

CHAPTER 5

Poetry and the passions: two Stoic views

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The spectator of the *dramatic* theatre says: 'Yes. I have felt the same. I am just like this. This is only natural. It will always be like this . . . I am weeping with those who weep on the stage, laughing with those who laugh.' The spectator of the *epic* theatre says: 'I should never have thought so. That is not the way to do it. This is most surprising, hardly credible. This will have to stop . . . I am laughing about those who weep on the stage, weeping about those who laugh.' Bertolt Brecht

Stop wanting your husband, and there is not one of the things you want that will fail to happen. Stop wanting to remain in Corinth. And in general stop wanting anything else but what the god wants. And who will prevent you? Who will compel you? No one, any more than anyone prevents or compels Zeus. Epictetus, addressing Medea

There is surely no principle of fictitious composition so true as this, – that an author's paramount charge is the cure of souls. Henry James, 'Miss Prescott's *Azarian*' (1865)

Listening to poetry, wrote Plutarch, is like eating fish-heads: absolutely delicious, but it can give you bad dreams (*How the young person should listen to poetry* 15bc). Believe this, as all the major Stoic thinkers do, and what follows? A lover of fish-heads would prefer, clearly, to discover a way to go on eating them in good health, without suffering the disturbing consequences. And this is, on the whole, the Stoic response where poetry is concerned: not sweeping censorship or hostile denunciation, but a stern yet affectionate programme of reform, aimed at preserving and enhancing the health of the soul.

But to design such a programme, one clearly needs to know a

I am grateful to Jacques Brunschwig, Miriam Griffin, Stephen Halliwell, Gisela Striker, and Richard Sorabji for comments that have helped me in my revision of this piece. I am conscious that I have by no means answered all the questions they have raised.

great deal about the systems that are affected. To solve the problem of fish-heads, a doctor will need to know a lot about the digestive system, and how fish-heads interact with it. Two scientists with radically different accounts of digestion will be likely to propose correspondingly different accounts of proper fish-head eating. So too for poetry. Before the doctor of the soul can productively ask how education can retain poetry's delights while avoiding its dangers, he or she must first have well-articulated views about the relevant questions in psychology. Above all, she must have an account of the passions, and of the operation of poetry on the passions. For it is generally agreed, among Hellenistic thinkers of several schools who disagree on much else, that poetry makes its impact on the soul above all by altering its passions. And it is this aspect of poetry's causal role that is the basis of the most serious attacks upon it. As in the digestive case, two thinkers who have radically different views about the nature of the passions and of poetry's causal interaction with them are likely to differ, as well, in their accounts of correct poetic education.

Both Stoics and Epicureans grapple with this problem, connecting their discourse about poetry closely with their analysis of the psychology of desire and passion. All major thinkers of both schools seem to agree that poetry has a powerful and in some respects dangerous effect on the passions of the soul; all ask what these effects are, and whether a reform of poetry can retain and cultivate whatever benefits poetry offers, while avoiding its dangers. I have elsewhere discussed some aspects of the Epicurean treatment of these issues, focussing on Lucretius.¹ Here I want to investigate some complexities of the Stoic positions.²

THE PARADOX OF STOIC POETRY

As soon as one embarks on the study of Stoic views of poetry, one encounters a paradox. For, on the one hand, the Stoics clearly took a very extreme position concerning the passions, holding that they should be not just moderated, but completely extirpated from

¹ Nussbaum (1989).

² Anyone who works on this topic owes a great debt to P. De Lacy's fine article, 'Stoic views of poetry' – De Lacy (1958a). It seems to me a major shortcoming of De Lacy's discussion that he did not clearly separate the different Stoic views of the passions, as I try to do here. But it is a fine, path-breaking study.

human life.³ No other school showed the passions such single-minded and obsessive hostility. On the other hand, no other ancient school is more sympathetic to the poets, those notorious feeders of passion.

We see this enthusiasm in many ways. First, we notice the striking number of Stoic treatises devoted to the topic of poetry. Zeno wrote a *Peri poiētikēs akroaseōs* (*On listening to poetry*) and may also have discussed poetry in his *Peri lexeōn* (*On diction*) (Diog. Laer. vii.4). Cleanthes wrote a *Peri tou poiētou* (*On the poet*) (vii.173) and, of course, poetry – on which we shall comment later. Timon, noting his slowness in scientific reasoning, mocks him as a ‘slow-witted lover of verses’ (vii.170). Chrysippus wrote a *Peri poiēmatōn* (*On poetry*) in one book, a *Peri tou pōs dei poiēmaton akouein* (*On how one should listen to poetry*) in two books (vii.200), and several other works that may have dealt with poetic matters. Diogenes of Babylon made important contributions to the debate in *Peri phōnes* (*On voice*) and *Peri mousikēs* (see below). Posidonius gave the topic a new direction, as we shall see; and poetry is discussed often in Epictetus and Seneca, as well as in the Stoic geographer Strabo.

But treatises may be condemnations; surely the number of Stoic treatises on the passions is no index of support. More significant, then, is the fact that the major Stoic thinkers were especially fond of citing poetry at moments of importance, apparently with approval. Zeno allegedly died with lines from the *Niobe* of Timotheus on his lips (vii.28). Cleanthes is depicted as quoting casually from Homer and Euripides (vii.172). Whether true or not, such stories indicate the prevailing habits and sentiments of the school. And about Chrysippus we know a great deal more. We know that he took the practice of poetic quoting to an extreme, drawing frequently and copiously on the words of his favourite authors: above all Homer, Euripides, and Menander, but also Hesiod, Stesichorus, Empedocles, Tyrtaeus, Orpheus, and other dramatic writers – a *thaumastē aperantologia*, comments Galen. We have, through Galen, many examples of such quotation, and indications of many more. Diogenes Laertius reports that Chrysippus was said to have copied nearly the entirety of Euripides’ *Medea* in one of his treatises (vii.180); and while that report may be hostile, the interest in the play that is evident in the fragments and reports of the *Peri pathōn*,

³ See Nussbaum (1987) for an account of these arguments.

especially in Galen's *de Placitis Hippocratis et Platonis* (hereafter *PHP*) make the story seem plausible enough.⁴ Another report states that if you remove the poetic quotations from Chrysippus' writings, the pages would be bare (VII.181). While this is clearly malicious, Galen's numerous complaints along the same lines make one believe that the bulk and variety of poetic quotation in Chrysippus' work must have been striking. And the use of the poets is plainly above all positive: he turns to the poets as genuine sources of insight.

Finally, we find explicitly favourable Stoic discussion of the effects of poetry, and explicit defence of its role in the education of the young – in authors from Cleanthes through Posidonius to Seneca and Epictetus. These establish conclusively that the Stoics did not write about and cite the poets only to repudiate them. Since these arguments will be a central theme of this paper, I shall say no more about them now.

The Stoics were aware of Plato's arguments, in the *Republic*, in favour of the censorship of most existing poetry. They share, it would seem, many of Plato's motivations for censorship. For while the *Republic* eliminates fear, grief, and pity from the lives of the guardians, but leaves in place some military anger, the Stoics wish to reject passion in an even more sweeping way. Why, then, do they not reject the artists who 'feed fat the emotion of pity' (*Rep.* 606b) and the other dangerous emotions? And how, given that they retain the bulk of conventional poetry, do they propose to prevent it from causing bad dreams?

I shall argue that there are two very different Stoic answers to this question, related to two different Stoic views of the passions. One view, developed above all by Chrysippus, but probably also by Zeno in some form, and continued by Seneca and Epictetus, I shall call the *cognitive* view. It holds that the passions are judgments, assents to appearances; they are therefore modifications of the rational faculty of the soul. They are educated by an education of this faculty. The other view I shall call the *non-cognitive* view. It is found in its clearest form in Posidonius, who defends (what he takes to be) Plato's tripartite account of the soul; but I shall argue that it is also found in a preliminary form (under cover of an allegiance to the cognitive view) in Diogenes of Babylon. This view holds that the passions are

⁴ See the excellent account of Chrysippus' interpretation of the *Medea* in Gill (1983).

movements of a separate irrational part of the soul. This part cannot be modified by a modification of judgments; it must be ‘harmonized’ and balanced through non-rational means. Obviously these two views are likely to yield very different accounts of the impact of poetry on the soul’s passions, and consequently different accounts of the correct poetic education of the young. I shall argue that they do, and try to describe the differences.

I shall begin, briefly, with Plato; for I believe that it is significant that not just one but (*pace* Posidonius) both of these views could find their archetype in Plato’s *Republic*, through certain ambiguities and indeterminacies in the *Republic*’s account of the passions. I shall then briefly mention an Aristotelian contribution to the debate that adds a factor of central importance. Then, turning first to the chronologically later of the Stoic views, the non-cognitive view, as the more direct descendant of Plato’s primary line of argument, I shall examine Posidonius’ account of the passions and their education through poetry/music. I shall argue that the essential features of this account are already present in Diogenes of Babylon, although he to some extent presents himself as an orthodox follower of Chrysippus. Then I shall turn to the very difficult task of reconstructing the view of poetry that was connected to the cognitive view of passion, piecing together the evidence about Cleanthes and Chrysippus, and relying, also, on Epictetus and Seneca – but turning also to some less mainstream sources – above all Plutarch’s *Pōs dei ton neon poiematōn akoueîn* (*How the young person should listen to poetry*), which, used with proper caution, contributes valuable information about Chrysippian views. I shall then ask why partisans of the cognitive view, according to which all passions are false judgments, still wish to retain poetry as a valuable part of education. And I shall above all ask how these Stoics solve the problem of the fish-heads – arguing that their devices for improving poetic digestion are multiple and ingenious, but perhaps not altogether foolproof.⁵

⁵ Among the many works that offer potential insight into these questions, the reader will notice that I have not included discussion of Philodemus’ *On the Poets*, which does discuss some Stoic positions. Since the work is occupied with questions about what makes a poem formally good, and since in many cases these questions are kept separate from questions about poetry’s effect on character and on the passions, it is not directly pertinent to this discussion. And in fact the Stoic material it contains is far less interesting in any case, I think, than the material from Diogenes of Babylon discussed by Philodemus in the *Peri mousikēs*.

NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

In the debate I shall describe, there is a difference of opinion not only about what poetry does to the passions and how, but also about which poems are of greatest interest and value in the educational process. Differences about the structure of the passions lead to differences about the causal interaction between poetry and the passions; and these in turn lead to differences about what the most educationally useful material is. All partisans to the debate deal with texts in verse that have – at least in part – musical accompaniment. All, then, are speaking about *mousikē* in the old sense of the word, in which it included poetry as well as instrumental and vocal musical performance, and in which text and accompaniment were usually regarded as intimately linked, complementary parts of a single whole. But one position (the non-cognitive position) tends to focus on the musical element, treating the text as a part of the complex auditory experience in which the most important elements are *melos*, *rhuthmos*, and *harmonia*. The cognitive position tends, by contrast, to emphasize the text – and above all its narrative and dramatic structure – though not ignoring what the other elements contribute to the presentation and communication of that structure. The non-cognitive group tend to use the word *mousikē*, the cognitive group the word *poiētikē* – though this is by no means always the case.

One might therefore wonder: am I comparing apples with oranges, A's position about music with B's position about poetry? I think that this is not the case, that the two positions are really rivals. And I shall go on defending this judgment as I proceed. But let me begin with some clarifying observations.

First, throughout I am beginning from a direct conflict between the two groups: the conflict about the structure of the passions. Both groups agree that the resolution of this issue has major consequences for one's views about education, and the place of poetry in that education. They portray themselves, then, as rivals about a single goal: namely, the proper education of the young, where the passions are concerned. And what I am attempting to do is to map out that debate, and to look at its implications for the role of poetry in education. If one group focusses on rhythm, the other on judgment, this is not because they are pursuing different inquiries: it is because they have come to different conclusions about the soul. Thus beginning, as the Stoic thinkers themselves begin, from the passions, helps

us to see an underlying unity to what might at first glance look like different inquiries.

But there are some other points of clarification that should be made here, in order that we should understand clearly just how close *mousikē* and *poiētikē* are, in any case, throughout the period with which we are dealing. First of all, then, the Stoics all considered poetry to be an *auditory* event. Although reading is mentioned once in the evidence I have scrutinized (and this by Plutarch, not by a Stoic), *listening* is always uppermost. (And of course reading itself, in this period, is above all an auditory experience in which metrical elements are always present.) Zeno's treatise on poetry and Chrysippus' work on the audience speak in the titles of listening and hearing; Plutarch's title follows Chrysippus'. The study of poetry was included by the Stoics under the branch of dialectic concerned with voice, *phōnē* (Diog. Laer. vii.44); and the Stoic definition of *poiēma* ranges it under *lexis* – itself a species of *phōnē* – describing it as 'lexis in metre or rhythm, going outside of prose in its structure' (vii.60: the definition is ascribed to Posidonius). *Poiēsis* is defined as 'significant *poiēma*, including representation of gods and human beings' (60). Thus poetry is already pulled towards music by the emphasis on its auditory character; and all the poetry considered by the writers on both sides of the debate, including epic and drama, would have had prominent musical elements.

On the other side, music is still considered by the Stoic thinkers we shall consider to be inseparable from a text. Music, too, is for the Stoics a branch of the study of *phōnē*, and thus included under dialectic (vii.44). And Diogenes of Babylon gave a widely received definition of *phōnē* that makes it apparent that human, as opposed to animal, *phōnē* is all 'articulate and sent forth in a deliberate way' (D.L. vii.55). If we combine this view with the view that *mousikē* is a part of the study of *phōnē*, it seems to follow that human *mousikē* is itself articulate: not just textless vocalizing, but the singing of a text. (And notice that bare instrumental music is apparently neglected altogether in this Stoic classification, since that cannot possibly be classed as *phōnē*, except insofar as someone sings along with it.) So *mousikē* is drawn towards *poiētikē*. And even though Diogenes of Babylon focuses, as we shall see, on the elements of lyric performance that we might tend to regard as purely musical, it is clear that he did not so regard them. For (in a passage that we shall study later) Philodemus represents Diogenes' supporters as charging

Philodemus with being *agroikos*, because *he* uses the term ‘*mousikē*’ too narrowly, excluding the poetic text. It seems to these opponents to be a *reductio ad absurdum* of Philodemus’ position that Pindar and Simonides will not count, for him, as *mousikoi*; so clearly, though these poets would have been famous as the authors of texts, they are central cases of *mousikē* on the non-cognitive view. And in general Diogenes never mentions instrumental music without text: he focusses on lyric poetry, hymns, laments, and other vocal/textual performances.

As we shall soon see, there are good and evident reasons why partisans of the two different views of the *pathē* should focus on different parts of the complex event that is the performance of a poetic text with musical accompaniment. But I believe that we are entitled to regard these differences as just that, differences of selection and emphasis, stemming from the different answers these people give to the question, ‘How does poetry move and influence the passions of the soul?’

ANTECEDENTS: PLATO AND ARISTOTLE

The seminal treatment of poetry’s influence on emotion, for all Stoic thinkers, is in Plato’s *Republic*. (The *Laws* has some importance too, as we shall see.) Plato’s texts, both complex and susceptible of multiple interpretations, serve as a starting point, officially or unofficially, for both of the competing views. Defenders of the non-cognitive view, such as Posidonius and Galen, explicitly appeal to Plato’s tripartite view of the soul. Defenders of the cognitive view, while rejecting the tripartite soul, still appear to follow certain Platonic lines of argument – especially the arguments of *Republic* II–III, in which poetry is criticized for its influence on beliefs about the self-sufficiency of the good person, and, through these, on the emotions of fear and grief. It would be an important part of a full account of this history to trace these connections in detail; limits of space prevent this. But a very cursory summary of the main points is necessary in order to set the stage for what follows.⁶

Posidonius will hold that emotions or passions⁷ such as fear, grief, pity, and anger are neither judgments nor dependent on judgment.

⁶ Many of these points are dealt with at greater length in Nussbaum (1992).

⁷ I am using these words with no significant distinction – see my comments in Nussbaum (1987) footnote 2.

The soul has three parts: the reasoning part, the epithumetic part (concerned apparently with hunger, thirst, and sexual appetite) and the emotional or thumotic part. Like the epithumetic part, the thumotic part appears in animals and young children, as well as in human adults; like the epithumetic, it can be trained and harmonized, but not through cognitive changes. This view, explicitly modelled on Platonic sources, can legitimately claim to derive from at least some of Plato's statements about emotion and poetry's influence on it. The general account of the soul's tripartite structure is clearly based upon *Republic* iv (though one might well feel that Posidonius makes the thumotic part more independent of belief and reasoning than Plato did there). It can also claim support from book iv's account of the education of *thumos*, in which it is to be 'calm(ed) by means of harmony and rhythm' (441e), and from the assault on the poets in book x, where they are criticized for 'feeding' the soul's 'hunger' for grieving, strengthening that irrational appetite and thus making it more difficult to control in actual life (606a–d).⁸ Here again, passions are treated, apparently, as irrational urges to be developed or undermined by non-cognitive strategies. Above all, however, Posidonius can (and does) claim support from the *Laws*, where the young human is said to be full of natural non-rational movements – certain cries and jumps (672cd) – that must be ordered by rhythms and melodies; these are taken to operate apart from reasoning and judgment, imposing a structure on something fundamentally non-cognitive. *Laws* vii follows the same line, focussing on the causal properties of melody and rhythm, and giving an account of the ways in which pregnant mothers can educate the emotions of their foetuses, through a kind of non-cognitive habituation.

Chrysippus, on the other hand, holds that episodes of passion are identical with evaluative judgments – that is to say, assents to certain (propositional) appearances; and not just any judgments, but judgments with a particular content. All involve the ascription of a very high value to 'external goods', that is to say, items in the world that the agent does not control.⁹ The basic idea seems to be that if we understand the reasoning part as both dynamic and involved in evaluation (not just calculation), there is every reason to

⁸ Another source of difficulty for the interpreter of Plato's position is the fact that *Republic* x appears to recognize only two parts of the soul, and appears to classify emotions such as grief and pity along with bodily appetites that demand 'replenishment'.

⁹ See the longer account in Nussbaum (1987).

think that our loves and fears are activities of that 'part', and consist in the assent of that part to the appearance that some external item (that is at hand, or lost, or whatever) has (or had) enormous worth. Passions are not animal urges or stirrings, non-rational motions, but choices about how to view the world. They can, therefore, be modified and educated only by an education of reason. Thus, when Achilles mourns for Patroclus, that grief is an acknowledgement of the importance he accords to the person he loves. It is an acceptance of the judgment, 'A person who is extremely important to me has died'. If such an attitude is to be modified, then one will have to change Achilles' view about what has importance. And this, notoriously and extensively, the major extant Stoic accounts of passion's therapy – in the fragments of Chrysippus, in Cicero and Seneca and Epictetus – all undertake to do.

This view can also claim to derive from Platonic sources. First of all, it can claim to be offering an alternative and perhaps a superior reading of the passionate part of the soul, as Plato presents it in *Republic* iv. For Plato insists on that part's responsiveness to belief and judgment, calling it an 'ally of the reasoning part' (441a) and a 'partner of judgment' (440b); and there are texts that also suggest that this part has its own internal beliefs and judgments. Chrysippus, of course, rejects tripartition. But he could plausibly point out that Plato's own characterization of the cognitive resources of passion makes the reasons for its division from reason less than compelling; and he could claim to be following what is deepest in Plato's account when he accepts the characterization of passion and refuses the division.

More important for our purposes, he can clearly claim to be following Plato's account of the reform of poetic education in *Republic* ii–iii. For there Plato reforms the emotions of fear and grief by reforming the beliefs (*doxai*) taught by poetic texts. Socrates focuses his attention above all on the portraits of the gods and heroes in epic and dramatic poetry – figures who are assumed to be the objects of a certain sort of admiring identification on the part of the audience. He then points out that these figures are repeatedly shown as attaching importance to events that actually have no importance, and thus as finding occasions for the emotions of fear and grief where a really good and self-sufficient person would not find them. For example, the grief of Achilles for Patroclus must be removed: for it shows a hero thinking it terrible to be deprived of a loved one,

whereas the really good and self-sufficient person would not think this (387–388a). In short, poetry contains false *doxai* (377b7); and these *doxai* are then ‘taken into the soul’ of the young hearer, and give the developing soul a certain shape (377ab).

Thus in books II and III’s assessment of poetry the focus is persistently on the evaluations poetry contains and promotes; and this cognitive content is understood to be closely linked to the poem’s narrative structure, which sets up relations of identification and emulation (these, too, based on judgments, e.g. that so-and-so is a good person), which are then the vehicle through which the characters’ passions enter the listener’s soul. And Socrates also suggests – significantly for the development of the Chrysippian account – that a change in the relation of spectator to characters, a change that disrupts these admiring *doxai*, will often be sufficient to disrupt the transmission of the passions. If we put Achilles’ speech into the mouth of a character who is inferior, or female (387e9–388a1), or in some way the object of mockery, we can prevent the malleable soul from being formed in accordance with the views expressed.

It is not the purpose of this paper to ask which Stoic position can claim to have read Plato more correctly, or indeed, even to ask whether there is a single consistent position on the emotions and their education in Plato, both in the *Republic* itself and in Plato’s work as a whole. What is evident is that Plato’s complex arguments provided more than one starting point for Stoic investigations.

Aristotle’s actual influence on this complex history is unclear – although the wide influence of the *Poetics* makes a causal relation to Stoic positions more likely than it is in some other areas. But in any case, Aristotle adds to the debate several ingredients that any good account of these matters needs to incorporate; so mentioning them will guide us in asking questions about the Stoic accounts. First, he introduces a far more explicit account of the emotions aroused by poetry, especially fear and pity, articulating the beliefs on which they rest and showing their common basis in the idea that events outside the agent’s own control have importance for the agent’s pursuit of the good. Second, he develops more explicitly than Plato an account of the process of identification with the tragic hero through which tragedy is able to show the audience ‘things such as might happen’ (*Poetics* ch. 9) in a human life. Thus he shows how

one's emotional response to a drama can be connected with thought about one's own life.¹⁰

But Aristotle's most original contribution to this debate is his recognition that the very literary form of a tragic drama embodies a commitment to the beliefs that ground the emotions. The form most characteristic of tragedy involves a significant reversal in fortune that is taken to be important enough to be the occasion for pity and fear. Without that plot structure, there is no tragedy – or at least no good tragedy. But that plot structure is not ethically innocent. By depicting the gifts or damages of fortune as if they have real importance for the lives of people who are 'good' and even 'better than us' – people with whom the spectator is encouraged to identify – they present already a certain view about the world and the importance of external happenings in it – a view that Plato and the Stoics will reject, and that Aristotle will (with some qualifications)¹¹ accept. So Aristotle shows that the reform of poetry (if one is a Platonist or Stoic) cannot involve anything so simple as changing this or that line, this or that passage: it must involve the entire formal structure of the work, the shape of the dramatic action. One cannot purify the content without reforming the form. Plato did anticipate this point when he suggested that we might reform tragedy by giving the offending sentiments to a character the audience is encouraged to disdain. But he never reflected on the alterations this would bring about in the literary form of drama, in its choice of plots above all. Aristotle's contribution seems to me to be essentially new, and extremely important. We shall have to ask, later, to what extent Stoic proposals for literary reform really take account of it.

¹⁰ This material is discussed much more fully in Nussbaum (1986a) Interlude 2 and in Nussbaum (1992). See also the admirable discussion in Halliwell (1986), especially persuasive on the issue of identification; the discussion is continued in Halliwell (1992), with an extensive account of the concept of tragic recognition.

¹¹ The qualifications I have in mind have to do above all with the question whether misfortune can affect character. In Nussbaum (1986a) ch. 11 I argue that Aristotle admits damage to *eudaimonia* through impediments to the expression of character in action, but that, at least in *Nicomachean Ethics* 1, he is convinced that character itself remains firm. Material in the books on friendship and in the *Rhetoric* may, however, suggest a more complicated position.

THE NON-COGNITIVE VIEW: POSIDONIUS ON THE RHYTHMS
OF THE SOUL

As we approach the Stoic views of poetry's effect, it will be useful to bear in mind a schematic contrast between two views.

<i>Non-cognitive view</i>	<i>Cognitive view</i>
tripartite soul	one-part soul
emotions are non-rational movements	emotions are evaluative judgments
emotions in humans and (most) animals	emotions in humans only
poetry educates by imposing structure on the non-rational movements	poetry educates by forming or changing judgments
emphasis on rhythm, harmony, melody	emphasis on cognitive structure: narrative, identification, character
reform by appropriate selection of rhythm, harmony, etc.	reform by disruption of identification, textual rewriting, allegorical interpretation, etc.
greatest interest in lyric poetry with musical accompaniment; hymns, dirges, etc.	greatest interest in drama and epic
favourite famous poets Pindar, Simonides, etc.	favourite famous poets Homer, Euripides, Menander, Publilius Syrus

I begin with the non-cognitive view because, though later in origin, it is also more explicitly traced to Platonic sources. It is also relatively easy to see what the view is, and what scheme of poetic education is proposed in connection with it.

Posidonius claims to follow Plato. In fact, he calls Plato 'divine', on account of his writing about the passions (Galen, *PHP* p. 286 De Lacy (1978/89) – hereafter D). He refers to *Republic* IV, the *Timaeus*, the *Phaedrus*, and the *Laws*, and was evidently fond of copying out passages from these works to support his case (see below). His view is that the soul has three parts: the *logistikon*, the *thumoeides*, and the *epithumētikon*. All the elements that older Stoics call *pathē* are located

outside of the *logistikon*, somewhere in the two non-rational parts. Obligingly explicit, at least here, he tells us that all four of the generic Stoic categories of passion – fear, distress, longing, and delight – are so located (*PHP* iv.5, 266 D); and his examples include not only the familiar Platonic case of anger, but also fear and grief (e.g. Galen, *PHP*, iv.5, 268 D). Concerning the nature and status of the passions, Galen informs us, Posidonius ‘completely departed’ (*telōs apechōrisen*), both from Chrysippus’ view that they are identical with judgments and from Zeno’s view that they supervene on and are necessarily produced by judgments:¹² ‘For he does not regard the passions either as judgments or as supervening upon judgments, but as coming about through the thumoeidetic and epithumetic power, following in every respect the ancient account’ (*PHP* iv.3, 248D). Later, Galen repeats the claim: ‘He both praises and accepts Plato’s view and disputes the view of the followers of Chrysippus, proving that the passions are neither judgments nor supervenient upon judgments, but certain movements of other non-rational powers, which Plato called *epithumētikon* and *thumoeides*’ (*PHP* v.1, 292 D = Posidonius Edelstein & Kidd (1989) fr. 152).

It is one of the frustrations of Galen’s account that he never tells us how Posidonius divided these two non-rational elements, or to which he assigned the various *pathē* and on what grounds. The natural assumption would be that everything the Stoics call *pathos* – fear, anger, grief, pity, etc. – is in the *thumoeides*, the bodily appetites in the *epithumētikon*. But the two Galen passages I have quoted do not support this, suggesting, instead, that the *pathē* were divided between the two non-rational parts. Perhaps this is just Galen’s confusion; but it prevents us from confidently asserting the obvious view. In another significant passage (EK fr. 31 = *PHP* v.6, 332 D), Galen represents Posidonius as comparing passions to the *two* horses in the *Phaedrus*; but again, this might just be careless.

We can see, however, that the distinction between *epithumētikon* and *thumoeides* becomes relatively unimportant, on the account Posidonius has produced. For Plato in *Republic* iv, the importance of the separation was that the *thumoeides* had a responsiveness to judgment and reflection about the good that the appetitive part was explicitly said to lack. This had important educational implications, developed

¹² Galen says that there is a difference of this sort between Chrysippus and Zeno; but we should be sceptical, since he also claims, implausibly, that Cleanthes supports Posidonius’ view.

in books II–III. But in other texts (for example *Republic* x, *Laws* II and *Laws* III), Plato seems to take a less cognitive view of the passions and their education. Posidonius clearly follows that lead. Insisting on his independence even from Zeno (though he claims to find support for his view in Cleanthes – *PHP*, 332D) he denies passions are produced by judgments. They are simply ‘non-rational movements’, found, Posidonius tells us, in animals as well as humans, and in children from birth. And all of them are explicitly said to be unresponsive to judgments about the good. There is, Posidonius says, a natural *oikeiōsis* towards pleasure through the *epithumētikon*, to victory through the *thumoeides*, to the *kalon* through the *logistikon*, and this alone (EK 160 = *PHP* v.5, 318 D). Although this view gives some vague basis for a distinction between *thumos* and *epithumia* (pretty vague indeed, since grief and pity, which have to be classified somehow, have no obvious connection with either pleasure or victory), more important to Posidonius clearly is the fact that it breaks the link between passion and judgment about the good. The non-rational parts become far more like one another than either is like reason.

One other passage that distinguishes the two non-rational parts is equally vague: for it holds that some animals have *epithumia* without *thumos*, namely, ‘all animals that are not easily moved and are attached like plants to rocks or something like that’ (EK 33 = *PHP* v.6, 334 D); other animals ‘all have both’. Once again, this is remarkably uninformative as to what the distinction actually is: for a friend of Chrysippus sees remarkably little difference between a sponge and a rat, where grief and love and anger and pity are concerned. And it certainly would not be safe to assume without further evidence that Posidonius could not have believed that sponges have grief and love. Still, once again, the primary message is clear. Grief and pity and love, even if not found in sponges, are certainly in rats and rabbits and worms and mosquitoes, and are to be seen as movements that go on in the absence of reasoning, without any natural orientation to reasoning and judgment. They are simply what Posidonius repeatedly calls them (Galen says it was a favourite term): *pathētikai kinēseis* (*PHP* v.5, 322 D).

Posidonius offers a related account of the origins of vice: these origins are innate, in the movements of the natural disposition, not learned from outside as a part of the creature’s acquisition of judgments and beliefs. Here he believes that he has the twofold

advantage of following Plato and at the same time solving a problem that Chrysippus' account (as he sees it) was unable to solve (EK 35 = Galen, *Quod animi Mores* 819–20; cf. also *PHP* v.5, 318–20 D). His own explanation has both a general and a particular aspect. All human beings are born with non-rational motions that need balancing and will cause trouble if they do not get it. To that extent, all stand in need of appropriate education. But individual constitutions also vary: and here Posidonius turns both to physiognomy and to climatology for 'explanations'. Animals and humans that are warmer and more broad-chested are more prone to anger; those that have wide hips and are colder are more timid. Climate affects the *pathētikai kinēseis* too, producing differences in emotional character. For this reason, some people can be easily balanced, while others must be 'blunted' with considerable difficulty (*PHP* v.5, 320–2 D).

Posidonius insisted on the great benefits of his account of the passions for the educational theorist. He wrote: 'When the explanation of the passions was grasped, it removed the absurdity [apparently that of Chrysippus' view], and showed the origins of distortion in what is desired and avoided, and distinguished the methods of training' (EK 161 = *PHP* v.6, 328 D; cf. also EK 168). In particular, he insisted on the crucial importance for education of recognizing that the goal, where emotion is concerned, is not learning or judging, but the production of a balanced movement whose sharp edges have been 'blunted by good habits' and that is weak and gentle enough to receive the rule of the rational part. 'For knowledge does not arise in the non-rational powers of soul any more than it does in horses, but these get their appropriate excellence through a kind of non-rational habituation [*ethismou tinos alogou*], the chariot-eer through rational teaching' (EK 31 = *PHP* v.5, 324 D).

Posidonian education must begin, he holds, with a programme for pregnancy; and Plato is praised for his thoughts about the movements of the foetus and the exercise of the pregnant mother (*PHP* 324 D). In the first book of his *Peri pathōn* (*On the passions*), Posidonius made a collection of Plato's various statements about the child (presumably drawing above all on *Laws* VII), and commended Plato's prescriptions for the harmonization of the child's passions through movements. 'For this,' he writes, 'is the best education of children: the preparation of the passionate part of the soul, so it will be as amenable as possible to the rule of the rational part' (EK 31 = *PHP* 423 D). Following *Laws* VII, he gives *mousikē* a substantial role in this

early education. But, as in the *Laws*, the focus is on the ways in which tunes and melodies of various types will habituate these non-reasoning elements, changing people's mood and disposition in a non-cognitive way. Plato showed little interest, in those passages, in dramatic or narrative poetry, focussing on hymns and other songs and lyrics. Posidonius seems to follow this lead. In keeping with his physiognomic and climatological interests, Posidonius' regime is more highly individualized than Plato's, however. Galen summarizes:

We should bid some people to spend their time in some rhythms and harmonies and exercises, others in others, as Plato taught us – raising the dull and heavy and spiritless in high-pitched rhythms and harmonies that forcefully move the soul and in exercises of the same kind, and those who are too spirited and who madly dart about in the opposite sort. Why was it, by the gods – I ask this also to the followers of Chrysippus – that when Damon the *mousikos* came upon a flute-girl playing in the Phrygian mode to some boys who were drunk and acting wild, he told her to play in the Dorian mode, and the boys immediately stopped their wild behaviour? For obviously they are not taught anything by the music of the flute that changes the opinions of the rational faculty. But, since the passionate part of the soul is non-rational, they are aroused and calmed by means of non-rational motions. For the non-rational is helped and harmed by non-rational things, the rational through knowledge and ignorance. (EK 168 = *PHP* v.6, 330 D)

(The passage is anomalous for its inclusion of apparently textless music as an example; but since the example is probably Galen's, not from Posidonius, it gives no indication of the range of Posidonius' own material.)

Since a question has been asked, the friend of Chrysippus should answer it, in a contentious style that emulates Chrysippus' own (see below). 'You are talking here about bodily feelings, or objectless moods, not emotions. And perhaps the non-cognitive aspect of hymns and songs, their bare rhythm and melody, can influence moods and bodily feelings. Perhaps it could indeed calm the heat of drunkenness, which nobody, not even you, would take to be an emotion. But no real emotion will respond to such treatment. If I am angry because someone has murdered my child, whom I deeply love, you could play Mozart until the year 2000 without altering my state. If I am grieving because my lover has died, Beethoven's Seventh will do me no good. If I fear a nuclear holocaust, marches by John Philip Sousa have nothing to do with my condition. If we

want children to learn to grieve and fear and love appropriately [which, for Chrysippus, means not at all – but one can be a friend of his analysis and take issue with the normative beliefs that lead to that conclusion] what we must do is to get them to understand what matters and what does not, what is worth caring about and what is not. Rhythm and pitch without understanding – as Plato himself saw, at least in *Republic* II–III – has nothing to do with the formation of the passions of the soul, a task in which poetic *mousikē*, as we can agree, plays a central role.’

Now we can see the non-cognitive proposal. It is obvious that I have little sympathy with it. But a defender of Posidonius might now charge that I am, after all, comparing two different things. For Posidonius, she might say (unconvinced by our remarks on pages 102–4) is talking about music, not poetry. Perhaps he has another and more compelling view about the interaction between poetry itself and the passions, one that does not neglect its cognitive content.

This defence will not do. It is not only that there is no sign of such an account. We can see that, given his view of the *pathē*, Posidonius *cannot* have such an account. The only way to approach emotion is non-cognitively, through a modification of the soul’s non-rational movements. Posidonius leaves no doubt at all about this: he prides himself on this view and repeats it. This being so, it is perfectly natural that tunes and rhythms spring to the fore in his account of education, while the text (still around, apparently, in the hymns and songs he praises from Plato’s *Laws*) is eclipsed, and narrative and drama disappear more or less entirely. That is not a change of subject matter; that is a change in selection of poetry that results directly and appropriately from Posidonius’ position on the emotions. Poetic texts may of course give information of various kinds to the pupil’s reason, in much the way a treatise can. But the only way they can have any impact on the passions – on pity or fear or grief or anger or love – is through the non-rational habituation of psychological motions, through a process in which a dog could also participate. Posidonius and Chrysippus share a goal: to put the passions of the soul in the condition that reason would approve. They differ about what the passions are, and thus about the causal processes that will produce the best state. Therefore they differ, as well, in their selections of causally beneficial poetry.

DIOGENES OF BABYLON: A PREDECESSOR OF THE
NON-COGNITIVE VIEW

Posidonius' view of the passions and the parts of the soul has usually been regarded as new within the history of Stoicism, and as containing a degree of unorthodoxy that earlier (and many later) Stoics would be reluctant to allow. And, strictly speaking, this view is more or less correct. But it is interesting to observe that most of the salient points in Posidonius' treatment of music/poetry are already present in a considerably earlier text: in the *Peri mousikēs* of Diogenes of Babylon, Chrysippus' pupil and follower. Diogenes still mentions the Chrysippian view of the soul; and his account of poetic education adheres officially to the cognitive view. On the other hand, his real interests and emphasis lead very much in the Posidonian direction. So it may be that reflection about poetic education motivated the development of the new view of the soul. Rather than flowing simply from an independently supported philosophy of mind, thought about poetry seems to shape philosophy of mind. Posidonius says with emphasis that we really need to get clear about the causes of the passions *before* we can properly describe 'the methods of training'. Perhaps this is a gentle rebuke to Diogenes, who let his keen interest in *paideia* carry him past an essential stage in the argument. At any rate, I think we will see that Diogenes' statements about poetry are very close indeed to Posidonius; this makes one suspect that Posidonius knew and used them, furnishing them with the necessary psychological background.

We do not have a great deal of information about Diogenes' character as a philosopher. (For the fragments, see *SVF* III, pp. 210–46; henceforth I shall refer to these by fragment number, not page.) He seems to have been generally orthodox in his views, but not afraid to propose new arguments and even new definitions. Galen reports that he offered new argument in favour of Chrysippus' view that reason is in the heart, basing his claims on the fact that voice issues from the chest (Galen *PHP* II.5 = *SVF* III (Diogenes) 229–30). On the other hand, Galen mocks him for inconsistency, saying that, having defined soul as an exhalation, he forgets he has done so and later says that it is blood, 'agreeing with Empedocles and Critias, not Cleanthes and Chrysippus and Zeno' (III.30). If this is not mere carelessness (or Galen's malice) it is unorthodoxy of a major kind.

In a revealing passage of the *de Officiis*, Cicero reports that Diogenes had a difference of opinion with Antipater about the moral obligations of the seller. Antipater held that the seller was morally obliged to disclose any fault in his merchandise. Diogenes held that he needed to do so only up to the point required by law, no further: 'It is one thing to conceal, another to be silent . . . What indeed could be more stupid than to tell the buyer the flaws in what he is buying?' (III.50 = *SVF* III (Diogenes) 49). I suggest that this principle guides, in effect, the exposition of doctrine in the *Peri mousikēs*. Diogenes presents a view of *paideia* that is hard to reconcile with the cognitive view of the passions, and strongly suggests something like the Posidonian tripartite view. He does not say this to the Stoic buyer. He is silent about the novel properties of his wares. So it is up to the buyers to examine them closely. This we shall now attempt to do.

Diogenes was known for his keen interest in poetry and music. He wrote a treatise *Peri phōnēs* that gave definitions of *phōnē*, *lexis*, and *logos* (see page 103); this was the major attempt in that area until Posidonius; to judge from the brief references in Diogenes, it contained discussions of phonology, of diction, of grammar, of rhetoric. He wrote a work on rhetoric, fragments of which are also preserved (cf. *SVF*). And he apparently wrote a work *Peri mousikēs*, concerning the effects of poetry/music on the character of the young. The difficulties of reconstructing this work are considerable, since it is preserved only via hostile paraphrase in the *Peri mousikēs* of Philodemus. The textual and philological problems of this fragmentary work are great (though progress has certainly been made by Neubecker's new edition (1986) of book IV, the most important book for our purposes). In addition to these problems one also has to face the problems caused by Philodemus himself, a stridently hostile and not terribly acute reporter.¹³

The subject of Diogenes' treatise is *mousikē*. Philodemus usually treats this as if it means 'music' as opposed to 'text' (*sēmasia*). He reports, however, that certain unnamed critics (*tines*) call him *agroikos* because he takes the term this narrow way; they charge that his whole critique of Diogenes fails on that account. Appealing to Plato

¹³ So as not to encumber the text unduly with references to the several editions of the work, I shall give citations from book IV using the chapters and page numbers of Neubecker's edition – Philodemus (1986) – and from other books using the *SVF* numbers. For one passage from book III that is not in *SVF*, I shall cite van Krevelen's edition – Philodemus (1939).

as their authority, they say that one would have to be pretty *apaideutos* to forget that melody and rhythm are wedded to text and have their effect in connection with text. On Philodemus' view, they say, Pindar and Simonides will not count as *mousikoi*; and they seem to treat this as a *reductio ad absurdum* of Philodemus' position. Plainly, then, for the defenders of Diogenes these are central cases of *mousikē* (cf. above pages 103–4). Philodemus replies that the opponents do in fact neglect, or at least subordinate, the text; in doing the same himself, he is simply following their lead. And besides, he adds, Aristoxenus uses the term *mousikē* in the narrower way (iv chs. 17–18, 73–8 N). As for the lyric poet, according to Philodemus he is a *mousikos* when he is producing *asēmanta*, a poet when producing *logos*. But it is clear that this account of *mousikē* belongs to Philodemus; Diogenes had a more inclusive understanding.

It appears, then, that Diogenes followed Plato – probably with explicit reliance on Plato's authority – in considering *mousikē* to include text and its musical accompaniment taken together; the lyric poets are central cases. On the other hand, it will become clear that Philodemus is in a way correct: Diogenes does neglect the text as a cognitive entity, focussing on the effect of auditory stimuli on non-rational movements. It is interesting to observe that, here already, the authority of Plato is apparently linked with a departure from Chrysippus.

Diogenes' general thesis is that *mousikē* is valuable for anyone who is not perfect (*SVF* 54), for people of all ages, Greek and barbarian (58). Its chief value is that it 'makes the disposition [*hexis*] very harmonious and very rhythmical' (*SVF* 56). Note here the non-cognitive language, which points directly ahead to Posidonius. He cites the musician Damon as authority for the fact that music contributes to the virtues (*SVF* 56). (Recall that Damon was cited by Galen in defence of Posidonius, possibly with reference to some use of his authority by Posidonius himself.) In fact, claims Diogenes, *mousikē* produces characters that are noble and serious (iv.1, 37 N), drawing the hearer to good dispositions (*sunephelkomenē*, 37N). Philodemus reports that these changes in character come about, for Diogenes, 'according to non-rational perception' (*kata tēn alogon epaisthēsēn*, 39 N).

Most of Diogenes' arguments seem to have consisted of asserting a series of specific cases of this general thesis, and then supporting these by examples. He discusses the usefulness of music in connection

with each of the virtues, taken one by one; the claim (as in Posidonius) seems to be that *mousikē* contributes to virtue by balancing and harmonizing the character: in other words by developing the non-cognitive side of virtue. Philodemus is especially amused by the idea that tunes and rhythms can make people more just: a claim that Diogenes apparently supported with reference to Plato (IV.15, 70 N). At least in Philodemus' report, what Diogenes said was that vocal sounds that are *kinētikai akoēs alogou* (that 'move irrational hearing') can be important to the disposition of the soul where justice is concerned. Philodemus scoffs at this, saying that no disposition concerned with choice and avoidance in connection with one's fellow citizens could possibly be produced or enhanced in such a way.

But above all Diogenes seems to have focussed more directly on the passions, holding that music can console grief, assuage the torments of love, moderate the feelings displayed at drinking parties, contribute to friendship by producing friendly feeling (*philophrosunē*) (IV, chs. 8–10). Again and again, Philodemus shows that he, at least, finds Diogenes' position to be a non-cognitive one, one that relies on the ways in which music affects non-rational movements and perceptions, rather than judgments. For again and again he argues against Diogenes that real moderation, real consolation, real erotic balance – these require correct belief about what is worth pursuing and what not. He ascribes to Diogenes, with ridicule, the view that music contains something that is 'stirring by nature' (*kinētikon phusei*) in much the way that fire contains something *kaustikon phusei* (IV ch. 5). To Diogenes' story that Thaletas and Terpander stopped a civil war by playing music, Philodemus asks, how on earth can *aloga melē* really do anything for a *logikē diaphora* (IV.11, 63 N)? This story is so like Posidonius' story of the flute girl that we have another reason to suspect continuity between the two thinkers.

Still a further similarity is to be found in the fact that Diogenes, like Posidonius, holds that *mousikē* must be chosen bearing in mind the particular disposition of the hearer: '*mousikē* can awaken an unmoving and sluggish soul and lead it to the disposition that the appropriate melody naturally awakens in it. For all are not moved in the same fashion by the same thing. Or the opposite: from a darting and rushing disposition it can calm it and make it serene' (SVF 62). The similarity of this passage to Posidonius is obvious. We meet once again the same two extreme characters – the sluggish one

and the darting one; and the passage even contains direct verbal resemblances. It seems to imply a Posidonian prescription for the reform of poetic education, one that would consist in the judicious selection of *mousikē* for each occasion and each individual.

The focus of Diogenes' attention is on various types of lyric verse set to music. We hear mention of *enkōmia*, marriage hymns, laments, love songs (iv ch. 3) – all lyric forms. Elsewhere Diogenes mentions military music, singing, dancing, and lyre-playing at *sumposia* (*SVF* 79). Tragedy and in general drama are mentioned in one passage (*SVF* 67) – but according to Philodemus the emphasis, even here, is on the lyric element: for he denounces Diogenes' focus on choral dancing, which according to Philodemus, contributes nothing valuable to the dramatic performance (iv ch. 4).

There are passages in which Diogenes seems to ally himself with Chrysippus' view of *pathē*: but I think we will find that they do not imply a very deep commitment to that view. In an early passage, he says that a poem with music moves the *logikē dianoia* more than one without (*SVF* 71): but his examples are of the general impression of weight and gravity produced by the musical element, not of any really cognitive effect. In general, his talk of the motion-imparting properties of music is Posidonian rather than Chrysippian, focussing on balance and harmony in psychological motions. So even if he uses the words *logikē dianoia* (cf. also book III, van Krevelen (1939) p. 50), the use seems more cosmetic than functional. Much the same is true of his claim that the hearer's auditory perception of *mousikē* is a special kind of *epistēmōnikē* ('knowledge-related') perception. For it is clear that this is a way of hooking up musical motions with the reasoning element in the soul; but nothing seems to be done with the device. It certainly does not seem to have the consequence that *mousikē* is seen as having an impact upon judgment (especially book iv ch. 1). And when Diogenes holds that music represents likenesses of character traits (*SVF* 63 and iv, 40–4 N) – even then, he does not seem to be thinking of the way in which an epic or dramatic poem represents a hero of a certain sort. For he says that these 'likenesses' are crafted and presented to the ear 'by *harmoniai*',¹⁴ which give an impression of 'splendour and humility and manliness and weakness and orderliness and boldness' (*SVF* 63; iv.1 = 40–1 N). Both the alleged mechanism and the choice of traits – not full-blown virtues,

¹⁴ There is actually considerable unclarity about the text at this point. I translate von Arnim's version; but Neubecker, more conservative, does not restore the word 'harmonies'.

but what we might call *manners* or *styles* – suggest that we are dealing with a position closer to that of the contemporary aesthetic theorist Suzanne Langer, who is herself close to Posidonius, than to that of Chrysippus.¹⁵ The tunes themselves, with their rhythms, contain likenesses of human feelings and dispositions, in that they are kinetically isomorphic to the movement pattern of those traits. Thus a sluggish melody ‘represents’ sluggishness, a darting one a ‘darting’ character, and so forth.

Some elements of Diogenes’ view could be imagined as parts of a cognitive view, and are at least compatible with it. The idea, for example, that music arouses the sense of hearing (*kinētikai akoēs alogou*) might be associated with the cognitive view’s idea that passion change is accompanied by a change in the way things appear to the agent, that is to say in the group of (usually propositional) appearances to which the agent will assent. The cognitive view could conceivably also have used music to ‘change the topic’, so to speak, getting the agent to focus for the time being on something other than the object of the passion, and thus preparing her for reasoning. (In this function it would not necessarily be privileged above other distractions, such as doing logical exercises or going in for sports.) It is always possible that Philodemus’ report has altogether distorted the point and emphasis of Diogenes’ account, and that he really had a cognitive view of the passions and their therapy that Philodemus simply fails to mention, in relation to which the account of irrational musical influences is an adjunct in one or both of the ways just mentioned. Possible, but, I think, unlikely: for there is no sign of these functions for music in the fragments of Diogenes’ position. There is no indication that music works by altering propositional appearances or assent to them. (That music ‘arouses hearing’ surely implies no more than that this is the sense that takes it in.) And there is no sign that music is, for Diogenes, just one among many equally beneficial distractions. (Nor is there any evidence I know of that Chrysippus gave music either of these two roles.) On the other hand, there is much evidence that Diogenes gives *mousikē* a special place *precisely because* of the power it has to move in non-cognitive ways.

So there appears to be no serious obstacle to understanding

¹⁵ S. Langer (1953, 1957) has defended the view that music contains motions that are isomorphic with the movements of human emotions; she develops a very interesting account of musical expression along these lines.

Diogenes as a Posidonius in the making – a Posidonius, that is, without a developed Posidonian philosophy of mind. It seems clear that Posidonius was much influenced by Diogenes, and follows his general line of argument. I suspect that some reports that are now traced to Posidonius – for example Galen’s flute-girl story – may actually have their roots in Diogenes. And both thinkers consider Plato their mentor. But Posidonius seems right to say that there is a major task (not performed, apparently, by Diogenes) that needs to be performed before the topic of *paideia* can be given a really convincing treatment: namely, the overthrow of Chrysippus’ account of the *pathē*. If one is heading in the direction they both are, where poetry is concerned, then that is what one must do. And Plato, guide to Diogenes already, is there to lend a hand.

It is somewhat disturbing to find oneself in agreement with Philodemus on any matter of importance, since his way of arguing is so crude and boringly polemical, his way of expressing his points so repetitious. But I believe that he is in essence right to say that this is a weak position, one that betrays a serious misunderstanding of the passions and the contribution poetry can make to their education. Poems are not just sound, tune, rhythm – they are idea, statement, action, confrontation. And by neglecting these elements, Diogenes and Posidonius have saddled themselves with a very thin account of mourning and consolation, of love, of anger and reconciliation. To suppose that hearing jolly or mournful tunes really alters a passion that is based on a cognitive commitment seems superficial. As Chrysippus has argued, passions are commitments made with the core of the personality, commitments about what is really important, assents to certain value-laden ways of seeing the world. The non-cognitive view yields an impoverished view of education, reducing the formation of a child’s emotions to a kind of dog-training.

THE COGNITIVE VIEW

The non-cognitive view did not altogether displace the cognitive view. Chrysippus’ general account of the passions prevailed, on the whole, in later Stoicism; it was adopted by Epictetus and Seneca, and it also heavily influenced non-Stoics such as Cicero and Plutarch, who think of it as the central Stoic view. And yet, no extensive whole discussion of poetic *paideia* by a major Stoic thinker in this

tradition survives. Chrysippus' *On how one should listen to poetry* is the work we would like to reconstruct. (And the thought of Cleanthes plays a part here too, as we shall see.) But we must approach this task tentatively, and using a variety of sources. We can draw, first of all, on numerous statements of Chrysippus himself about the poets, and on his practice of poetic interpretation. We also find helpful material in Seneca and Epictetus. Strabo, who explicitly portrays himself as a Stoic reporting Stoic views, contributes some helpful remarks. But many points on which we would like to be informed are not covered in these sources. We need, therefore, to turn for elaboration to another work of surprising interest: Plutarch's *How the young person should listen to poetry*. Philip De Lacy has argued that this work relies heavily on Chrysippus' work of similar title, and can be used as a source for Chrysippus' view. Obviously one must proceed with caution here, but I believe that De Lacy is basically right. Certainly Plutarch here refers to Chrysippus and to Stoicism with approval, and describes (with crucial citations) parts of the contents of Chrysippus' work. He describes the purpose of his work as one of arguing against an Epicurean rejection of poetry; and throughout he shows himself in general sympathetic to Stoic positions. (He is critical of allegorical reading; but, as we shall see, that device is not as central in Stoic theory as is sometimes made out.) Where we do find parallels between Plutarch's argument and material in more orthodox Stoic sources, agreement is close. So I believe that we may use the work cautiously, to flesh out a Stoic picture of cognitive poetic education.

The general character of the cognitive view of the passions should by now be fairly clear. The associated theory of poetry holds – to turn here to Strabo – that the aim of poetry is *didaskalia*, not a non-teaching sort of *psuchagogia*. The ability of poetry to improve *ēthē* and *pathē* and *praxeis* derives from its cognitive content. In fact, poetry has a close kinship with philosophy (1.2.3). This view need not neglect poetic form: for we have seen that, in *Republic* II–III and especially in Aristotle's *Poetics*, such a view prompted a searching inquiry into elements of poetic form – especially narrative, character, and structures of audience identification. But it will be interested in form as expressive of certain commitments as to the way the world is, certain patterns of salience. It will treat form as showing us something about how we might see ourselves, our relationships, our commitments, our vulnerabilities.

THE DEFENCE OF POETRY: DANGERS AND BENEFITS

We have, then, a view according to which the passions are (false) recognitions of great value in external and uncontrolled things and people. According to this view, poetry affects the hearer's emotional disposition through the judgments it leads the hearer to form about what is important and what not. The strand in Plato's argument that focussed on the acquisition of belief or judgment concluded that most existing poetry would have to be banned, since it seemed so obvious that most of it shows alleged heroes as fearing and grieving for things beyond their control. Aristotle compounded the problem, arguing that the very structure of the tragic genre, its characteristic ways of engaging its audience, relies upon fellow-feeling with a hero who suffers an undeserved and significant reversal, and on the emotions of pity for the hero, fear for oneself, that the witnessing of such an event evokes. If this is so, we might expect a Chrysippian Stoic to conclude that tragic poetry – and no doubt most of epic as well – is false and pernicious in its very structure, indissolubly wedded to values that must be rejected from Stoic education. And we might expect Stoics, like Plato, to permit only praises of the goodness of good gods and heroes.

This, of course, is not what happened. The partisans of the cognitive view are also zealous defenders of poetry. Even more clearly than the non-cognitive theorists, they rely heavily on existing poetic texts in many ways – Homer and Euripides being the favourites. We must now ask to what extent they perceived the dangers of poetry for their ethical position, why they felt it was so important that it should be retained nonetheless, and how they proposed to guard against the dangers.

Dangers

Evidence that this group of Stoic thinkers saw the dangers of poetry for their pupils is not copious, but it is telling. Cicero's account of the Stoic position on the origins of vice names the poets as among the environmental culprits (along with parents, teachers, and nurses): they take the 'soft and unformed souls' and 'bend them as they wish' (*de Legibus* 1.47 = *SVF* III (Chrysippus) 229b). This is probably a reference to Chrysippus' much-discussed account of the origins of vice. Seneca presents the dangers at greater length; and similar

views are developed in an interesting way by Plutarch, who may tentatively be taken here to be reporting, roughly speaking, Chrysippian views.

Seneca's primary complaint is that poets are indifferent to the (ethical) truth. They do not think the search for truth is important. (*de Beneficiis* 1.3.10, 1.4.5); and they tell many stories that are false and potentially pernicious. These include false stories about the underworld (*Consolatio ad Marciam* 19.4), false stories that the gods are involved in vice – for example, stories of the love affairs of Jupiter (*de Brevitate Vitae* 16.5, *de Vita Beata* 26.6), false praises of wealth (*Epistulae* 115.12 ff.). What interests Seneca about these poetic falsehoods is their effect on the passions of the hearer, through a formation of judgment. (He seems to be interested primarily in dramatic and epic poetry – poetry with a marked narrative content; he once expresses disdain for the trivialities of lyric – *Ep.* 49.5.) The tales of the lower world 'stir us up with empty fears' because they make us believe that there are bad things waiting for us after death. Stories of Jupiter's lust 'feed human error' by making people believe that it is a good thing to desire and act that way (*Brev. Vit.* 16.5); their shame is removed (*Vit. Beat.* 26.6) when they see that the gods themselves act this way. Tales of the glories of wealth, and especially of the material luxury of the lives of the gods, 'set a torch to our passions' by making us believe that wealth is an extremely important thing, the best thing the gods can have or give (*Ep.* 115, 12). Thus, as in *Republic* II–III, it is not just the presence of the value judgment in a poetic work, but its connection with figures who are displayed as admirable or divine, that produces, through a complex of judgments, the bad effect.

Plutarch makes these same points and adds two others of considerable interest. First, he notes that the mechanism through which passion is aroused frequently includes identification with a character or characters who are suffering or feeling fear. This was implicit in Plato and Seneca, but he makes it explicit and develops the point at length. He quotes several agonized speeches of characters who fear either their own death or the death of a loved one (drawn from Homer and from Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis*) and comments: 'These are the voices of people who are suffering [*peponthotōn*] and who have been snared beforehand by opinion and delusion. For this reason they seize hold of us and thoroughly shake us up, as we become

infected by their passion and by the weakness from which the speeches are said' (17cd). This passage, whose terminology of weakness and passion seems to mark it as close to a Stoic source, indicates, plausibly, that it is our sympathy with the characters, our feeling of closeness, that permits the transmission of passion, as we come to share their deluded opinions about what is happening to them. The same speech said by a tough or evil or unsympathetic character, or without all context of character, would not move us as the speech of Iphigenia does.

Furthermore, Plutarch adds a further very important point: Poetry as an art is thoroughly committed to certain ideas that are rejected by philosophers. Among these ideas are: the idea that the good and the bad are closely intermingled throughout human life in complicated ways – an idea, Plutarch remarks, 'that very definitely says goodbye to the Stoics [*polla panu tois Stōikois chairein phrazousa*], who will have it that nothing bad attaches to virtue and nothing good to vice' (25c); the idea that sudden highly significant changes take place in life, that unexpected happenings have great importance; and, above all, the general idea that life is a complicated business – 'for the simple is without emotion [*apathes*] and boringly flat [*amouson*]' (25d). In short, poets hold their audience by committing themselves to a non-Stoic view of the world. Our interest in narrative is closely linked to a certain false sort of interest we have in our lives and their events. Even the gods, in order to figure in a good poem, *must*, Plutarch continues, be falsified; they cannot be represented as 'free from emotion or error' 'in order that the exciting and striking element in the poetry should not be absent because of an absence of risk and struggle' (25d).

It would be nice to believe that these wonderful comments, which Plutarch connects closely with Stoic ethics, have Chrysippian roots; they are extremely perceptive, and show a greater sensitivity to the connection between literary form and philosophical content than we usually find in ancient literary discourse. But whatever their source, they raise a most difficult challenge for the Stoic defender of poetry. For they tell her that poetic forms themselves, and the springs of the hearer's interest in poetic forms, are thoroughly wedded to a morality that Stoics must repudiate. The choice appears clear: either dull flat poetry, or goodbye to Stoicism.

Benefits

The Stoics chose neither horn of this dilemma. They remained fascinated with the poetry that was already around and already loved. They offer several arguments for this continued engagement, claiming that poetry has such importance in human life that it should be retained despite its risks.

First of all, poetry simply presents a great deal of information that the student, and even the philosopher, should know and use. Strabo indicates that he is following Stoic doctrine in regarding the poets as teachers about all sorts of things: in his case, geography above all. And indeed, he does appear to be following Chrysippus' example. For it is clear that Chrysippus regarded the poets as a major source of evidence about psychology and physiology. He irritates Galen no end by appealing to Homer and other poets in support of his views about the location and structure of the soul. Seneca makes this same point about the ethical sphere, holding that poetic maxims are a major source of ethical information: 'How many things poets say that the philosophers either have said or ought to say' (*Ep.* 8.8).

But such information, once discovered by the philosopher, could from then on be transmitted in a prose form. So this argument, while it gives the philosopher a reason to read the poets himself, gives him no reason to make use of them in education. The Stoics, however, have further arguments. In a famous comparison, Cleanthes insisted that poetic form sharpens and condenses meanings, making truths clearer to the audience: 'Just as our breath gives out a clearer sound when it is drawn through the long narrow passage of the trumpet and pours out from the broader opening at the end, so the narrow necessity of poetry [*carminis*] makes our meanings clearer' (Sen. *Ep.* 108. 10). Seneca, discussing this view, insists that moral maxims enclosed in poetry are more easily grasped and digested by the young; furthermore, their pithy quality inspires self-scrutiny and self-recognition in the audience at any age. He reports that when a clever verse about avarice is recited in a mime of Publilius Syrus, 'even the most mediocre person applauds and delights in accusing his own vice' (108, 8–9). The usual 'uproar' in the theatre when such truths are uttered (108, 12) shows that they lead to 'confession of the truth'. When such things are said in prose, 'we listen to them more carelessly and are less struck; but when metre is added and the excellent meaning is put in line by a definite

rhythm, the same maxim is as if twisted more tightly by the arm' (108, 10).

Such a defence does little, as yet, for existing works of poetry. For all that seems to be said here, we could replace the mimes people love with a collection of maxims in verse, thus avoiding the dangers attaching to drama in general. This was actually done in Seneca's time, to avoid the immorality of mime performances. Seneca the Elder was fond of such collecting; and collections of this sort played an important role in later education – St Jerome studied from one. But I suspect that Seneca's view of poetry here is more complex. The effect that he describes as happening in the theatre is surely not independent of the whole experience of going to a mime of Publilius. The relaxed atmosphere, the audience's identification with characters who live and to some extent speak like them and whose lives are full of engaging and amusing incident – all this appears essential to the effect of self-recognition and 'confession' that Seneca describes, although he is not explicit on this point. The fact that this passage is written later than most of Seneca's remarks about the dangers of poetry – and yet he still does not advocate replacing mime by a collection of maxims – indicates that he thinks of the beneficial effect as belonging to the theatre and the dramatic experience.

A more extensive Stoic defence of dramatic and epic poetry is made in Strabo and in Epictetus. Strabo, referring to the authority of *hoi palαιοi* and to the thought of 'our people' (i.e. Stoics), says that poetry is 'a kind of first philosophy' (1.2.3), which contributes to virtue in the hearer by luring him into a moral lesson with a novel and engaging story. Children, he says, love stories and the marvels and novelties stories present. This is why stories can serve us as 'bait' to get them involved in moral inquiry that would otherwise bore them. Furthermore, this moral instruction does not simply consist in maxims inserted in an otherwise morally neutral story: the story itself inspires virtue by encouraging the imitation of excellent heroes and by frightening the hearer away from vice. A philosophical argument or a simple exhortation on these points would have little effect; but the dramatic structure promotes involvement (1.2.8). Here we find, once again, stress on identification as essential to poetic experience; this time it is seen as morally beneficial.

Strabo adds that poetry in this way is important not just for children, but actually for women as well, or indeed for any 'random

mob' – in short, for anyone lacking the patience and the intellectual training to understand a philosophical argument. And at any time this is likely to mean most people. Philosophy is 'for the few, while poetry is more friendly to the masses and can fill up the theatre' (1.2.8).

We now have two arguments in favour of the poets; both defend not only the setting of maxims in verse but also the narrative/dramatic structure of conventional genres. Strabo's argument defends the value of poetry only for non-philosophers; the Cleanthes/Seneca argument, based on clarity and self-recognition, seems to defend its value for everyone, suggesting that the forcefulness of poetic language, and probably also (in Seneca) the power of identification with dramatic situations, plays an important role in self-scrutiny and 'confession' for anyone who is trying to be good. One final argument pushes this general defence further. It is found in both Epictetus and Plutarch; but Chrysippus' famous treatment of the *Medea* is likely to be a source for Epictetus in some passages, and what Galen preserves of Chrysippus' comments on Euripides suggests that he argued along similar lines. The argument is that hearing poetry – in this case, tragic drama above all – prepares one for the various misfortunes that can take place in a human life. At the same time it shows how morally ruinous it is to come to misfortune with a mistaken set of values. The importance of being prepared for misfortune is, of course, a constant theme of Stoic thought about the 'therapy' of the passions; no other school makes such a point of this. Plutarch, I think, shows the Stoic credentials of his poetic thought clearly when he emphasizes this feature – saying that it is a consequence of having experience of poetry that 'we ourselves when we encounter misfortunes will not be struck down or disturbed, but will bear calmly with ridicule and reviling and laughter' (35 D).

Epictetus takes the same thought one step further. By seeing in tragic drama how many misfortunes can befall people, especially people of wealth and high degree, you will learn, he tells the pupil, not only to be prepared for misfortune, but also not to become excessively attached to the things that can be altered by fortune, and not to envy people who have a lot of such things. Having seen a tragedy such as the *Oedipus*, you will, he says, have a new way of looking at people who have a great many external advantages.

... remembering that tragedies take place among rich men and kings and tyrants, but no poor man has a role in a tragedy, except as a member of the chorus. Kings begin well:

‘Hang the hall with garlands.’

But by the third or fourth part, we hear:

‘O Kithairon, why did you receive me?’

Slave, where are your crowns, where your diadem? Aren’t your guards going to help you? When you see a person like that, remember all this: you are approaching a tragic character – not the actor, but Oedipus himself. (1.24.16–18)

And, almost certainly following the example of Chrysippus, Epicetetus adds a further elaboration. When we look at a tragedy, we do not only see what misfortunes life can bring; we also see that these things are devastating misfortunes only to people who have the wrong scheme of values. When we hear the tragic hero’s laments, when we see the wreckage of that life – *and* see that these piteous laments are being uttered by someone who was supposed to be a hero, we see that real heroic dignity is incompatible with the attachment to externals that brings these people low. Setting all this moaning over against an example of real heroic dignity – for example, the life of Socrates – we learn to disdain externals and to reject the values embodied in the tragic hero. If we had not witnessed his downfall, we might not have seen how ridiculous, how lacking in dignity, such a person actually is. In attending to tragedies, then, a person’s goal must be:

to study how to remove from his own life mournings and lamentations, and such expressions as ‘*oimoi*’ and ‘*talas egō*’, and misfortune and ill fortune, and to learn the meaning of death, exile, prison, hemlock – so he can say in prison, ‘O dear Crito, if this is what pleases the gods, so be it’ – and not that other exclamation, ‘Poor me [*talas egō*], an old man, it is for this that I have kept my gray hairs.’ Who says this? Do you think I am talking about some insignificant lowly person? Doesn’t Priam say these very things? Doesn’t Oedipus? In fact, don’t all kings talk like this? For what else are tragedies but the sufferings of people who have been wonderstruck by external things, displayed in the usual metre? (1.4.23–30)

And in a later passage he gives us a further ‘definition’ of tragedy, making the same point: ‘Look how tragedy comes about: when chance events befall fools’ (2.26.31). His elaborate reading of the *Medea*, very close to Chrysippus’ own surviving treatment (see

below, pages 142–3), makes a similar point. We are to see that what is wrong with this woman is that she has valued the wrong things; without the initial moral failing the mischance she encounters would have seemed no disaster and would not have given rise to murderous rage. Thus, when we see the terrible consequences of depending too much on the external, we have powerful motives, connected with our sense of our own dignity and our moral health, for leading a Stoic life. Thus tragedy is not simply a source of true statements: the tragic plot itself, and its central action, serve the purposes of Stoicism.

I shall later return to this reading of the *Medea*; for I think it takes us to the heart of the fascinating and radical proposal the Stoics make for the reform of poetic spectatorship. But by now we can already see a difficulty emerging for their account, one that we will not be able to resolve until we understand this proposal. The difficulty is that the attack on poetry and the vindication of poetry do not seem to go together. The attacks assume that the listener or spectator is experiencing the work as an involved participant, in more or less the usual way: not just absorbing its truths, but caring about the characters, involved with their fate, identifying with them, ‘infected’ with their emotions. And Plutarch’s attack suggested that things must be this way: poetry, without that kind of involvement in an interesting and surprising story, would be flat and uninteresting. Some of the defensive arguments do appear to be compatible with these observations. Strabo thinks of the non-philosopher as caught up in the plot as ‘bait’, fascinated by strange adventures. Seneca, too, seems in Letter 108 to assume at least a certain degree of relaxed participation and identification. Epictetus, on the other hand, seems to be thinking of a very different spectator: a watchful, critical, actively assertive spectator, who dissociates him or herself strongly from characters like Oedipus and Medea, and refuses to participate in their fate. I shall be arguing that this new conception of the spectator is crucial to the Stoic rehabilitation of poetry; it explains why Stoics can at one and the same time love and revere the poets and also teach that the Stoic wise man is the best or only poet. But before we can get to these conclusions, we need to survey the whole arsenal of devices the Stoics have at their disposal for taking the danger out of poetry.

MAKING POETRY HARMLESS: 'SOME UPRIGHT STANDARD OF REASON'

The Stoics, then, have a problem on their hands. On the one hand, they agree with most of Plato's claims (in *Republic* II–III) about the dangers of poetry, where the formation of value-judgments and the related passions are concerned. Indeed, they appear to go even further, holding that those dangers of passion are intrinsic to poetic genres. On the other hand, they see some compelling reasons for retaining poetry in the curriculum; and these reasons require the retention not simply of verse maxims, or praises of the goodness of good men, but of interesting narratives, and, above all, of tragic dramas. Whether based on a Stoic source or not, Plutarch's vivid metaphor gives an accurate summary of the Stoic position and its difference from the harsher position of Epicurus:

Shall we, then, stopping up young people's ears with a hard and unyielding wax, as the ears of the Ithacans were stopped, force them to put to sea in the Epicurean boat, and to avoid poetry and steer their course clear of it? Or shall we instead, standing them up against some upright standard of reason, and binding them there securely, straighten and watch over their judgment, so that it will not be carried away by pleasure toward that which will harm them? (15d)

The Stoics choose, with Plutarch, the latter course. Where do they find the upright standard of reason? And how do they apply it to the poetry they wish to preserve? I shall argue that the Stoic rationalizing arsenal has at least four weapons – the last of which is, I believe, by far the most important and the most interesting, though others have received more attention. These are: censorship (?); writing new poetry; allegorical interpretation; and what I shall call the art of critical spectatorship.

Censorship

For Stoic censorship there is little evidence. But since there is said to be some it must be mentioned. In Chrysippus' account of his ideal republic, according to Plutarch, he forbade citizens certain 'things delightful to hearing and sight' (*De Stoicorum Repugnantiis* 1044d). Philip De Lacy (1958a) has interpreted this – not altogether implausibly – to refer to some sort of censorship of the arts. Perhaps it does.

But on the other hand the bulk of what we know about Chrysippus indicates that he was determined to find something uplifting about even the most objectionable art works (see pages 133–4 below). I conclude, therefore, that the evidence is too vague and thin to tell us anything. No other Stoic of the cognitive view seems to provide evidence leading in this direction.

Writing new poetry

The Stoics famously held that the wise man was best at all the arts, including the art of poetry (*SVF* III. 654–6). And several of them put this into practice, Cleanthes, obviously, above all. His non-mythological and yet (to many) stirring verses show that it is possible to retain certain elements of poetic tradition while purifying tradition of harmful theological and psychological content. Seneca's tragedies and Lucan's epic extend the experiment to the two central poetic genres. But how and to what extent they do this with fidelity to Stoicism is a very complex issue that we cannot begin to discuss here.

More local and piecemeal attempts were also made. Stoics were fond of rewriting existing poetic works so that they would yield a more acceptable sense. Diogenes Laertius tells us that Zeno rewrote two lines of Hesiod so that following a good example would be praised above discovering something oneself – rather than, as in Hesiod, the other way round (VII.25). He also rewrote Sophocles' lines:

Whoever comes to do business with a king
Is his slave, even if he arrives a free man.

so that the second line read:

Is not a slave, if he arrives a free man.

Cleanthes rewrote Euripides *Electra* 428:

Give to your friends, and when your body falls ill
Save it by spending,

to read:

Give to your whores, and when your body falls ill,
Wear it out by spending.

Epictetus produces a satirical Romanized version of Euripides' *Phoenissae* 368, where Polyneices longs for 'The gymnasia in which I was reared and the water of Dirce', mocking an analogous Roman

youth's longing for 'Nero's baths and the waters of the Marcian aqueduct' (2.26.31). Plutarch suggests a long series of such changes. Interpolations in dramatic texts were also common practice. In such ways the Stoic thinkers maintained their control over the text, and showed the pupil that in the poetic experience philosophy was always in charge.

Chrysippus is not mentioned as part of this tradition of composition. On the other hand, there is some evidence that he did, on occasion, write philosophy dramatically. Most accounts of his style are very negative; he is blamed for verbosity, bad diction, and flatness. And it must be said that the surviving fragments appear to have little literary distinction. But according to Fronto, his style was vividly dramatic: 'He ... asks questions, describes, invents characters, puts his sentiments into the mouth of another' (*SVF* III.27). Plutarch, too, speaks of the vivid and dramatic way in which Chrysippus presents opposing positions (*How the Young Person* 32). We may possibly, then, have here some attempt to emulate the dramatists, and to show how a philosopher can perform that function.

Allegorical interpretation

But the Stoics were, on the whole, too fond of the existing poets to displace them in favour of their own work. And the primary task they undertook was to keep the usefulness and delight of poetry while preventing its potentially harmful elements from harming. One famous Chrysippian device to this end, which altered the course of literary history for centuries, was the device of allegorical reading. To the persistent charge that the artists are liars, Chrysippus replied by showing that any work, however apparently false and even morally pernicious, can be a source of truth about the universe, if only one follows its suggestions (*huponoiai*) and does not stop with the first apparent meaning. The most notorious and, in many ways, most revealing example of this technique concerns not a literary text but a painting. To the considerable disgust and amusement of later thinkers, Chrysippus produced a very serious explication of a painting that apparently showed Hera fellating Zeus. Obviously this painting is a paradigm of what would have been banned in Plato's ideal city; and it doesn't even meet with the approval of the various people who narrate parts of the story (*SVF* II.1071-4). Chrysippus not only refuses to condemn it, but actually draws attention to it as a

source of insight. What he apparently said is that the painting represents the matter of the universe receiving the *spermatikoi logoi*. (It is impossible to tell, here or elsewhere, whether Chrysippus had a sense of humour.) Diogenes Laertius exclaims: 'He says what nobody would soil his mouth with on a bad day . . . Even if he praises it as philosophy of nature, the language used is more appropriate to whores than to gods' (*SVF* II.1071 = Diog. Laer. VII.187).

The attempt here is presumably representative. If I can make something respectable and even illuminating out of *this* work of art, Chrysippus seems to say, I can do it anywhere, and so can you. The choice of an otherwise not distinguished work seems best explained by some generalizing intention. And the example of oral sex – regarded as profoundly disgusting and degrading in the Greek world – makes it a 'worst-case scenario' for the rationalizing interpreter. A work of art that might have inspired unacceptable erotic desires, if seen with uneducated eyes, is now seen in a new way, under the guidance of correct teaching and an 'upright standard of reason'. This teaching tells the pupil to regard the painting not with any anthropomorphic identification or sensory memory and anticipation, not with any human fellow-feeling with the depicted figures, or any infection with their involvement in the body and its sexual activities as things of great interest and importance – but, instead, as a set of signs to what is really important – reason, and reason's plan for the whole universe. By a change in the relation of spectator to work, the work is rendered harmless, and even possibly helpful. And one can imagine a further bonus. Someone who becomes accustomed to looking at artistic depictions of sexual activity as signs of Zeus's rational plan might begin, after a while, to take up the same attitude to him or herself and his or her own body. He might begin, that is, to think that what is important about it and its activities is not that it feels this sensation or that, or has intercourse with this or that particular person – but, rather, that it plays its part in Zeus's scheme of things.

I have focussed on this case from visual art since it shows the important points especially clearly. But it is plain that Chrysippus was fond of doing the same thing for literature as well – as is clear from Galen's account of his arguments for the placement of the *hēgemonikon* in the region of the heart. Here Chrysippus uses an extensive allegorical reading of the Hesiod story of Athena's birth from Zeus's head, in order to show that it can be made to support and not undermine his theory. The idea is that Athena is conceived

somewhere in Zeus's middle, but comes out through the head – i.e., says Chrysippus, the mouth – just as reason is in the heart, but comes out as voice through the mouth. The myth is called a *sumbolon* of these physical facts. (Here it is not a question so much of defending the literary work as of defending his theory against the apparently contrary authority of the literary work.) Chrysippus has a lot of trouble with some details of the story – especially with Hesiod's claim that she came out from the 'top of the head' (*koruphē*); Galen delights in his discomfiture and the absurdities it produces.

But it appears that where literature was concerned, allegory was not Chrysippus' first avenue of interpretation. He turns to it here only when challenged to defend his view; and most of his many readings of literary works are much more straightforward. It is fortunate, I believe, that this was so. For the laboured ingenuity of these allegories would hardly have been easily available to the young, to whom poetry is above all commended by the Stoics. This point, interestingly enough, was already made in *Republic* II, where Socrates renounces this approach to the rationalization of literature: 'For a young person cannot judge what is a *huponoiia* and what is not, but whatever opinions they take in at that age are likely to be hard to wash out, and unchanging' (378de). Even where sophisticated readers are concerned, *ad hoc* manoeuvres such as those by Chrysippus did not and do not inspire confidence. Galen is more than usually convincing when he tells Chrysippus to give up that approach. He refers to Plato's *Phaedrus*, where Socrates criticizes rationalizing explanations for the myth of Boreas:

For my part, in the words of Plato himself, I 'regard' all 'such' interpretations of myth 'as otherwise delightful, but as the work of a man who is excessively clever and hard-working and not altogether fortunate, for no other reason than that after this he must rectify the species of the Hippocentaurs, and then that of the Chimera; and a whole throng of such figures comes flooding in, gorgons and Pegasuses and an absurd crowd of other impossible and fantastic natures. And if someone, doubting them, is going to reduce them all to the probable, using a rustic kind of cleverness, he will need a lot of leisure time.' Chrysippus should have read this passage and then abandoned myths, and should not have wasted his time explaining their *huponoiiai*. For if a person once gets involved in this, a countless number of mythical narratives 'comes flooding in,' so that anyone who examines them all will spend his whole life at it. (*PHP* III.8, 230–2 D)

Allegorical reading has great interest as one mode of a more general strategy: to break the links of poetic identification, producing a detached and critical spectator. It is not the most reliable such device, especially where the young are concerned.

Critical spectatorship

But the Stoics have other devices that are as sophisticated as allegory without being as sophistical, devices that keep the reader involved with the literary work, and connected to the reasons for which it originally seemed important, while still protecting the soul from passion. Allegory wards off passion through a very radical shift in the position of the spectator. He is not only not to identify with the characters represented, he is not even to think of them as human beings at all. Instead, he sees them as symbols, usually of some non-anthropomorphic aspect of nature or reason. Such a shift is difficult to achieve and to sustain, especially in the young, given the vividness of the anthropomorphic depiction for which poetry is valued. And it might also forfeit some of poetry's benefits, since some, at least, seem to depend upon regarding the events as human events happening to people who are in many ways like oneself. The Chrysippian reading of the painting will not promote recognition and 'confession' in any person but one who already thinks of his body as a piece of the rational order of the universe. Such a person is already a Stoic philosopher. Nor, furthermore, will such a reading help anyone prepare for the many changes of fortune that human life brings.

Accordingly, in the bulk of what the Stoics of the cognitive view write about spectatorship, we find another conception of detachment. From Epictetus' general remarks and concrete interpretations, from Chrysippus' handling of Euripides' *Medea*, from Plutarch – in this case sometimes explicitly reporting Chrysippus – we can reconstruct a complex and coherent picture of 'how one ought to listen to poetry' – the title of Chrysippus' treatise, and Plutarch's essay. The mutual reinforcement among these different sources of evidence indicates that we have here, at any rate, if not Chrysippus' view, at least a genuine Stoic view of the audience, and one that is consistent with what we know of Chrysippus' critical practice.

We have seen that the passion-arousing effects of tragic poetry (and also, to some extent, of epic) depend upon certain formal

features of tragic spectatorship. First, it is crucial that the spectator identify with the hero or heroine, believing that the tragic action shows possibilities for him or herself as well. Second, the spectator must believe that the sufferings of the characters are really important. If one thought that the hero's loss was trivial, or even a good thing, deep emotions of pity and fear would not be possible. The hero takes his loss extremely seriously; and the unreformed audience does so too, entering into the way he views the world. Finally, the spectator must believe that the characters are in some sense powerless to prevent the damages – and that the spectator herself, being like the characters, is powerless to prevent similar misfortunes in her own life. Losses of loved ones, defeats in war, are objects of pity and fear because they come to the tragic characters from outside, in a way they cannot help. One will not view in the same way the arrest of a drug-dealer, let us say, or the punishment of a wife-beater. These events inspire no pity, since we believe that the bad outcome is the result of the person's own bad character and bad choices. Accordingly, insofar as we are trying to be good, we dissociate ourselves from that outcome and those possibilities. We therefore feel no fear, since we can easily prevent ourselves from committing similar crimes.

Clearly, from the point of view of Stoicism, these three beliefs, all constitutive of tragic spectatorship, are false and pernicious. The sufferings shown in tragedy are important only to one who has the wrong view about what is important. And they are beyond our control only when we do not take control of our own lives, extirpating the attachments to externals on which these sufferings are based. We cannot control the events; we can control ourselves and the ways in which events matter to us.

Accordingly, the Stoic spectator must take up a new attitude to the tragic characters. The essence of this attitude is a concerned but critical detachment. By supplementing the works of the poets with the continual guidance of philosophical commentary (which provides, as Plutarch puts it, a correct *paidagōgia* – 15c), the Stoics hope to form a spectator who is vigilant rather than impressionable, actively judging rather than immersed, critical rather than trustful.

The first step in this re-formation, and one that is insistently emphasized, is to get the spectator to realize that poetry can lie. What we have before us is not the way the world is, but only someone's appearance (*phantasia*, *phainomenon*). And we have to ask

ourselves, as we do about any impression that comes before us, whether we are going to assent to it or not. In this process, the spectator has to realize that she cannot rely on the poet: as elsewhere, she has to rely on herself and her own judgment. Plutarch says that, therefore, the young must be armed from the first with the saying that poetry cares little for the truth (17de). Epictetus and Seneca give similar advice. From the first, the main aim must be to produce a spectator who is vigilant and probing, active rather than receptive.

This vigilance is directed above all at the relationship formed between spectator and characters. For the aim of critical spectatorship is to break the bonds of tragic fellow-feeling and identification, substituting a different bond, one that does not presuppose a shared scheme of values, but is based upon what we might call reforming zeal and compassion. Again and again, Epictetus warns the spectator not to yield to the view of the world held by one or another literary character, but to realize that this is just someone's appearance – and, as with any other appearance, we are the ones who must choose. Furthermore, when we see what happens to these characters who are attached to externals and who do not regard these appearances critically, we will observe that the impressions lead them both to suffering and to wrongdoing. So the spectator, once having suspended initial identification, will derive from her study of the plot a new motive to persist in that critical posture:

Am I stronger than Agamemnon and Achilles, – that they, through following what appeared to them to be the case, both do and suffer such evils, and yet I am satisfied with what appears? And what tragedy has any other starting point? What is the *Atreus* of Euripides? Appearance. What is Sophocles' *Oedipus*? Appearance. *Phoenix*? Appearance. *Hippolytus*? Appearance. What sort of person, then, do you think it is who pays no attention to this problem? What do we call people who follow every appearance? – Madmen. – Are we, then, acting any differently? (1.28.31–3)

The appearances in question are the appearances of the characters within tragedy or epic – as the initial examples of Agamemnon and Achilles show. They are appearances not, clearly, in the sense of sensory illusions, but in the sense of impressions about matters of importance, impressions as to what is worth pursuing and what is not. Epictetus agrees with *Republic* II–III that such impressions are starting-points of tragedy. But he then claims that tragedy can be, for this very reason, highly beneficial. The spectator is to

have sufficient fellow-feeling with the characters to recognize that, as human beings, they share a common problem: what to choose, what to value, how to exercise control over appearances. Seeing what happens to people who solve this problem in the tragic hero's way – loving things external – she acquires again and again, as often as she sees a tragedy (and the importance of repetition and a variety of related works is stressed), a powerful motive to choose the Stoic solution. And the more she moves toward the Stoic solution, being watchful over herself and her passions, scrutinizing each action and each appearance, the more she will also be a good Stoic spectator of tragedy. The two practices reinforce one another.

Above all, then, Stoicism undoes tragic identification by attacking the hero's (and thus the spectator's) belief that what we see here is a serious misfortune that could not have been prevented by intelligence. The misfortune, Epictetus insists, comes not from the events, but from the characters' scheme of values, which gives them a certain way of viewing the events, the way that makes for passion. And one's way of seeing the world is always in one's control. Therefore there is nothing grand or inevitable about tragedy – and it is a record of deplorable, if extremely common, foolishness. Tragic heroes are not the grand things that the tradition takes them to be; we should call them 'people who have been wonderstruck by things external', and their tragedy nothing more solemn than 'what happens when chance events befall fools'.

Several techniques contribute to the formation of this detached and critical attitude. Most centrally and pervasively, our Stoic texts use and recommend the technique of philosophical commentary. The spectator is encouraged – first by example, gradually in her own efforts – to provide a running commentary on the action of the work she hears. In doing this, to begin with she should look for the poet's own commentary upon his characters – for when she does so, as both Seneca and Plutarch insist, she will frequently discover a criticism that approximates to the criticism philosophy itself would offer. This source of insight, Plutarch holds, is frequently lost through premature allegorizing, and is to be sought by staying closer to the literal sense of the text. His examples are taken from Homer (who seems to be critical of excesses of love and anger), Euripides and Menander. Seneca develops the same point with an example from Euripides: he imagines the poet himself reproving the audience for hasty reading; 'Euripides' urges them to wait to see what becomes of a character

who has a defective ethical view (Plutarch 19–20, *Sen. Ep.* 115, 15). Plutarch makes many sensitive and subtle points about the way in which a poet may undercut our enthusiasm for an initially attractive character, both through explicit statements and through the course of the dramatic action.

This is, I think, an important part of the Stoic programme. Finding such judgments in the plays and poems themselves is important for them, if they wish to defend existing works of literature, retaining the ‘classics’ as a positive force in education. I think it is significant that their attention is focused on authors – especially Menander and Euripides – who could plausibly be said to be at times almost Stoically critical of ordinary human passions and the values that underlie them. Perhaps the emphasis simply reflects these authors’ popularity; but I suspect there is more to it. Sophocles’ scheme of ends would be far harder to accommodate.

But the Stoic spectator is critical even when the poet himself does not oblige. She is encouraged to foster detachment further, through two further devices: generalization, and humour. Chrysippus, according to Plutarch, advised the spectator to apply poetic statements and situations to other similar situations – making characteristic use of a medical analogy. When doctors see the effectiveness of a drug in one disease, they apply it to other relatively similar diseases. So too, says Chrysippus, when a poetic statement seems valuable, we should ‘not allow it to be linked to one matter only, but move it over to all similar cases, and accustom the young people to see the common link and to make intelligent transfers of what is pertinent, through many examples getting practice and training in sharpness of discernment. For example, when they listen to Odysseus’ rebuke to Achilles, as he sits idly amusing himself with the maidens in Scyrus, they are to think how this rebuke applies to other profligate and wasteful people’ (34b ff.).

Such generalizing is as old as Plato; and Aristotle already made it a reason for calling the poetic experience philosophical. Chrysippus now uses it to explain how poetry helps the spectator interpret his or her own life. Notice, however, that generalizing does not work the way it does in Aristotle, through approval of and identification with the tragic hero. Instead, the spectator is detached from the types he observes. He may, as in Seneca’s example, recognize himself in what he sees on stage; on the other hand, he may simply reprove and condemn. In neither case does he acquiesce in the literary flow and

let it take him along. He relies on the active guidance of his very own judgment. And notice that the active guidance of judgment forges a new sort of bond between characters and spectator. The spectator now views himself as a kind of doctor-in-training of the soul, seeking for explanations of human diseases and weaknesses. (See Plutarch 28b for emphasis on the importance of always seeking explanations.) He now sees poetry as a representation of human disease and weakness:

Let the young person . . . think that poetry is a representation of character and life, and of human beings who are not perfect or pure or entirely above criticism, but all mixed up with passions and false opinions and ignorance, but who on account of the goodness of their nature often change for the better. (Plutarch 26a)

In what looks very much like a Stoic's reply to Aristotle's *Poetics*, Plutarch appears to endorse Aristotle's account of poetic representation, but changes it in a decisive way. The fundamental attitude of the spectator is now not admiring fellow-feeling, but a peculiarly Stoic blend of criticism and compassion. He doesn't suffer with the characters, he discerns their diseases, and wants to heal them. It is significant that Chrysippus urges the listener to take up a partnership with Odysseus, whose role is to offer criticism and wise advice. Both of them, like doctors, will be concerned about the diseases of the hero.

Finally, as a further weapon against excessive involvement with tragic characters, the Stoic uses humour and satire. The topic of Stoic humour sounds rather unpromising. But I believe it is not, and that one could do interesting research along those lines. Epictetus listens to the lament of Polyneices in the *Phoinissae* of Euripides, we recall, and quickly produces a satirical Roman version, mocking the hero's attachments and inducing a mocking self-recognition in the young spectator. As often in Epictetus' treatment of the interlocutor, the grief and pathetic sufferings of tragic characters are, here and elsewhere, treated with a brusque and mocking vigour. In this way the spectator is urged to find (his own or another's) excessive involvement in trivial things foolish, to laugh at the weepers. Such laughter cements the distance between hero and audience. It says, in effect, 'I am not like you. I see things differently. You are a silly creature. You could have done otherwise. This did not have to happen to you. What you call tragedy is simply your own foolishness.' We can see why Menander is important for Stoic theatre when

we reflect that this structure is frequently present in New Comedy itself, in its mockery of obsessive types of various kinds.

Plutarch concludes with several further pieces of advice that may well also be taken from Chrysippus – at any rate, they are adjacent to the explicit reference we have just discussed. They flesh out the general programme that we have described. This advice is: to seek the reasons for each thing that happened; to argue with poetic statements; to look for useful lessons, especially lessons in moderation; to comment and amplify with related philosophical remarks on the same point.

We can get an idea of how these pieces fit together if we look at the approach of Chrysippus and Epictetus to Euripides' *Medea*. Much of Chrysippus' treatment is preserved by Galen. And Epictetus devotes more time to *Medea* than to any other fictional character. First, we see clearly that both find in the play evidence that the passions are false judgments and that the conflict between passion and reason is a debate about how (in evaluative terms) to see the world. This is especially plain in the evidence about Chrysippus, which I have discussed elsewhere; and his interpretation of the play has recently been convincingly defended by Christopher Gill (explicitly), and by Bernard Knox (implicitly).¹⁶

Second, it is equally plain that both philosophers are anxious to break, in the case of the reader or spectator, the ties of identification that would cause similar judgments, similar passions, to arise in them. Chrysippus insists that *Medea* is an example of a diseased person, who thinks life is not worth living without an external undependable item: all her suffering and her murderous rage stem from that error, an error that the audience is encouraged to repudiate. The general context uses a number of the devices I have mentioned to promote distancing: grotesquely ugly description of anger, satire and ridicule, philosophical generalization from her case to other related cases.

Epictetus' treatment is perhaps even more interesting, since he gives us, in his lively address to *Medea*, an example of Stoic spectatorship at work, a spectatorship that is vigorously concerned, yet detached, that points out error, reproves, says things do not have to be the way they are:

Medea, since she could not endure [not getting what she wanted], ended up killing her children. At least she acted with great spirit. For she had the

¹⁶ See Gill (1983), Knox (1977).

proper impression of what it means not to get what one wants. 'Well then, I shall avenge myself on the man who has wronged and insulted me. But what good do I get out of his being in a bad state? How can that be accomplished? I kill my children. But I shall get revenge on myself also. But what do I care?' This is the outburst of a great-sinewed soul. For she did not know where the ability lies to do what we wish, that it must be sought not from without, not by changing and rearranging things. Stop wanting your husband, and there is not one of the things you want that will fail to happen. Stop wanting him to live with you at any cost. Stop wanting to remain in Corinth. And in general, stop wanting anything else but what the god wants. And who will prevent you? Who will compel you? No one, any more than anyone prevents or compels Zeus. (2.17.19–22; cf. also 1.28.7–9)

In what precedes and follows, he generalizes this to the situation of the pupil. In short, the spectator is permitted to admire Medea and to be intensely concerned with her – but not with 'infection' or fellow-feeling with her love or her anger. The love is treated drily, distantly, viewed critically as a regrettable error. The ordinary spectator of Medea's tragedy would find something deeply painful in the way in which great and loyal love, betrayed, leads on to disaster; for they would think of such love as a fine thing, and it would seem horrible that the interaction between love and the world would produce such a morally disturbing result. She would fear for her own life, seeing that she has, in all likelihood, attached to love a similarly high value. The Stoic spectator feels none of this emotion. She is concerned about Medea as a doctor is concerned: with active energetic commitment to making her better, and to using her case to improve the health of others.

What we have here, then, is a retention of the literary work, accompanied by a radical transformation of the spectator's relation to it, through the omnipresence of vigilant philosophical commentary. Does this reformed Stoic theatre escape Plutarch's original charge that a literature without surprise and passion on the part of the audience would be dull? Does it escape Aristotle's claim that the bonds that hold us to the tragic poem must be bonds of pity and fear, forged by fellow-feeling?

To a surprising extent, I believe that it does. In answering these questions, the Stoics will follow Chrysippus' literary use of the medical analogy. The good doctor, they will insist, is not bored with his patients. He does not have to become infected with their diseases to be strongly concerned for their well-being. So too, the good Stoic

spectator is concerned with the characters – with a friendly and humane concern that is perfectly compatible with detachment from their sicknesses of passion. He views them as fellow imperfect human beings, and regrets that they are not sufficiently concerned with their progress. His attitude to them is one of rational wish (*boulēsis*) for their good, and friendly warning (*eulabeia*) about the consequences of their sickness. If he could, he would talk to them and give them help. As for his own self-interest: in seeing their illnesses, he will frequently, as Seneca saw, recognize himself. Such recognition appears to require only the Stoic sort of concern and not any stronger sort. The possibility of self-recognition and ‘confession’ will generate in him still further interest in the literary work, and increase his motivation for engaging himself seriously with literature. The Stoic will claim that here is a way in which theatre can be truly interesting without being corrupting, truly exhilarating rather than producing people who passively wallow in pity. There is no true compassion in wallowing; in advice there is real fellow-feeling and love of humanity.

It is, I believe, both useful and striking to compare to these attitudes the criticisms made by Bertolt Brecht of the ‘dramatic theatre’, and his famous proposal to replace it with what he called the ‘epic theatre’. The problem with the usual dramatic theatre, as Brecht saw it, was that the spectator wallowed passively in human suffering, acquiescing in bad states of affairs as if they could in no way be helped. Thus the spectator surrendered control and ceased even to ask the question, ‘What is under my control and what is not?’ Brecht’s response, notoriously, was to create a theatre in which dramatic illusion was regularly broken by philosophical commentary – in which the spectator would become aware of herself as an active, critical, reflective being, a being who asks, ‘How did this come about? How can this be changed? How can these people live better?’ There *is* fellow-feeling with the characters in the epic theatre, an awareness of common humanity and a concern with well-being. But this fellow-feeling issues not so much in pity and fear as in practical reflection and the giving of advice. And it expresses itself structurally in a Stoic kind of alternation between representation and commentary, making significant use of mocking detachment and humour to construct the new spectatorial relationship.

There is, of course, an absolutely fundamental difference between epic theatre and Stoic spectatorship. For in the former the things

that need changing, the things to which the practical attention of the audience is directed, are material and institutional conditions, whereas in the latter they are internal diseases of thought and choice. Brecht, as a Marxist, was profoundly opposed to the idea that changes in thinking were the most essential to the improvement of human life. And Marx's own rejection of that idea was closely connected with his turn away from Hellenistic philosophy as a source of insight. There is disagreement, as well, about the nature of the spectator's detachment. For while Brecht's spectator is made to adopt a detached and mocking attitude to many of the evaluations characteristic of ordinary life – to the obsession with money and power, even to the obsessions and jealousies of erotic love – some areas of agreement with ordinary belief remain undisturbed, where a Stoic would certainly disturb them. I think above all of the approval of an all-encompassing love of a mother for a child, which is the mainspring of audience interest in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*; a Stoic would surely have qualms here.

On the other hand, in some equally fundamental ways Chrysippus and Brecht can agree: above all, in rejecting the Aristotelian idea that true insight is gained through and in emotional experience itself; in the view that the theatre will be practical only if it creates a critical and unemotional spectator, one who is actively in control of his or her own judgment. The nearness of the parallel can be appreciated if one considers the passage I have quoted as the epigraph to this paper, comparing it with Plutarch's prescriptions and Epictetus' practice.¹⁷ If we allow for the differences in the positive direction of thought proposed by the two thinkers – political change in the case of Brecht, change of thought in the case of Chrysippus – we might well have here – even in its muscular and dramatic style – a piece of Chrysippian writing. And we begin to see, through considering the parallel, how poetic drama can be seen with critical detachment and still be engaging. For the experience of seeing a play of Brecht *is* engaging, in a peculiarly exhilarating way – for the combination of insight, reflection, humour, and human compassion it evokes. Euripides seen through Chrysippus' eyes would yield, it is claimed, a similar experience.

¹⁷ Brecht's remark, made in 1936, is quoted in Tynan (1964) pp. 143–4.

POETRY REFORMED?

We have, then, a plan for the reform and yet the retention of poetry: a plan that justifies the Stoics' proud boast that the wise man is the only true poet. For the plan puts the Stoic philosopher firmly in charge of the poetic experience, forging, in effect, a new work compounded from philosophical commentary and the poetic original. The claim is that such a partnership, and the new experience that issues from it, will retain the great advantages of poetry for human life – in particular its advantages as an explorer of 'foolishness' and passion – without incurring the risks run in the unmediated poetic experience.

This proposal seems to me exciting. In contrast to the proposals of the non-cognitive school, it really grapples with the *intelligence* of great poetry, with its cognitive commitments, and with the identifications and evaluations usually built into the poetic experience. It does not treat a poetic text as simply a machine that imparts sub-rational animal motions. It has not only (I believe) a far richer and more adequate view of the passions, but also a richer view of the poetic text itself, one that does justice to its complex cognitive and narrative structure, and to the importance of our relations with poetic characters. And it treats the spectator like an intelligent human being – and perhaps even to a greater extent than does the Aristotelian view, in that it continually asks him to take charge of his own judgment. The proposal also seems to me superior to the allegorical strategy, in that it allows poetry to stay close to the daily lives and passions of human beings, where, the Stoics argue, its insights have much to contribute, generating recognitions of many kinds. In so doing, it seems to me to develop what is best and deepest in the original Platonic picture, bypassing what is weaker and in tension with that. And yet it avoids Plato's stern rejection of poetry by reinventing its audience.

Will this work? First of all, we have to say that the institutional side of things remains, so far as we can tell, altogether undeveloped. Brecht did not just make remarks about the spectator: he actively forged a theatre in which the spectator would be what he imagined. Chrysippus, Plutarch, Epictetus apparently tolerated the retention of current theatrical practices, and merely added their comments and training to them, for any young people who fell under their influence. This seems to me a rather weak approach; for surely one's

experience of spectatorship is influenced far more by what actually goes on in the theatre – the reactions of one's fellow audience members, the style of acting, the mode of presentation – than by instruction one gets before or after concerning how to watch. The limits of the approach are even more apparent if one reflects that many of the spectators with whom the Stoics are most concerned are young and inexperienced in philosophy, not ready to hear Chrysippian lectures. These will form bad habits of spectatorship before even encountering philosophy – as would not happen, for example, to an audience brought up on Brechtian dramas, in which drama and commentary are an inseparable whole and the thought is woven into the form.

A related problem is that Stoics seem vastly to underrate the extent to which their own evaluative commitments are at odds with those of the poets they praise. Perhaps one reason why they are willing to allow the young to hear unreformed Euripides or Homer, even before encountering philosophical instruction, is that they are convinced that there is an alliance between Stoicism and these poets on the most important matters. Even though their works portray *characters* who are passionate, the poets themselves, they usually suggest, subtly urge balance and *apatheia*. This seems to me to be plainly false, at least of many central cases. The works of the great tragedians do, as Aristotle believed, have built into their very structure the bases of fear, pity, and grief. Someone brought up on them will learn that it is really dreadful to lose a child or a husband, to be made a slave, to die. Euripides' *Medea* is the object of pity and sympathy, not simply of moral disapproval: and this is written into the play itself. Achilles is not simply a person who foolishly fails to listen to good advice: he is a hero who claims our love, and whose risks we allow to stand, in certain ways, for our own; again, this is written into the poem, and cannot so easily be removed. To some extent Euripides is a better ally for the Stoics than other major Greek poets: for he shows the ugly consequences of deep love and other external commitments so clearly that one might well read him as calling for the extirpation of passion – though I believe that it would be incorrect to do so, and that plays such as the *Hippolytus* and the *Bacchae* could not possibly bear such an interpretation.

In short, it seems difficult to reform the poetic experience without reforming the poetry. A certain conception of the spectator's response is built into the structure of a tragic poem: in this Aristotle

was correct. One cannot so easily keep the very same poem and change the experience. It seems to me, then, that the Stoics should have gone further in the direction taken by Brecht, with his thorough-going reconstitution of the theatrical text and its mode of presentation. They could have left in far more of poetry's delights than Plato did – and Brecht is a valuable example of how this can be done. But they need to intervene more in both dramatic writing and dramatic production.

The only Stoic who seems to have reflected profoundly about these issues is Seneca. For of course Seneca did produce poetic dramas that are in some way related to his Stoicism. And he did, apparently, produce them as recitation-drama, not as staged drama – a mode of production that might be thought suitable for the more didactic and dialectical approach to theatre that Stoicism requires. It is not possible to launch into the large question of Senecan drama and its relation to his philosophical work here, at the end of what is already much too long a paper. I have discussed some of the relevant issues elsewhere.¹⁸ But two points can be briefly sketched.

First, Senecan drama presents Stoic psychology of passion and passional conflict with greater explicitness and clarity than any non-Stoic poetic text – even one, such as Euripides' *Medea*, that might be invoked in Stoicism's support. In this way, it furthers Seneca's didactic purpose. And, second, the dramatic structure of Senecan drama actively impedes sympathetic identification, promoting critical spectatorship and critical reflection about the passions. For the central characters repel the spectator, making it very difficult to be 'infected' by their passions, difficult to view them as anything but diseased. And the Chorus, frequently a guide for the spectator's response, is moralizing and orthodox to a degree unknown in Greek tragedy; it usually lacks sympathy with the principal character. In these ways, Seneca promotes Stoic spectatorship – although the complexities of his dramas make it clear that the tragic genre, even in such careful and sophisticated hands, is not an altogether reliable tool for Stoic moralizing.

But my greatest objection to the Stoic revision is a deeper one. It is that, while apparently treating the poets as wise men and sources of insight, Stoic thinkers never really admit the possibility that poetry might actually have something to teach *them* – not just about

¹⁸ In Nussbaum (1991).

diseases, but about full health, not just about aberration but about the complete human life. Chrysippus makes a great show of learning from the poets; and no doubt he is convinced that he has done so. He even makes it fundamental to his philosophical method in psychology that he should turn to the poets as to reliable authorities. But where the most important matters are concerned, he does not do this at all. He does not really ask Euripides or Sophocles or Homer what view of the worthwhile and the good shows itself in the totality of their work. Nor does he open himself up to the avenues of learning – through emotional response, above all – that their poetry makes available to the spectator who follows its lead. His proposal for defensive spectatorship (if it is his) is arrived at out of an experience that is itself thoroughly defensive and dogmatic. In all the hundreds of Chrysippian references to and discussions of poetic scenes and speeches, one never has the sense of a person who is puzzled, or troubled, or in any way *changed* by the poetic text – who is ever at a loss for what to do, what to say. But, as even Plutarch saw, being bewildered by the complexity of life, being surprised and troubled, is a great part of what poetry has morally to offer us. And if one steels oneself so adamantly against all this, what is the point of having poetry in one's life at all?

Plutarch's treatise ends with a telling image. The young person, he says, needs a good helmsman in matters of poetry, so that, 'not prejudiced but educated, in a kindly and friendly and appropriate way, he may be sent forth from poetry into philosophy' (36b). The Stoic boat knows where it is going, and exactly who is steering it. 'Our people say that the only real poet is a wise man' (Strabo 1.2.2). Not with explicit Platonic opposition, but in a kindly and friendly and appropriate way, the poets have been banished – not from the city, but from control over their own meanings, their own truths.