



MORS INDIVIDVA AND AEQVA (SENECA, TROADES 401 AND 434)*

ABSTRACT

This note highlights an original echo between two passages of Seneca's *Troades* that draws attention to one of Andromache's personality traits.

Keywords: Seneca; *Troades*; Andromache; tragic irony; death; ghost

In Seneca's *Troades*, before relating the dream in which her husband, Hector, appeared to her, Andromache claims that enemies are coming back from the afterlife (430–2). This detail reminds the reader/spectator of Talthylbius' monologue in which he asserts that the ghost of Achilles has appeared to him (167–99). Andromache continues her speech with these sentences: *solisne retro peruium est Danais iter? certe aequa mors est!* (433–4), 'Is the way back open only to the Greeks? Surely death is impartial.'¹ The philosophical topos, that death is the same for everyone, has been well commented upon,² but the parallel with the chorus' statement *mors indiuidua est, noxia corpori | nec parcens animae* (401–2), 'Death is not separable, it is destructive of the body, without sparing the soul',³ which is still fresh in the reader/spectator's memory, seems to have gone unnoticed. In Andromache's mind, death is fair (*aequa mors est*) and, since dead enemies are reappearing to the living, Hector might even return and help her. But the reader/spectator who has just heard the chorus declare that death is final and that no one can actually come back from the afterlife knows that it will never happen, and that Hector will remain dead, just like Achilles.⁴ Andromache is thus right

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¹ Transl. E. Fantham, *Seneca's Troades. A Literary Introduction with Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Princeton, 1982), 154.

² F. Caviglia, *Le Troiane. Introduzione, testo, traduzione e note* (Rome, 1981), 257; Fantham (n. 1), 91 and 278–9; A.J. Boyle, *Seneca's Troades. Introduction, Text, Translation and Commentary* (Leeds, 1994), 179; A.J. Keulen, *L. Annaeus Seneca Troades. Introduction, Text and Commentary* (Leiden / Boston / Köln, 2001), 302.

³ Transl. Fantham (n. 1), 152. For commentaries on this passage, see Caviglia (n. 2), 253–4; Fantham (n. 1), 270; Boyle (n. 2), 175; Keulen (n. 2), 284.

⁴ For commentaries on 'Death is final' as one of the themes of the play, see Caviglia (n. 2), 43–8; Fantham (n. 1), 78–92 and 268–9. See also Boyle (n. 2), 172–3: "'Death-as-annihilation' kills Ach. once and for all ... The ode is appropriately situated between two alleged resurrections (of Achilles in Act Two and Hector in Act Three) ...'. On the conception of afterlife in Seneca's philosophy, see e.g. R. Hoven, *Stoïcisme et stoïcisme face au problème de l'au-delà* (Paris, 1971), 116–18; A. Setaioli, 'Seneca e l'oltretomba', in *Facundus Seneca. Aspetti della lingua e dell'ideologia senecana* (Bologna, 2000), 275–323; R. Scott Smith, 'Physics I: body and soul', in G. Damschen and A. Heil (edd.), *Brill's Companion to Seneca, Philosopher and Dramatist* (Leiden and Boston,

when she says that death is the same for everyone; however, she does not yet understand the full implications of this, though she will eventually. Indeed, in lines 684–5, even she⁵ understands that Hector has not been freed from Death (... *cernitis, Danai, Hectorem? | an sola uideo?*). *aequa mors est* is thus in line with *mors indiuidua est*. The echo between the two sentences adds tragic irony to Andromache's speech: since Death is implacable and the same for all, neither Achilles nor Hector can return, contrary to what Andromache believes and hopes for.

University of Basel

DIANE COOMANS
diane.coomans@unibas.ch
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2014), 343–61, at 357–60; G. Williams, 'Eschatology in Seneca. The senses of an ending', in H. Marlow, K. Pollmann and H. Van Noorden (edd.), *Eschatology in Antiquity: Forms and Functions* (London and New York, 2021), 320–32.

⁵ Within the play, not every character believes in Achilles' return. The few characters of the *Troades* who believe (or pretend to believe) that a hero can come back from the dead are all in shock from the recent events: these are Talthybius, Andromache, Hecuba and the Messenger. Pyrrhus, Agamemnon and Ulixes are more pragmatic and do not mention any apparitions. Helen is enigmatic. As for Calchas, he thinks that the death of Astyanax, which can be justified by political reasons, is more important than the ritual sacrifice of Polyxena on Achilles' tomb (365–7).