

of elegiac couplet form would immediately signal an amatory context.<sup>19</sup> However, the shock absence of the upright hexameter draws attention to the isolated and deflated pentameters: another signpost to the poem's underlying meaning.<sup>20</sup>

These erotic connections offer one plausible answer to the enigma of these verses. This does not mean that they are the only way to read the poem: given its allusive, figurative nature there may be some deliberate ambiguity here, inviting the reader to offer different guesses about the poem's subject. Yet on the reading presented here, the connections between form and content, and between this graffito and the literary world, are stronger and more meaningful than has been previously suggested. If we accept this interpretation as at least possible, these pentameter verses contribute not only another penis to Pompeii's teeming landscape but also further evidence for the literary sophistication of the reading and writing culture of Pompeii's graffiti.

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### *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

<sup>19</sup> For the association of elegiac couplets and love, see T.S. Thorsen, 'Introduction', in T.S. Thorsen (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Love Elegy* (Cambridge, 2013), 1–20.

<sup>20</sup> For a striking parallel case of an isolated line of pentameter in a graffito from an imperial villa at Boscotrecase, see Cugusi (n. 2), 25 and Morgan (n. 2), 363, who likewise argues that the 'pregnant' absence of the hexameter signals the verse's theme (in this case, a transgressive political commentary). Kruschwitz (n. 2) offers several examples of the meaningfulness and markedness of the pentameter in inscriptions.

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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.’<sup>1</sup> The philosophical topos, that death is the same for everyone, has been well commented upon,<sup>2</sup> 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’,<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> Andromache is thus right 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 she<sup>5</sup> 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.

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<sup>1</sup> Transl. E. Fantham, *Seneca’s Troades. A Literary Introduction with Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Princeton, 1982), 154.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> 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, 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.

<sup>5</sup> 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 Talthylus, 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).