Wilfried Stroh: Seneca's *Troas*

Seneca named two of his tragedies after cities and not, as customary, after persons. These are: *Thebais* and *Troas*. In both cases the title is transmitted only by manuscripts of the A-group while the Etruscus (E) gives in each case a title which corresponds to the title of a Euripidean drama: *Phoenissae* and *Troades*. That the title *Phoenissae* is not Seneca's is evident from the *dramatis personae* in which no chorus of Phoenician slaves appears. In the case of the *Troas* the title *Troades* would not be entirely unsuitable, but since the Excerpta Thuanea, which belong to the same tradition as the Etruscus,[1] also give the title as *Troas* this has to count as the reading of the archetype and hence as the received title.[2]

  The title, "Poem on Troy", is in keeping with the contents of the drama,[3] in which the city, still burning and smoking (these fumes are ever-present in the piece: 889, 900, 1053 et seq., cf. also 392 et seq.), is addressed on the morning after the destruction almost as a *dramatis persona* (1-4, Hecuba): *Quicumque regno fidit* [...] *nec leues metuit deos* [...], *me uideat et te*, *Troia* ... The characters are outside the city[4] - thus forming another parallel with *Thebais* where the action also takes place outside Thebes, in contrast to the usual situation in tragedies where the setting is the palace facade.

  One of the main ideas of the piece is that Troy, the "title role", is not, as Hecuba believes at the beginning, already totally destroyed (14) and only awaiting burial (65); on the contrary, the truth is correctly stated by Andromacha (428): *nondum ruentis Ilii fatum stetit* (cf. 454 et seq.). The ghost-like heroes of the Trojan war continue to exert influence even beyond their graves and demand new and more dreadful victims. Achilles the Greek desires bloody marriage with Polyxena, daughter of Priam (cf. esp. 955 *adhuc Achilles uiuit*...?): this is the case in Act II, IV, V; more than anything else, fear of the Trojan Hector (esp. 529 et seqq.) moves the Greeks to cast down from the tower his little son Astyanax, the potential avenger of his father, *futurus Hector* (551): this is the case in Act III and V – two shocking murders of innocent children.[5] Not before this double deed of awful violence has been accomplished can it be claimed (1168, Hecuba): *bellum peractum est*.

It is very probable that Seneca found the combination of precisely these two plots – Polyxena and Astyanax - in none of the Greek tragedians. Polyxena appeared in Sophocles' (now lost) drama of that name and Euripides had portrayed her in the first part of *Hekabe*; the fate of Astyanax makes up about one third of the surviving *Troades* of Euripides and it was the main subject of the Roman dramatist's Accius tragedy *Astyanax* – a play known to Seneca and from which he took over one motif, the hiding-place of Astyanax.[6] However, for the concept of his drama as such he is indebted to Ovid, who in his 13th book of the *Metamorphoses* only touches on the destruction of Troy but then goes on to deal in detail with the deaths of Astyanax and, in particular, of Polyxena (408-575). In this passage of Ovid Seneca discovered

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[1] Cf. stemma in Otto Zwierlein's edition (p. xviii) and Zwierlein 1983, 15 et seqq., esp. 19.

[2] Stroh 1994, 251 note 23; in agreement with this is Harrison in: Harrison 2000, p. X and Volk 2000, 197 with note 3. The traditional view without explanation in Keulen 2001, 14.

[3] Important aids to comprehension are the two independent commentaries of Caviglia 1981 and esp. Fantham 1982; Keulen 2001 is important on account of the material and should be taken with Amoroso 1984 and Boyle 1994. *Troas* is the object of a number of studies in the otherwise uneven collection of Harrison 2000. Among older studies attention should be given to Steidle 1941, Schetter 1965, Steidle 1968, Calder III 1970, Lawall 1982, Wilson 1983, Dingel 1985, 1087-1094, Motto / Clark 1988, 215-259, Vielberg 1994, Boyle 1997, 67-84, Heil 2007; additional literature in Stok 1999 and Malaspina 2005 (accessible via index).

[4] On the importance of the stage-setting here cf. Schmidt 2001, 344 et seq., cf. also 350 et seq.

[5] Shelton 2000 comes to a slightly different conclusion with regard to Roman amphitheatre games; but cf. note 32 below.

[6] Fantham 1982, 64-66; Fantham (pp. 50-78) provides a useful review of the history of the legend and Seneca's sources.

the idea that Achilles even after his death remained the enemy of Troy (499-507[7]); here he found those thoughts which recur rondo-like throughout his tragedy (met. 13,464): that the living are more to be bewailed than the dead (Tro.142-163; 576 et seq., 945-948, 967-971; 1171-1174). Longing for death, fear of death and the vanquishing of this fear are the recurring themes of the tragedy (this, too, in contrast to the *Troades* of Euripides[8]). Two symbols of death and transitoriness, the walls of the ruined Troy and the grave of Hector, are constantly visible on stage.

Hecuba, who is to become the *mater dolorosa* of the piece, opens the prologue and Act I with a speech on the transitoriness of the happiness of rulers, which displays almost philosophical detachment – hardly a wonder, for she has foreseen the fall of Troy since the birth of Paris (28-37) and, as she remarks in a tone of self-irony, has even brought it about herself. Only when she speaks of the murder of her husband Priam (44-56) does her tone become slightly more passionate.

The Trojan women whom she now urges to lament (63 *lamenta cessant?*) must already be on stage. Either they have been there from the start or have gradually taken their positions in the course of the prologue.[9] Like her previous speech Hecuba's lament, rehearsed and presented with the chorus – an anapaestic *kommos* (*planctus*: 64, 79, 93, 130) –, is by no means a spontaneous cry of pain, but a ritual "dirge" (*lugere*: 68, 82, *luctus*: 97), as is fitting for a chorus which has had ten years' experience of suffering and lamenting (67-78; cf. 97) and in which the mood has, as it were, to be induced step by step. The beginning of the real *planctus* i.e. the ode accompanying the "beating" of the breast (106, 114, cf. 120 et seq.), the head, the arms and the shoulders (117-119) does not occur until line 117; the women make preparation for this by unbinding their hair and baring arms and breasts (87 et seqq.). Fifty anapaests are required for the *planctus* (117-141), then, at Hecuba's command, the song is changed: Priam, up till now the object of lament, should rather be considered blessed, since he has been spared the humiliation of a Greek triumphal procession (!) and may abide with Hector in Elysium (142-163). Exalted in ecstatic visions of the other world, the chorus and Hecuba move off as if a tragedy were already at its end. But it is only the beginning.

As is correctly noted in the A-tradition (before l. 164: *Taltibius chorus grecorum*), Talthybius, accompanied by a group of Greek soldiers, enters the now empty stage;[10] they will now be witnesses to the dispute between Pyrrhus and Agamemnon (337) and will naturally sing the second choral ode.[11] The whole of the second act (whose title N.B. is *not Troades*) is dominated in calculated contrast to the first act by men and and by Greeks. The view generally held until recently that the chorus of Trojan women is present as audience during the report of Talthybius and then goes on to sing the second choral ode leads to

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[7] It was precisely this passage which Seneca's father had quoted in detail and discussed (contr. 9,15,17). – On the imitation of Ovid throughout the drama cf. Jakobi 1988, 18-41, who however only notes isolated parallels.

[8] These themes, however, harmonise with the prose works of Seneca; cf. esp. Leeman 1971; relevant passages cited by Motto 1970, 59-62 (s.v. "Death"). – For the motif of death in the Troas cf. the commentary by Fantham 1982 and particularly the studies by Lawall 1982, Motto / Clark 1988, 215 et seqq. and Shelton 2000.

[9] The latter option was adopted in the Munich performance of 1993 (partial documentation in Stroh 1994, cf. Vogt et al. 1993). The results of this production with regard to stage-action have been fully incorporated into the present study. It appears that the idea of Seneca's *Troas* as a piece conceived for the stage is winning increasing acceptance. The latest objections, circumspectly raised by Fantham 2000, will probably not convince many. Cf. esp. the essays by Schmidt 2000, 2001, 2004a, 2004b and pp. **???** of the present volume. Theatrical performances of the *Troas* and other tragedies of Seneca from the year 1993 on have been registered under www.klassphil.uni-muenchen.de/~stroh/seneca_scaenicus.htm (a shortened version is available in the appendix to Stroh 1994 / 2008).

[10] It is unnecessary to assume a change of location here, provided one does not (as some commentators do) imagine the Trojan women to be held in a kind of prison camp to which the Greeks have no access. On the unity of location in the drama as a whole cf. Schmidt 2001, 345 with the reference to Vogt et al. 1993, 76 et seq.: for a different view cf. most recently Marshall 2000, Heil 2007, 1.

[11] Stroh 1994, 261; subsequently also Keulen 2001, 268 (with additional arguments) and Heil 2007, 1.

hopeless contradictions. Here, for example, is only one: Both Act III and Act IV rest on the assumption that the Trojan women know nothing about the planned executions.

At any rate, the manifestation of the ghost of the wrathful Achilles which gives the initial impulse to the plot is not actually shown on stage (though this may have been the case in the *Polyxena* of Sophocles); it is only described in the messenger speech of Talthybius. Seneca's aim was probably to leave some room for doubt about the actual truth of this fantastical (169) narrative, delivered with all the refinements of horror (168).[12] It is in keeping with this that Pyrrhus and Agamemnon, who clearly do not make their appearance until after the messenger speech, make no reference to this miracle in the course of their dispute about whether Polyxena should be sacrificed.[13] Notably Pyrrhus does not justify himself by referring to any such explicitly formulated wish of his father and mentions only the deeds of his splendid valour (209 et seqq.). What leads him to demand Polyxena at all is only hinted at (cf. 195 and 246): it may be that before l. 203 the beginning of Pyrrhus and Agamemnon's conversation (very abrupt as it now stands) has dropped out of the tradition.

Achilles' son – choleric and touchy about his honour – and Agamemnon – initially a model of statesman-like reasonableness - engage in a dispute, at first in the form of a rhetorical *agon* (203-291), then in an exchange developing in intensity into stichomythia (292-348); in no way does it follow a purely argumentative course.[14] First the rhetorically bungled demand of Pyrrhus, tactless as it is and even insulting, breaks down in the face of Agamemnon's noble principles (250-291, 293-300).[15] Pyrrhus reacts to this with an outbreak of anger which drives him to threaten violence (cf. gesture at 306!) and even regicide (306-310). Faced with this intimidation Agamemnon suddenly loses his composure and resorts to irritated irony (310-313; 318-321) and insinuations (325 et seq.). When Pyrrhus then adds to his threat of violence an almost open incitement of the present soldiers to rebellion (337 et seq.), the commander-in-chief sinks to the level of undignified denigration of his opponent, making particular reference to his illegitimate origins (342 et seq.). Pyrrhus has only now to hint a third time at violence and perhaps unsheathe his sword (348 *comminus*!) for Agamemnon to back down completely; with a boastful remark to the effect that, were it not for his desire to maintain his customary humanity (350 et seq.), he could easily teach Pyrrhus some proper respect, he delegates the whole affair to Calchas.

This means that Agamemnon, waiving his original, clear decision, has now reconciled himself inwardly to the sacrifice; indeed he actually suggests a positive decision to Calchas by spontaneously recalling the earlier sacrifice of Iphigenia at Aulis.[16] Calchas, who as a priest is, as it were, professionally committed to matters of sacrifice, sees himself encouraged to demand yet another sacrifice on the basis of some nebulous *fata*,[17] i.e. purely on the basis of

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[12] For a different view cf. esp. Dingel 1974, 92-94; according to Dingel the objective truth of this manifestation is meant to refute the rational philosophy of the second choral ode.

[13] Cf. Schmidt 2004b, 343 et seq. and Heil 2007, 2 et seq. ("the quarrel and the appearance of Achilles, as reported by Talthybius, are reactions to one and the same event [...] the allocation by lot of the Trojan women"). Agamemnon's argument that Achilles would actually be vilified in his prestige as a result of such a sacrifice (293-300) would be meaningless if Achilles himself had unambiguously demanded this show of honour.

[14] Cf. Stroh 1994, 256 et seq.; slightly different: Littlewood 2004, 91 et seq.

[15] Agamemnon here represents Seneca's own views as Anliker 1960, 65-67 rightly understands; cf. Malaspina 2004, 275 et seq. and 287 et seq. Other assessments of Agamemnon are summarised by Keulen 2001, 17.

[16] Unlike the present situation the position at Aulis was a genuine emergency since the Greeks were prevented from continuing their voyage by the calm sent by the gods. Quite implausibly some have suggested a comparable calm for Seneca's *Troas* (Schetter 1965, 234; Steidle 1968, 60; Fantham 1982, 233, 239 etc., Dingel 1985, 1088), attempting to see a reference to this in ll. 191 et seqq. and 199 et seqq.; justifiable disagreement in Schmitz 1993, 184-190.

[17] It would be at least to some extent consistent with conventional religious beliefs that an enraged deity (as for example Artemis at Aulis) should demand a human sacrifice. When Calchas attributes such a demand to *fata*, he is mixing an archaic concept of Moira with Vergil's notion of *fatum*, which may also make demands on human beings. This has nothing whatsoever to do with the stoic *fatum* (cf. Keulen 2001 on l. 352 for a different view, together with the deceptive reference to the note on l. 124).

his authority as a priest: Hector's son is to be thrown down from Priam's tower. Only after this has been accomplished can the journey home take place.

The awkward atmosphere created by this priestly death-sentence is taken up in the following choral ode by the Greek soldiers (371-408: in stichic Asclepiads), one of the most fascinating pieces of ancient contemplative poetry.[18] Is it then true, as myth (*fabula*) suggests, that after death a shadow of the human being lives on (370 et seq.) and thus draws out the misery of his existence (377)? Or is man allowed to die wholly, having drawn his final breath (378-381)? The chorus ponders the question and tends to see the solution in the second alternative. This, we will remember, is Epicure's answer – not that the chorus explicitly adopts that philosopher's argumentation, based as it is on a developed form of materialism or atomism. Seneca, avoiding anachronism, lets these Pre-presocratics operate with the generally observed law of mortality (382-390)[19]: Just as everything in the world comes to an end, so the soul together with the body will cease to exist (401 et seq.). After death is just the same as before birth (407 et seq.).

This ode, in which Seneca very clearly pays tribute to the Greeks as the inventors of philosophy (though the view expressed is not necessarily quite his own),[20] cannot be understood as a reaction to the alleged apparition of Achilles nor, indeed, is any reference made to the previously announced fate of the young victims-to-be.[21] But it is nonetheless very closely linked to the main theme of the drama – the fear of death and the vanquishing of this fear. Fear of death as fear of the after-life can with the help of simple reflections be overcome – even by the ordinary man.

It is fear which drives Agamemnon to yield to Pyrrhus; fear is spread by the priest's pronouncement (592); it is fear from which the chorus in the second ode attempts to free itself; in short, fear (*timor, metus*) – from the first report of Talthybius in the second act to Ulixes' terror-trick in the third (164-704), i.e. over a stretch longer than half of the drama – fear is the all-pervading emotion. Andromacha, Hector's widow, who now makes her appearance in the third act (and will presumably remain on stage until the end of the piece), presents a sharp contrast to her loudly wailing attendants (409-411); she remains quite unfeeling except for the one remaining surge of fear (423, 425, 426, 431 etc.) which is roused in her on account of her little son Astyanax whom she has brought with her. In close correspondence with the doctrine of Stoic psychology, this fear is nourished by the hope with which it is linked (462 *spes*):[22] Andromacha, a hero's widow and a hero's mother par excellence, sees in the little Astyanax at her side both the image of her own Hector (464-468), who is still of greater importance to her than her son (459!), and at the same time the future avenger of Troy, to which great end she is presently training him (470-474). Thus at the dream appearance of her husband (438-460), who entreats her to save their son, she is overcome by panic-stricken fear (457 et seq.). The very presence of Hector's tomb on the

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[18] Even Hamlet's famous soliloquy may have been inspired by this passage (Miola 1992, 38 et seq.).

[19] For this reason alone it can hardly be correct when Fantham 1982, 85 (cf. 262 et seq. and Fantham 2000, 18; similarly Littlewood 2004, 94 et seq.) believes that in this choral ode the philosopher Seneca is speaking in his own voice, free of any close reference to the plot. – On the relationship of the ode to Seneca's prose works: Marino 1996.

[20] Cf. the literature listed in note 8 above.

[21] Interpretations in this direction are presented by Keulen 2001, 268-270; cf. also Dingel 1974 (as above in note 12). An easy connection with the preceding situation would be Lucretius' comment after his indignant description of the sacrifice of Iphigenia: It is fear concerning the soul's fate after death which causes humans to become the victims of religion and its representatives; if people *knew* that death puts a definite end to their woes *aliqua ratione ualerent / religionibus atque minis obsistere uatum* (1, 108 et seq.). This, however is not formulated by Seneca. – Incidentally, with regard to his description of the Calchas scene, I have no doubt that Seneca, who wrote *De superstitione* in the spirit of enlightenment, felt much the same as Lucretius: *tantum religio potuit suadere malorum* (1, 101).

[22] Sen. epist. 5,7-9 (following the Stoic Hekaton): similar thoughts in Horace in the Stoic epistles 1,6, 9-11 and 1,16, 65.

stage where she plans to conceal Astyanax – so far quite in possession of her wits (484) – fills her with ominous dread (487 et seq.); this is now transmitted to her little son (503 et seq.), a phenomenon which she grotesquely misinterprets as a clear sign of heroic descent (504 et seq.),[23] for young heroes, after all, must be free of fear.

Even Ulixes, Andromacha's opponent, - perhaps in part a self-portrait of the statesman Seneca who was himself hemmed in by so many constraints[24] – is not without fear. When he enters hesitantly (522 et seq.), it is not because he is hatching some plots (523), but because he is suffering from the ambivalence of his own feelings. On the one hand, his allotted task of taking a child from its mother is painful to him (cf. esp. 736); on the other hand, fear concerning the future of Greece (529 et seqq., cf. 737 et seqq.) and of his own son (593) press him to carry out the unavoidable instruction: should the son of Hector remain alive, the Greeks would never be able to feel safe. (The authority of the priest, however, leaves Ulixes fairly cold: 532 et seq., 592 et seq.). Seneca has made it unmistakably clear that this fear is objectively justified: given the opportunity, Andromacha would train her son to be the avenger of Troy; he would then be destined one day to drag Pyrrhus, Achilles' son, and so win posthumous satisfaction for his father (774).

The central section of the third act in which Andromacha and Ulixes confront one another has long been considered a masterpiece of dramatic art.[25] In a reversal of role expectations the "wily" Ulixes openly states his intentions and reasons (524-555), while Andromacha tries to be cunning: Oh, if she only knew where her son was! Her exaggerated grief over the son who has died at an unknown spot (556-567) and the superfluous heroic pathos with which she claims as *animosa mater* to be ready to undergo any type of torture (582-588) indicate clearly to Ulixes that this woman is simulating (568-570, cf. 589 et seqq.). After a pause, however, her second improvised version, according to which Astyanax perished at the fall of Troy and is now "lying among the dead" (603), does finally (accompanied by an oath) make some impression. Ulixes is already preparing to carry the good news to his countrymen (605 et seq.) when, pausing[26] and giving the matter calm consideration, he realises in a monologue (607-618) that Andromacha, whom he has been observing closely, may well be deceiving him even now. Her fear, which in her gestures she cannot keep concealed (616 et seq.), becomes her downfall (618): *magis haec timet quam maeret*.

Now Ulixes becomes "the genuine Ulixes" (614), the man of cunning whom we have long been waiting for; above all, the master of highly refined psycho-terror. First he shocks Andromacha by describing to her in a hypocritical show of congratulation the manner of death planned for Astyanax (619-622); her reaction is to fall down in a faint, again revealing her maternal fear (623-625); to increase her fear but, more importantly, to win some clue from Andromacha's reaction as to Astyanax' hiding-place he immediately feigns a search and sends his soldiers off to this purpose (627-631). Finally he has a brainwave: if Astyanax is really

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[23] On the disturbed communication between mother and child cf. Stroh 1994, 258 et seq.

[24] I refer here to his reaction to the murders of Britannicus and Agrippina, the one alleged, the other undeniable. Föllinger 2005 gives the different view that in the person of Ulixes Seneca wanted to demonstrate "the moral worthlessness of tyranny" (p. 113); but consider just lines 762-765. Ulixes is always as humane as his mission allows.

[25] As early as 1874 Klein (generally contemptuous of Seneca) proclaims this act to be "in its pathos one of the most powerful, in its dramatic quality one of the most magnificent pieces in the heritage of classical tragedy as a whole" (p. 386), ranking it even higher than similar passages in Shakespeare. In dramatic power comparable, and similar in respect to the character of the "revelation scene" are the central scene of *Phaedra* (Phaedra – Hippolytus) and the final act of *Thyestes*.

[26] Useful comments on the stage-action of this scene in Schmidt 2000, 401-403, 421-423.

and truly dead, then Calchas' orders are that the tomb of Hector must be destroyed (634-641).[27]

HIS tomb! Andromacha, a prey now to a double fear – for Astyanax *and* for Hector – delivers a grotesque monologue of decision (642-662). Although, naturally, the desecration of Hector's tomb must bring with it the discovery and death of Astyanax, she still thinks she is in a position to decide between son and husband; finally she decides for Astyanax – not on the basis of a mother's love but from a need for revenge (662): *serua e duobus, anime, quem Danai timent*.

But Andromacha, the victim of her emotions, cannot uphold even this illusory decision. When Ulixes now really looks like going to attack the tomb (663 et seqq.), she is suddenly once more obsessed by the idea (673-676) she must defend Hector and announces that she intends using force to protect the tomb (671-677). With a cry recalling Leonore's "Kill first his wife!" – *me me sternite hic ferro prius* (680) -, Andromacha throws herself in the path of the approaching soldiers – but in vain: *repellor, heu me* (681). All that remains to her, powerless as she is, is the wild hope, fast becoming a hallucination, that the dead Hector will protect his tomb himself (681-685). Only the actual attack on the tomb brings her back to her senses. All at once she realises that Astyanax' fate is sealed, even if she abandons Hector (686-691).

Immediately she is once more the skillful tactician who in an instant changes her plan and throws herself at the knees of Ulixes (691), even grovelling at his feet (692 et seq.); invoking the most humane principles (694-697), she entreats him twice to have mercy: *miserere matris* (694 and 703) – with an additional comment at the end which both reveals and conceals her true emotions (703 et seq.): *unicum adflictae mihi / solamen hic est*. Understandably Ulixes permits himself no emotional reaction to this Andromacha: *exhibe natum et roga* (704). First the son ...

When Andromacha sings in anapaests (705-735) to bring Astyanax from the burial mound she gives us a final sample of her theatrical art: she kneels down, showing Astyanax how to stretch out his arms and beg Ulixes to have pity (708 et seqq.); but at the same time she transforms him into a living picture of the child-Priam who once long ago was also supposed to have knelt before Hercules (718 et seqq.). The effect of her performance is not lost on Ulixes who almost apologises for the heartlessness to which the raison d'état compels him (736-738). However, when Andromacha, full of pathos, tries to demonstrate the absolute harmlessness of her quite innocent little child, he has no more time or patience to repeat his earlier considerations (536 et seqq.), but, recalling the command of Calchas (749), breaks off the discussion sharply.

This is a turning-point;[28] Andromacha, seeing only now that she has no chance any longer, abandons the pretence she has been keeping up since l. 556 and gives her emotions free rein: first to her anger at Ulixes before whom she has had to humiliate herself so long (750-756); then come the *dolores* (762), the *lacrimae* and the *fletus* (765, cf. 785 et seq.), for Ulixes, always as humane as possible within his time limits, allows her to make her final farewell. Here in our economically structured tragedy genuine tears flow for the first time – those mentioned in the kommos (67, 116, 131, 142) were of a ritual nature - , here for the first time unfeigned, spontaneous pain and grief find their expression as Andromacha now weeps for her son and the loss of all the hopes placed in him (766 et seqq.). Yet, as a genuine hero's mother and in spite of her deepest sorrow, she succeeds in deriving from the execution of her son a little comfort for her pride (789 et seq.): ... *occidis paruus quidem, / sed iam timendus* ...; and again, almost ecstatically, she sends him away to Troy's hall of heroes beyond the

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[27] On the basis of Seneca's text it is not possible to be certain if Ulixes pretends this intention because he already knows from Andromacha's darting looks (631 *quid respicis*...?) that Astyanax is hidden in Hector's tomb, or if he only wants to shock her with this plan of desecrating the tomb. The former possibility is the more probable.

[28] It corresponds exactly to the turning-point in Sen. Med. at l. 530.

grave (791): ... *i, uade liber, liberos Troas uide*. One can understand why the boy cries (his only words): *miserere mater*! (792). This mother is pitiless.

The last part of the act shows again Andromacha exclusively as a hero's widow. Now that Astyanax has lost his function as bearer of hope he is transformed into a messenger of love: it is his task to carry not just the torn-out hair, the kisses and the tears but also her final message (802-806): "Return like Achilles!" (a provocation calculated to make Hector react). While Ulixes then has the child dragged away she buries her face in a piece of clothing she has taken from Astyanax; her intention is not to caress this, a souvenir of her maternal love, but to examine it for possible remains of Hector's ashes (809-812)! Probably she remains on stage in this striking attitude until the next act.

The Trojan women now reappear on stage and in a short choral ode we see women who in sharp contrast to Andromacha have already come to terms with their fate and are preparing themselves mentally for their future in Greek captivity (814-860). The pleasant, rather superficial ode is written in charming Sapphics and its main purpose is to allow the viewers to recover a little after the onslaught of the most contradictory passions in the previous act.[29]

The fourth act matches the third in pathos. In content, too, it forms almost an exact parallel to the third. There the task was to trace Astyanax, the first victim for sacrifice; here Polyxena must be induced to agree to a pretended marriage with Pyrrhus, which is in reality a bloody union with Achilles: at the end of both acts we see the victims dragged off (813 *abripite*, 1003 *abreptam*). Here intrigue is employed immediately. The task is given to Helena, who after ten years at Troy must now against her will collaborate once more with the Greeks; she describes to Polyxena all the pleasant aspects of such a splendid match (871-882) – and without delay a row of maidservants are on the spot to dress up the girl appropriately for her wedding (883-887). In a dumb show[30] Polyxena rejects the offered wedding-dress and is supported in this by her cousin Andromacha who attacks Helena as the real cause of the world conflict (888-902). At first Helena tries to defend herself, indicating her own suffering (903-923), but finally, overcome by her own pain and the pain of the other side, she can restrain her tears no longer (925-927) and confesses the truth: No wedding is planned, Polyxena's blood must be shed ... (938-944). Wonder of wonders! Now, all of a sudden, Polyxena accepts the wedding-dress (945-948). Death is open to her and death is her choice. While she joyfully prepares for the wedding with all the servants running excitedly to and fro, Hecuba falls to the ground, only now overcome by her suffering and bursting into uncontrollable weeping (949 et seqq.). This contrast between mother and daughter gives emblematical emphasis to one of the main ideas of the play: being obliged to live may be a much harder thing than having the choice of death.

Once more the end of the act is turbulent. Pyrrhus appears in wordless pantomime – his "bride", too, speaks never a word - ; Hecuba throws herself in his path crying "Kill me!" (1000-1003). While he brutally drags off Polyxena (who would just as willingly follow him joyfully), her mother summons all her strength to hurl a curse of revenge on the Greek fleet with which she herself must soon depart (1005-1008), and that, worst of all, as the booty of Ulixes. How far distant is this desperate woman from the philosophic figure of the first act! After Andromacha and Helena she is now the third to shed uncontrollable tears. Thus in the bond of weeping, in the shared desire for death[31] we see the common feelings of these three very different women : the *mater dolorosa*, the hero's widow, the noble *femme fatale*.

As after the third act there follows here a rather more frivolous choral ode in gently touching mood set in Sapphics (1009-1055): *Dulce maerenti populus dolentum*, "Grief shared

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[29] For this function of choral odes cf. Stroh 1994, 261-263.

[30] On the stage-action of this scene cf. Stroh 1994, 259 et seq.; in agreement with this Schmidt 2001, 350.

[31] 963 et seq., 1169-1177: Hecuba; 418 (cf. 968, 969): Andromacha; 925-927: Helena. Steidle 1941, 227 (cf. 229) was right to recognize in the "increase of suffering" a structural principle of the piece.

is grief halved" – but not because it does one good to weep away one's sorrows on the shoulder of a friend but because it helps to know that other people enjoy no better a lot than oneself (1023). After this rather heartless reflection the thought moves associatively to that moment in the future when all must finally leave Troy, when the smoke of Troy will be nothing but a faint spiral on the horizon ... Once more Seneca here is not trying to penetrate deeper into the emotions which have been aroused; rather he wishes to create a contrast to these.

The fifth act deals in a two-part messenger speech with the noble, fearless deaths of Astyanax and Polyxena (1064 *uterque letum mente generosa tulit*); it is the only act which relies on the spoken word alone. Though the pictures are undeniably powerful in which Seneca via the messenger[32] describes not only the behaviour of the two youthful victims but also the behaviour of the audience at the execution - almost theatre within the theatre (1125 *theatri more*) -, nothing of what is said is actually presented visually. This is quite surprising when one considers that Seneca at the end of *Phaedra* does not hesitate to have the corpse of Hippolytus brought on stage piece by piece (and in other places, too, shows no disinclination towards horror scenes, particularly at the end of his plays). Here he has decided *not* to imitate Euripides (*Troades* 1123 et seqq.), who had the dead Astyanax brought in on Hector's shield so that he might be mourned. Seneca clearly did not wish to have the end of his play marked by the desperate mourning for the dead – almost unavoidable if the corpses had been actually produced – but by the exemplary courage with which his figures met their deaths: Astyanax, proud as a young lion, offers resistance to his execution (1092-1098) and anticipates it by a voluntary leap (1102 et seq.); Polyxena on Achilles' funeral mound courageously faces the thrust of Pyrrhus' sword (1151 et seq.) and even in the throes of death tries to make the earth heavy for her dead "bridegroom" (1158 et seq.) – a patriot almost beyond the last breath of life.

This, the final act, is also brought to a conclusion by Hecuba, symbol of the now utterly wasted Troy. This time her words are no curse but a moving prayer to *Mors*, the silent heroine of the drama. Why, she asks, does she come only to children and not to her, the woman bent with years? (1171-1177): a dry summons calls all the women to the ships: "Departure!" (1178 et seq.).

With good reason Joseph Justus Scaliger described our tragedy as "the first of all Seneca's" (*omnium Senecae [...] princeps*);[33] Daniel Heinsius placed it far above the *Hekabe* of Euripides,[34] and Martin Opitz, who also considered it "the finest among the Roman tragedies",[35] translated it into German – probably the first German translation of any ancient tragedy (1625). Any monotony is only on the surface; certainly the three central acts are full of the most exciting, carefully motivated action; the third act, the first "police interrogation" of world literature, is in its structure perfectly unique, recalling something finely calculated at a drawing boad. The art of characterisation to be found in the six main figures, male and female, will stand comparison with anything in Sophocles or Ibsen.

Above all Seneca has succeeded in turning one theme of his reflections, the *meditatio mortis* as precondition of the successful life, into the subject of a drama. Two children, Astyanax and Polyxena, accomplish what many adults, including an Agamemnon, fail to achieve: mastery of the fear of death. This does not necessarily mean that our tragedy is the bearer of a specifically Stoic message, often hastily ascribed to Seneca. The two young heroes are in fact *too* young to be genuine Stoical sages; and, strictly speaking, their patriotic fury

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[32] Since at the end the messenger summons the women to the ships (1178 et seq.), he must be a Greek (as, for example Fantham 1982, p. 366 believes); it is all the more noteworthy that he, under the influence of the events, brands the action of the Greeks as *scelus* (1057, 1129) and *nefas* (1119).

[33] Letter to Salmasius 20.11.1607; quoted from Friedrich G. Welcker, *Die griechischen Tragödien mit Rücksicht auf den epischen Cyclus*, Suppl. II.3, Bonn 1841, 1453, note 53.

[34] In *L.& M. Senecae [...] Tragoedias animadversiones et notae*, ²1620; quoted in Vogt et al. 1993, 105

[35] *Gesammelte Werke*, Vol. 2, Stuttgart 1978, 431: "die schönste vnter den Römischen Tragödien"

must in the end disqualify them from such a role. Nevertheless, as *argumentum a minori* they are witnesses to the fact that life is not the very greatest of all possessions.

The philosopher Seneca knew of two alternatives concerning death (corresponding approximately to Socrates' opinion in Plato's "Apology" and to Cicero's in his fist book of the "Tusculan Disputations"): death is either total nothingness – and therefore not to be feared – or there is perhaps a happy continuation of life for the soul freed from the body.[36] Seneca' s drama leaves the question open. The first choral ode, sung by the women of Troy, enthuses irrationally about blessed Elysium; in the second the Greek men wrestle with the problem in argument and come to the conclusion that they can welcome death as a nothingness. As a contrast to these earnest odes which take away death's sting and to the increasing pathos of the last three acts we have the two choral odes which separate them. Here we listen to the song of women who have almost shaken off the horrors of war and who are calmly and a little sentimentally trying to accustom themselves to the idea of the next stage of life in a new homeland. Thus in some of his choruses Seneca is not above giving expression to ordinary people's[37] philosophy of life.

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[36] epist. 24, 18: *mors nos aut consumit aut exuit*. More in Fantham 1982, 78-92 ("Death and the Dead in Seneca's 'Troades'"), a chapter well worth reading. Cf. note 8 above.

[37] A certain banality for the themes of the choral odes is even prescribed by Horace, ars 197-201. In other respects as well Seneca seems to me to have fulfilled all the demands made of tragedy by Horace.

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