

# NOTES ON SENECA, *AGAMEMNON*

W. S. WATT

**T**arrant = Seneca, *Agamemnon*, edited with a commentary by R. J. Tarrant (Cambridge 1976).

1. *hunc fraude nunc conaris et furto aggredi,  
quem non Achilles ense violavit fero,  
quamvis procacem torvus armasset manum,  
non melior Ajax morte decreta furens,  
non sola Danaïs Hector et bello mora, etc.* 207–211

The nurse addressing Clytaemestra; *hunc* is Agamemnon.

The traditional view is that *melior* (presumably “the better warrior”) is intended to distinguish Ajax son of Telamon from Ajax son of Oileus. This view is rejected by Tarrant on the ground that Ajax was no longer mad when he decided to kill himself: a somewhat pedantic objection. Tarrant himself translates “Ajax who was a better man once he had decided to die;” it is not clear how *furens* fits into this translation, nor indeed in what sense Ajax was a “better” man after his decision.

I believe that the traditional view is right in essentials but that *melior* should be emended to *maior*. μέγας is a standing epithet of the son of Telamon in the *Iliad* (so *magnus* and *maximus* in *Il. Lat.* 588 and 780); by contrast the son of Oileus is μείων, οὐ τι τόσος γε ὅσος Τελαμώνιος Αἴας, / ἀλλὰ πολὺ μείων (*Il.* 2.528 f.). For the corruption compare Cicero *Fam.* 15.21.4, where Ernesti’s conjecture *maioribus* (*laudibus*) has been adopted in the three most recent editions in place of the manuscript reading *melioribus*.

2. *vos, umbrae, precor, . . .  
reserate paulum terga nigrantis poli,  
levis ut Mycenae turba prospiciat Phrygum.* 754–756

Cassandra asks the shades to “draw back the covering which conceals the dark pole” (Tarrant), in order that the dead Trojans may have the satisfaction of seeing Agamemnon murdered by his wife.

It is difficult to believe that *terga* is sound; it is not really supported by passages in which “*tergum* denotes the topmost layer of a homogeneous substance” (Tarrant). What is wanted is a word meaning “a covering placed over a hollow space” (Tarrant), and the Latin for that is *tecta* (“roof;” “poetic” plural, as at *Med.* 973). This, I suggest, is palaeographically much better than Damsté’s *regna* and Bentley’s *claustra*.

ABERDEEN, SCOTLAND