

## SENECA, HERCULES OETAeus 1697-98

In the following passage (1696-1704) Philoctetes records the final words of Hercules just before the pyre is lit:

quacumque parte prospicis natum, pater,  
te te, pater, quem nocte commissa dies  
quaesivit unus, si meas laudes canit  
utrumque Phoebi litus et Scythiae genus  
et omnis ardens ora quam torret dies,  
si pace tellus plena, si nullae gemunt  
urbes nec aras impias quisquam inquinat,  
si scelera desunt, spiritum admitte hunc, precor,  
in astra.

At the beginning of 1697 E reads *te te, A iste est*. The latter, designated as "plain interpolation" by Housman<sup>1</sup>), was adopted by Leo who in addition emended *quem ... quaesivit* to *cui ... quievit*. Richter followed Leo's emendation, but retained *te te* and altered *pater* to *precor*. Miller in the Loeb edition prints Leo's text and Herrmann in the Budé edition prints Richter's. Giardina reads *iste est, pater ... † quaesivit*, suggesting in his apparatus that *quaesivit* was repeated from the beginning of 1694 (*quaesivit oculis*) and has replaced a verb such as *produxit*. Most recently Axelson<sup>2</sup>) has defended Richter's text, arguing that *pater* is dittography after *pater* at the end of 1696 and noting the parallel passages with *cui* in 1863-66, *magnique Iovis | plangite natum, cui concepto | lux una perit noctesque duas | contulit Eos*, and *Agam.* 814-16, *magnus Alcides, cui lege mundi | Iuppiter rupta geminavit horas | roscidae noctis*. Only the Italian editors, Moricca and Viansino, retain the text as recorded in E. Although Axelson has rightly emphasized that scholars have placed too much faith in E and too little in A, E is nevertheless more trustworthy and its readings should not be rejected without sound reason, especially when, as here, "correction" of the text involves three emendations.

Two objections have been raised to E's reading, the first being that *te te* is "ungrammatical"<sup>3</sup>). That this criticism is unfounded is shown by Vergil, *Aen.* 4.314-19:

mene fugis? per ego has lacrimas dextramque tuam te

1) A. E. Housman, "Notes on Seneca's Tragedies," *CQ* 17 (1923) 171.

2) B. Axelson, *Korruptelenkult. Studien zur Textkritik der unechten Seneca-Tragödie Hercules Oetaeus* (Lund 1967) 40f.

3) Housman, *op. cit.* His emendation *Titana per is*, as I hope to show, unnecessary.

(quando aliud mihi iam miserae nihil ipsa reliqui),  
 per conubia nostra, per inceptos hymenaeos,  
 si bene quid de te merui, fuit aut tibi quicquam  
 dulce meum, miserere domus labentis et istam,  
 oro, si quis adhuc precibus locus, exue mentem.

Both passages have the accusative *te*, then conditional clauses, an imperative, and a verb of entreaty<sup>4</sup>). The repetition and emphatic position of *te te* is typically Senecan<sup>5</sup>). The presence of *pater* in 1696 and 1697 may seem unpleasant to our ears, but Seneca was not averse to such repetitions, nor were ancient poets in general. Furthermore, if Axelson is right in maintaining that the *Hercules Oetaeus* should not be ascribed to Seneca and that its author was here influenced by *Phaedra* 661–64, *si cum parente Creticum intrasses fretum, | tibi fila potius nostra nevisset soror. | te te, soror, quacumque siderei poli | in parte fulges, invoco ad causam parem*, it may well be that the repetition of *soror* suggested to the poet the repetition of *pater*.

The second objection is the meaning of *quem ... unus*. The expression *nocte commissa dies unus*, although somewhat unusual, must in the context of Hercules' conception refer to the double night<sup>6</sup>). It denotes either a period of daylight and darkness to which a further period of darkness has been added (*commissa*) or more probably simply a period of darkness which instead of being followed by daylight is followed by an additional period of darkness. In either case *nox* has been added to *nox*, and it is this double night, with or without a period of daylight, which is denoted by *nocte commissa dies unus*. Housman's argument that "the object of *quaesivit* cannot be *quem*, i.e. Iovem, for then the subject must be *caelum* or the like" is surely wrong. The subject is *dies unus* and this single day "looked in vain" (*quaesivit*) for Jupiter because he was hidden from the day's view by the night which had been added. There is of course a certain illogicality in saying that "day looked for Jupiter", since if night were joined to night there would be no day, but poetry is not always strictly logical.

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4) Cf. also *Aen.* 12. 56–60.

5) Axelson (pp. 16f.) compares *HF* 900, *Phaedra* 663, 888, *Oed.* 1042. He also defends A's *te te precor* in *HO* 541 against E's *te deprecor*.

6) Cf. Ovid, *Amores* 1.13.45f., *ipse deum genitor, ne te tam saepe videret, | commisit noctes in sua vota duas*.