



Reflections on the Justice and Ethics of War in Act II of Seneca's *Troades*¹

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In contrast to his established persona in the previous literature, in Seneca's *Troades* Agamemnon embodies traits of a wise person who has learned from his past. In his fierce debate with Pyrrhus in the second scene of Act II, he argues against the sacrifice of Polyxena to the dead Achilles and supports a merciful treatment of the defeated Trojans. His thoughts could be read in parallel with texts exploring the concept of a leader who possesses *clementia* (cf. Seneca's *De clementia*), recall Vergil's *parcere subiectis et debellare superbos* (*Aen.* 6.853) and engage in relevant discussions on the justice and ethics of war such as those in Cicero's *De officiis*. Thus, in his arguments it is possible to reconstruct aspects of a just war theory that focuses on the *ius post bellum*. The decision of the gods, who do not espouse Agamemnon's suggestion, could be interpreted according to Seneca's broader poetic and philosophical beliefs regarding the liberating choice of death, and not as a condemnation of the view that the defeated should be treated leniently.

Keywords: Seneca, *Troades*, Agamemnon, *ius post bellum*, *clementia*, Cicero.

Introduction

The intense conflicts (both external and internal) that marked the historic path of the Roman Empire's creation and evolution naturally

¹ I am grateful to LAS's anonymous referees, as well as to Adalberto Magnavacca and George Pliotis for their helpful comments on previous versions of this article.

led to the exploration of various possibilities for conflict resolution, reconciliation² or vanquishment of the opponents, and, by extension, to a just war theory that included a multifaceted approach regarding the justice and ethics of war in all its stages focusing on its purpose, action and results (*ius ad bellum, ius in bello, ius post bellum*).³ In Roman thought aspects of the relevant theoretical discourse are found in numerous literary texts that are not exclusively philosophical in nature, a fact that demonstrates the great interest of the Roman people in the concepts of the justice and ethics of war, concepts frequently included in the famous logic of *pax Romana* and often associated, among others, with the notions of *clementia, venia, misericordia* and *ignoscere*.

In this article I shall focus on Seneca's tragedy *Troades* aiming to show how in an episode of intense verbal disagreement, such as that between Agamemnon and Pyrrhus regarding Polyxena's sacrifice (203-352), it is possible to identify traces of the ethics-of-war rhetoric in the Greek commander's words, who suggests mercy for his defeated opponents. In contrast to his established characterization in the previous literature,⁴ now the commander of the Greeks at Troy is presented

² Reconciliation, as has been argued, is not always depicted in literature as 'an unambiguous, unproblematic moral good', since even in the most intimate spheres, 'reconciliation is bound up with questions of hierarchy and power relations' to a significant extent; in other words, 'the ways in which we reconcile often serve to confirm and perpetuate dominant power relations and hierarchies – between generations, genders, classes and races'; see van Dijkhuizen (2018) 1-2 and the publishing house's blog (<https://bloomsburyliterarystudiesblog.com/2018/11/a-literary-history-of-reconciliation.html>, last accessed 17/6/2025); see further Moloney/Williams (2017).

³ On the just war theory of the Romans, see e.g. Albert (1980); Clavadetscher-Thürlemann (1985); Mantovani (1990); Loreto (2001); Zack (2001); chapters in Bellamy (2006) or Brunstetter/O'Driscoll (2018); Vassiliades (2023) with further bibliography (18 n. 3). Grotius' famous treatise *De iure belli ac pacis*, an influential early modern work, first published in Paris in 1625, in many cases reflects Roman views; Neff (2012). For the evolution of the just war theory and the modern debates on it, see, for instance, Hall (2020); Frowe (2023).

⁴ Petrone (1995) 110-111; Schiesaro (2003) 191-192; Casamento (2021) xxxi-xxxii, 93-94. Even in the homonymous Seneca's play – and albeit his limited presence here (*Ag. 782-807*) – Agamemnon appears as a boastful triumphant victor (cf. esp. *Ag. 782-785: Tandem revertor sospes ad patrios lares. / o cara salve terra! tibi tot barbarae / dedere gentes spolia, tibi felix diu / potentis Asiae domina summisit manus*, 'At long last I return in safety to my father's house gods. Greetings, my dear land! To you so many barbarian peoples have yielded spoils, to you the long-thriving mistress of powerful Asia has surrendered'; 799: *Victor timere quid potest?*, 'What can a conqueror fear?'). However, aspects of his humanitarian approach are discernible in this tragedy too, when he cares about Cassandra's health and safety, although his stance towards the Trojan princess could also be attributed to his possible love for her (cf. Clytemnestra's words

as a wise person⁵ and a dutiful and responsible commander who has learned from the past and focuses on the future. This depiction of the Greek commander and his views will be discussed in conjunction with Seneca's philosophical prose writings (especially *De clementia*) as well as with other relevant Latin texts, such as the *Aeneid* and the famous *parcere subiectis et debellare superbos* (*Aen.* 6.853) or Cicero's philosophical treatises (especially his *De officiis*, and to a lesser extent his *De re publica* and *De legibus*). As we shall see, Seneca's play engages in discussions on the justice and ethics of war, and aspects of a just war theory that focuses on the *ius post bellum* can be revealed in many passages. Finally, a special emphasis will be put on the various implications of the gods' decision that Polyxena must be sacrificed, which seems to undermine the validity of Agamemnon's argumentation. In my view, the defeat of the Greek commander's appeal for clemency should be interpreted in the broader context of the triumph of *nefas* and death that prevails in Seneca's tragedy and not be regarded as a flawed argumentation.

Agamemnon in Seneca's *Troades*

Act II of Seneca's *Troades* starts with the *nuntius* Talthybius, who describes the apparition of the ghost of Achilles and the latter's demand that Polyxena be sacrificed to him at his tomb as his bride. Later on, while Achilles' son Pyrrhus⁶ asks that this demand be satisfied, Agamemnon

at *Ag.* 175: *amore captae captus*, 'Captured by love for a captive'. For a comparison of the characterization of Agamemnon in Seneca's *Troades* and *Agamemnon*, see e.g. Giancotti (1953) 113-116; Fantham (1981-1982) esp. 119-125.

- ⁵ For an excellent discussion of the depiction of Agamemnon in Seneca's *Troades* as a model of *sapientia*, see Casamento (2022); additionally, see Anliker (1960) 65-67, who believes that in this play Agamemnon echoes Seneca's own thoughts, a view also suggested by Fantham (1982) 241, 252 and Stroh (2014) 437-439. On Agamemnon's literary portrayal in the play, see also Steidle (1941) 279-280; Giancotti (1953) 109-112; Mazzoli (1961) 54-56; Owen (1970) esp. 130-132; Schetter (1965) 400-407; Steidle (1968) 61-62; Seidensticker (1969) 163-179; Lefèvre (1973) esp. 68-70, 85; Dingel (1974) 92-93; Heldmann (1974) 181-182; Caviglia (1981) 34-43; Fantham (1981-1982) *passim*; Amoroso (1983) 87-92; Amoroso (1984) 119-142, esp. 129-130; Ahl (1986) 38; Petrone (1995) 109-112; Stok (1999) 17-20; Raby (2000) 184-185; Shelton (2000) 103-104; Stroh (2008) 204-207; Matias (2009) 91-95; Mazzoli (2010) 352-354; Flamerie de Lachapelle (2011)b 172-178 and 181 with further bibliography (174 n. 19); Balula (2015); 304-306; Shelton (2016) 203-207; Guastella (2017) esp. 113-120; Balula (2018) 72-73; Casamento (2021) xxvii-xxxiv. For a brief review of the depiction of Agamemnon in the previous literature, see also Boyle (1994) 158; Keulen (2001) 17-18.
- ⁶ For the depiction of Pyrrhus as inheritor of Achilles' qualities in the *Troades*, see Wilson (1983) 34-38; Colakis (1984-1985) 150-151; more recently Casamento (2017)

disagrees, enters a quarrel with him and argues for mercy for the defeated Trojans. Scholars have already noted that the second scene of Act II, where Pyrrhus and Agamemnon argue about Achilles' demand, is modelled on 'the "Passion-Restraint" pattern (Herington), which is characteristic of Senecan tragedy in general, and of Act II in particular: one character is filled with passionate emotion, while the other tries to exercise a restraining influence.'⁷ Moreover, the influence both of the ἀγών-scheme of the Greek tragedians and of the *suasoria* tradition of the Roman rhetorical schools has been convincingly suggested, various sources for the scene have been mentioned – as is reasonable, among them the first book of Homer's *Iliad* dominates – and many associations have been underlined (e.g. 'the quarrel between Pyrrhus' father and Agamemnon (likewise about a girl, a gift of honour for Achilles), and the offering of Agamemnon's daughter').⁸ However, the aspects of the just war rhetoric that pervades the entire episode have received little attention.

The case of Agamemnon's persona is of great interest here. Although, like his interlocutor, he does not refrain from harsh personal attacks that undermine the likelihood of a reconciliation with Pyrrhus and this occurs only after divine will is revealed and not as a result of a compromise,⁹ the positions he defends are driven by the need for clemency and mercy regarding the treatment of his opponents. Thus, we observe a case of irony,¹⁰ a figure not unusual in Seneca's tragedies, in the portrait of a character exhibiting ad hoc behaviour, choosing, at times, direct and relentless confrontation, while, at others, preferring the line of a milder approach. It is also worth noting that even when he is strongly defending the more lenient treatment of the defeated Trojans, his arguments are not entirely driven by humanitarian principles but are often motivated by the intention to protect his person and his forces from a future reversal of fortune.

51-61 and Williams (2021) 324-325; for his presence in the previous literature, see Boyle (1994) 158; Keulen (2001) 18-19.

⁷ Keulen (2001) 195, with reference to Herington (1966) 453-454; see also Boyle (1994) 152, 158; Casamento (2021) xxx.

⁸ Keulen (2001) 195; see also Schetter (1965) 398-408; Seidensticker (1969) esp. 163-173; Caviglia (1981) 35-38; Fantham (1982) 241; Wilson (1983) 34-38; Colakis (1984-1985) 150; Boyle (1994) 157-158, 161-162; Littlewood (2004) 91-92; Casamento (2021) xxix-xxxiv, 91 n. 74; Casamento (2022) 146-148. According to Calder III (1970), the second scene of Act II derives from Sophocles' *Polyxena*, but see Fantham (1982) 57-60.

⁹ Iurescia (2019) 257-262; see also Wilson (1983) 31, 38; Boyle (1994) 170.

¹⁰ Raby (2000) 184.

Let us take a look at certain characteristic passages. From the very first words he utters in the tragedy, Agamemnon stresses the need to keep young passions in check, suggests that a milder response to aggression and threats is the correct approach, and highlights the value of patience and tolerance (*patientia*), a value he associates with greater power (250-254):

*Iuvenile vitium est regere non posse impetum;
aetatis alios fervor hic primae rapit,
Pyrrhum paternus. spiritus quondam truces
minasque tumidi lentus Aeacidae tuli.
quo plura possis, plura patienter feras.*

Young men have the failing of being unable to govern impulse. In others such impetuous ardour is caused by immaturity; in Pyrrhus, it is inherited. Once I tolerated the harsh arrogance and threats of proud Aeacides. The greater your power, the greater should be your patience.¹¹

This passage artfully signals the direction Agamemnon will take: his opposition to the inability of young men to control their impulses and his commitment to tolerance and patience provide his views with a Stoic philosophical tone¹² and skilfully pave the ground for his stance towards the defeated Trojans, which is also marked by the principle of tolerance.

Of even greater interest for our study are Agamemnon's words in the lines that follow, where the Greek leader appears to believe in the existence of rules that place certain obligations on both the victors and the defeated (255-263):

*Quid caede dira nobiles clari ducis
aspergis umbras? noscere hoc primum decet,
quid facere victor debeat, victus pati.
violenta nemo imperia continuit diu,
moderata durant; quoque Fortuna altius
evexit ac levavit humanas opes,
hoc se magis suppressere felicem decet
variosque casus tremere metuentem deos
nimium faventes.*

Why bespatter a renowned leader's glorious shade with monstrous bloodshed? First one should understand what actions the conqueror may

¹¹ Throughout this article, for the Latin texts and the English translations I follow the recent Loeb editions.

¹² Casamento (2022) 150-151.

rightly take, and the conquered endure. Power used violently is held by no one for long; used with restraint, it lasts. The higher Fortune raises and exalts human might, the more the fortunate should humble themselves and tremble at shifting circumstance, fearing overly favourable gods.

In a sequence of *sententiae*¹³ meant to justify his position, he cites the potential of controlled power to endure, as opposed to ungoverned violence which cannot last,¹⁴ while he also mentions the custom of fortune to crush any whom she had previously favoured and elevated excessively,¹⁵ thus stressing the fact that the fortunate ought to restrain themselves and to fear the gods¹⁶ and the fickle nature of fortune.

Following a structural pattern already familiar from his philosophical treatises, Seneca shows Agamemnon to be supporting his theoretical teachings, his *praecepta*, with the appropriate *exempla*, which, near in time to events and confirmed by the speaker's personal experience, prove to be especially suitable for the particular purpose.¹⁷ One such example is that of Troy, which lost its grandeur and was crushed in an instant¹⁸ teaching Greeks the lesson that it was not wise to show arrogance and aggression, as such a fate awaits them too (263-275):

¹³ Keulen (2001) 218-219. For a helpful discussion of the use of *sententiae* in the whole episode, see Boyle (1994) 162; Casamento (1999) 128-129.

¹⁴ For other Senecan parallels to this view, see Malaspina (2004) 275 n. 22, who cites *Phoen.* 660; *Med.* 196; *Thy.* 215-217; *Clem.* 1.8.6; 1.11.4; 1.12.4; 1.13; see also Boyle (1994) 162; Keulen (2001) 223-225.

¹⁵ On this *topos*, see e.g. Seneca *Ag.* 100-101: *quidquid in altum Fortuna tulit, / ruitura levat* ('Whatever Fortune raises on high, she lifts to cast down') and see Lefèvre (1973) esp. 66-74; Tarrant (1976) 5, 181-184; Fantham (1982) 249, who discusses the interrelation between the two traditional themes of 'the instability and impermanence of fortune's gifts' and 'the need for mercy to the fallen' in Agamemnon's words.

¹⁶ Cf. Hecuba's similar references to the gods at *Tro.* 1-6; 28; 56. Generally, for the gods in the *Troades*, see Motto/Clark (1988) 215-259; Lefèvre (1988-1989).

¹⁷ Cf. Seneca's views on the combination of *praecepta* with *exempla* at *Marc.* 2.1 or his view on the effectiveness of the *exempla* at *Ep.* 6.5: *longum iter est per praecepta, breve et efficax per exempla* ('the way is long if one follows precepts, but short and helpful, if one follows patterns').

¹⁸ For a comprehensive interpretation of the fall of Troy in Seneca's *Troades*, see Shelton (2016); see also Raby (2000). As Casamento (2022) 152-153 rightly notes, Agamemnon's words on the destruction of Troy follow the recurring motif of the lament over the disappearance of cities and the consequent reflection on the fragility of human existence, a motif for which he cites Degl'Innocenti Pierini (2012) a and (2012)b. For the destruction of Troy as a metaphor for the fragility of fate (with allusions to the future of Rome), see also Pipitone (2014), who discusses the architectural metaphors in the *Troades*; on the imagery of ruins in the play, see, additionally, Mazzoli (2010).

*magna momento obrui
vincendo didici. Troia nos tumidos facit
nimium ac ferores? stamus hoc Danaï loco,
unde illa cecidit. fateor, aliquando impotens
regno ac superbus altius memet tuli;
sed fregit illos spiritus haec quae dare
potuisset aliis causa, Fortunae favor.
tu me superbum, Priame? tu timidum facis.
ego esse quicquam sceptrā nisi vano putem
fulgore tectum nomen et falso comam
vinclō decentem? casus haec rapiet brevis,
nec mille forsā ratibus aut annis decem;
non omnibus Fortuna tam lenta imminet.*

That greatness is crushed in a moment I have learned by conquering. Does Troy make us too arrogant and self-assured? We Danaans stand in the very place from which she fell. I admit, at one time I was unrestrained and proud in government, bearing myself too high; but that arrogance was broken by the very cause that could have produced it in others, Fortune's favour. You make me proud, Priam, you make me fearful. Could I consider sceptred power to be anything but a name overlaid with false glitter, a deceiving bond to adorn the hair? Some quick calamity will snatch these things, perhaps without a thousand ships or ten years; Fortune's menace is not so long drawn out for all.

Apart from the example of Troy, we also see Agamemnon citing his personal experience, comparing his own fate to that of Priam. He claims that he has learned the lessons of his victory (*vincendo didici*) and admits that he too had been prone to despotic and arrogant behaviour in the past,¹⁹ but that the very same victory that made him arrogant was warning him to stop behaving in such a manner. He is led to this conclusion by heeding the example of Priam's defeat, an example which makes him fearful that he too will follow in the Trojan king's footsteps and is teaching him that power is at the mercy of fickle fortune which is too powerful for any man to challenge.²⁰ As is well known, his words and

¹⁹ This works metapoetically as well, because we can talk of the *literary* past, inscribed in text, as well as of the past in terms of mythological chronology.

²⁰ Vergil *Aen.* 2.554-558, where the death of Priam is presented as a paradigm of the reversal of fate, could be seen as a hypotext for Agamemnon's words here.

concerns prove prophetic,²¹ as he will in due course die by the hands of his wife and her lover upon his return to Mycenae.

Agamemnon's words lead us to interesting conclusions regarding what he considers to be appropriate action in a post-conflict context. He rejects extreme violent behaviour and chooses leniency in his interaction with his opponents, as he believes it to be the safer option if one's intention is to ensure long-lasting power. He is fearful of happiness, which he presents as a sure target of an inconstant and deceptive *Fortuna*, and advises against arrogance (*superbia*), showing it to be an invitation to divine punishment. It is worth noting that here Agamemnon's argument regarding the lenient treatment of the defeated is not a product of humanitarian motives concerning the fate of the latter but aims to ensure more stable power for the victors and protection from the spite of the gods and the games of the levity of fortune. He introduces theological and philosophical beliefs in his interpretative pattern regarding the role of the gods and of fortune, beliefs that are present throughout the tragedy (Hecuba's words in the beginning of the work being a characteristic example) and according to which fortune's favour foretells the demise of the favoured and is therefore something to be feared. Thus, *superbia* is shown to be a grave danger from which people should distance themselves, while an interesting theory of history of philosophy is skilfully highlighted, namely that the power enjoyed by nations is not permanent but is constantly transferred to whomever fortune chooses to favour. This position, which to some extent recalls Sallust's theory that power always goes to the morally superior nation,²² constitutes a noteworthy diversion from Vergil's famous view regarding the eternal dominance of Rome, as it is expressed in Jupiter's prophecy to Venus in the first book of the *Aeneid* (*Aen.* 1.257-296) and can be summed up with the famous phrase *imperium sine fine dedi* (*Aen.* 1.279). Thus, one could reasonably conclude that Seneca's words as spoken by Agamemnon – just like by Hecuba²³

²¹ Wilson (1983) 37; Boyle (1994) 163; Stok (1999) 18 with n. 43 and 82 n. 82; Petrone (2013) 93 n. 31; Casamento (2021) 94 n. 96; Casamento (2022) 154-156. For an interesting reading of Seneca's *Troades* as 'the tragedy of the winners', see Balula (2018); see also Balula (2015) and Shelton (2016).

²² Sallust *Cat.* 2.6: *fortuna simul cum moribus inmutatur. Ita imperium semper ad optimum quemque a minus bono transfertur* ('there is a change in fortune accompanying the change in character. Thus, sovereignty is always being transferred to the best man from the hands of his inferior'). For similar views, cf. Cicero *Off.* 2.26-29.

²³ The similarities between Agamemnon and Hecuba have already been mentioned

earlier – serve as an indirect warning for the writer's contemporaries that they should not be complacent about fortune's favour and exhibit arrogance (*superbia*), but, on the contrary, should rein in their passions and be prepared to be stricken by an unfortunate turn of fate.

Elements of the *ius post bellum* rhetoric are also found later in Agamemnon's speech in the lines that follow. Here the Greek commander admits that he too desired the defeat and vanquishment of the Trojans but denies that he wanted the complete destruction of Troy, an event he was unable to prevent as he failed to control the fury (*furor*) and brutality of the victors,²⁴ both of which were kindled by pain (*dolor*) and darkness (*tenebrae*). He insists that his adversaries were excessively punished which is why he is trying to preserve what he can of the defeated Troy.²⁵ Thus, he expresses his opposition to the slaughter of Polyxena, which he describes as *facinus atrox caedis* and *culpa*, and stresses his own responsibility to prevent it, saying that the mistakes of the many come back to him, as whoever does not forbid a mistake when it is in their power to do so, might as well be ordering it to happen (276-291):

*Equidem fatebor (pace dixisse hoc tua,
Argiva tellus, liceat): affligi Phrygas
vincique volui; ruere et aequari solo
etiam arcuissem; sed regi frenis nequit
et ira et ardens ensis et victoria
commissa nocti. quidquid indignum aut ferum
cuiquam videri potuit, hoc fecit dolor
tenebraeque, per quas ipse se irritat furor,
gladiusque felix, cuius infecti semel
vecors libido est. quidquid eversae potest*

by many scholars; see Caviglia (1981) 34-43; Fantham (1982) 207 and 248-249; Boyle (1994) 22-23, 135, 161, 163; Petrone (1995) 109-111; Stok (1999) 17-18 and 81 n. 80; Keulen (2001) 225-228; Malaspina (2004) 287-288; Guastella (2017) 113-114, 116 n. 31; Casamento (2021) xxxii, 93-94; Casamento (2022) 154, 158. These similarities confirm the view of Littlewood (2004) 100-102, who concludes: 'The *fabula* of *Troades* is a single episode in a longer cyclical history' (101). For the recycling of past as present as a major theme in the play, see also Lawall (1981-1982) 250-252; Boyle (1994) esp. 21-26; Williams (2021) 325. Fantham (1981-1982) successfully demonstrates that Seneca's *Troades* is the prequel of his *Agamemnon*; cf. Giancotti (1953) 113-116.

²⁴ Here and in lines 250-254 Kohn (2017) 140 sees 'a possible sign of recognition that some people do, in fact, "suffer" from PTSD [= Post Traumatic Stress Disorder], and do not simply experience it'.

²⁵ On the contrary, Ulysses interprets the extermination of all members of the royal family as the elimination of any future threat and therefore as self-protection and establishment of a secure peace, cf. *Tro.* 526-555; 589-593; 736-738.

*superesse Troiae, maneat; exactum satis
poenarum et ultra est. regia ut virgo occidat
tumuloque donum detur et cineres riget
et facinus atrox caedis ut thalamos vocent,
non patiar. in me culpa cunctorum redit:
qui non vetat peccare, cum possit, iubet.*

For my part I will admit it (may I say this without offence to you, Argive land): I wanted the Phrygians beaten down and defeated; but as for being ruined and levelled to the ground, I would actually have prevented it. Nevertheless tight reins cannot be kept on anger and the blazing sword and a victory turned over to night. Anything that might have been thought unworthy or barbarous was the work of bitterness and of darkness, through which frenzy intensifies itself, and of the successful sword, which once dyed in blood has an insane lust. Whatever can survive of Troy, let it remain. Enough reprisals and more have been exacted. That a princess should fall and be offered as a gift to the tomb and quench its ashes, and that they should call a cruel act of bloodshed 'marriage,' I will not permit. The guilt of all comes back to me: one who does not forbid wrongdoing, when he has the power, commands it.

From this we can conclude that Agamemnon condemns the obliteration of one's opponents, believes there should be limits to the punishment victors can impose on the defeated, stresses the destructive force of forms of passion such as wrath (*ira*),²⁶ the victorious sword's blood lust (*gladii vecors libido*) and fury (*furor*), all of which he believes should be checked, considers it wrong to kill the young children of the defeated royal family²⁷ and stresses the personal responsibility of a commander to forbid that which is *indignum aut ferum*. In this passage one can detect the early signs of a humanitarian and emotional

²⁶ Lines 279-281: *sed regi frenis nequit / et ira et ardens ensis et victoria / commissa nocti* are very redolent of *Ir.* 1.19.1; similar language can be found also in *Med.* 591-592: *caecus est ignis stimulatus ira / nec regi curat patiturve frenos* ('Blind is the fire whipped up by anger, careless of control, impatient of curbs').

²⁷ Of course, this contrasts with his sanctioning of the sacrifice of Iphigenia; cf. also *Iliad* 6.55-60, esp. 59-60. It is almost as if he wants to prevent a repetition – or even to undo altogether – his previous acts of brutal, inhumane violence. I think one could read that metapoetically, as if Agamemnon is trying to halt the play's *own* regressive re-enactment of violence that has already been done in previous plays and poems. This goes back to Schiesaro's reading (2003) of Senecan tragedy as obsessively self-aware of itself as a *repetition* of earlier literature, asking itself the question, 'Why again?'. It seems that Pyrrhus flags this metapoetic reading at 331: *Iamne immolari virgines credis nefas?*, 'So nowadays you consider sacrifice of virgins a crime?'.

approach regarding one's opponent which becomes more clearly apparent in lines 295-300, where Agamemnon refuses to condone human sacrifice for a human being²⁸ and speaks of how easily moved he is by the cries of desperate mothers:

*Quod si levatur sanguine infuso cinis,
opima Phrygii colla caedantur gregis
fluatque nulli flebilis matri cruor.
quis iste mos est? quando in inferias homo est
impensus hominis? detrahe invidiam tuo
odiumque patri, quem coli poena iubes.*

But if the dust is assuaged by the pouring-on of blood, cut the necks of prime cattle from a Phrygian herd, and let the blood that flows not bring grief to any mother. What kind of custom is that? When was human life expended on tomb offerings for a human? Lift the burden of odium and hatred from your father: you want him revered through reprisals!

Agamemnon's comments connect excessive cruelty with barbarian behaviour and, by extension, link respect for the lives of innocent civilians with the principles of a civilized society. Furthermore, he relates the stance towards the defeated both with the responsibility of a commander and his future image as well as with his own emotions and the feelings he creates in others.

Consequently, it transpires that in Agamemnon's approach all three Aristotelian persuasive methods are used: *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos*, as the logical arguments we saw in the beginning are accompanied by arguments that aim to highlight the moral calibre of the speaker, as well as evoke pity for the vanquished Trojans. Another interesting aspect of this passage is the emphasis the speaker places on the praise and fame that come to the victor, both of which appear to make violent behaviour unnecessary and serve as an additional factor to be consid-

²⁸ In this way he differentiates the case of Polyxena's sacrifice from that of Iphigenia's sacrifice, which intended to appease a goddess; see Keulen (2001) 237-239, with a brief review of the history of human sacrifice in the classical world. A comparison between the two sacrifices is also implied in lines 330-333, and Casamento (2021) 97 n. 119 and (2022) 161 n. 62 rightly highlights the popularity of the theme in the declamation schools citing Seneca *Suas.* 3.1-2, where Arellius Fuscus has Agamemnon say: *Victa Troia virginibus hostium parcam* ('When Troy is conquered, I shall spare the daughters of the enemy'); cf. Caviglia (1981) 34 n. 19; Boyle (1994) 162; Shelton (2000) 117 n. 50; Guastella (2017) 116 n. 29.

ered after the end of an armed conflict and support a more humble stance in the treatment of the defeated.

The completely opposite approaches of Pyrrhus and Agamemnon regarding the matter of how victory should be handled are perfectly highlighted in their quarrel in lines 333-336, which is based on successive *sententiae*:

PYRRHUS: *Lex nulla capto parcat aut poenam impedit.*

AGAMEMNON: *Quod non vetat lex, hoc vetat fieri pudor.*

PYRRHUS: *Quodcumque libuit facere victori licet.*

AGAMEMNON: *Minimum decet libere cui multum licet.*

PYRRHUS: No law spares a prisoner, or forbids reprisal.

AGAMEMNON: What law does not forbid, a sense of restraint forbids.

PYRRHUS: The victor has a right to do whatever he pleases.

AGAMEMNON: He who has much right should please himself least.

Pyrrhus focuses on the absence of a legal framework enforcing the compassionate treatment of prisoners of war and the prohibition of punishment and believes that victors should be free to act as they please. In his words, some scholars have seen a parallel with Euripides *Heracl.* 963; *Ion* 1046-1047; Livy 26.31.2: *quidquid in hostibus feci ius belli defendit* ('in the case of an enemy whatever I did is sanctioned by the rules of war'), where it is suggested by Marcellus that the law of war allows violent treatment of the defeated enemies.²⁹ I believe that in Pyrrhus' words one could also see a parallel with – or an exploitation of – Cicero's famous phrase *silent enim leges inter arma* ('When arms speak, the laws are silent', *Mil.* 11), a much-misunderstood phrase³⁰ that could support his argument that the acts of warfare are not governed by any law that protects the individuals. Agamemnon, on the other hand, focuses on the concept of shame (*pudor*), which he believes

²⁹ Keulen (2001) 251; Casamento (2022) 161-162.

³⁰ Neff (2012) 7-8 n. 34: 'Some have interpreted this to mean that, between belligerents in wartime, no law is in force. In fact, Cicero made the remark in the context of asserting a right of *individual* self-defence against an assailant, making the point that, in such an emergency, it is not possible to mobilise the normal forces of the state against the criminal. It is therefore necessary for the law to allow self-help in such an emergency. Cicero was making no reference to war between states. Grotius therefore rightly points out that the laws which are silent, in Cicero's statement, are the ordinary civil laws applicable *within* a state (i.e., the law forbidding forcible self-help by individuals) and not the law of nature, which is of permanent and eternal validity, even between enemy belligerents in time of war'.

should make up for the absence of legal obligations and feels that whoever has great power, should not be aiming to please themselves.³¹ Here we see a shift from the legal to the moral perspective which is presented as the main means by which the appropriate behaviour in war should be examined and decided upon, while the crucial role of *pudor* is also highlighted in the moral constraints that keep a person from committing ignominious acts.³²

The mere fact that the stance in favour of moderation in the tragedy is supported by Agamemnon and not another character acquires in itself special functional value. As is well known, in earlier literary tradition the commander of the Greek forces is usually portrayed as despotic and arrogant, indifferent to the honour of others, demanding young captive girls as gifts of honour; moreover, he is willing to sacrifice his own daughter for the favourable outcome of his campaign and is generally shown to represent the logic of cruelty and violence. On the one hand, the fact that he is now shown to depart from his well-established earlier literary image and to be adopting a completely different stance could imply that not only has he recognized his earlier mistakes, has learned from them, has matured and become wiser, but also that his new views are the product of valuable first-hand experience and are therefore more correct. In this framework, armed with the teaching of the past he is now a wise and responsible commander striving for a safer and better future for both himself and his forces. Having realized where his earlier beliefs led, he feels that a better future can only be achieved if one follows the path of clemency. On the other hand, this change in Agamemnon's literary depiction could be interpreted from the perspective of literary function, given the paradigmatic and peda-

³¹ As well as the rhetoric of *ius belli*, lines 333-336 also plug into the discourse on Roman imperial power. *De clementia* touches on it (see below), but see also *Thyestes* 211-218 and Pseudo-Seneca's *Octavia* 450-455, where it is 'Seneca' who seems to speak like Agamemnon here; cf. e.g. *Oct.* 450: *Hoc plus verere [sc. deos] quod licet tantum tibi* ('You should fear all the more because you have so much power') and 454: *Id facere laus est quod decet, non quod licet* ('Praise lies in doing what one should, not what one can') which remind us of Agamemnon's view at *Tro.* 336. The parallels are not exact, but they are similar in idea and there is also some lexical overlap. While Agamemnon resembles Seneca's own teaching, one could contemplate the possibility that Pyrrhus resembles Nero. It is interesting to add that the *Octavia's* Nero seems (partially) modelled on Pyrrhus.

³² On the contrast between *lex* and *pudor* here, see Keulen (2001) 251-253, with many parallels; cf. Flamerie de Lachapelle (2011)b 176. More broadly, on shame in Seneca's ethical system, see Wray (2015). Generally, on the concept of *pudor* in Roman thought, Kaster (2005) remains fundamental.

gogical function that characters assume within the poetics of Seneca's tragedy. From this perspective, Agamemnon's character in this play could serve to explore the idea of restraining youthful passion, illuminate the fickleness of fortune, exemplify the notions of *humanitas* and *clementia*, embody the concept of a responsible ruler and, finally, highlight the moral obligations of victors in war.

It appears that Agamemnon's portrayal in earlier literary tradition, from which Seneca tried to depart, was not the writer's only model for this original depiction of the Greek general, nor should this be solely attributed to the tendency of writers of the Imperial period to surpass their classic models or reshape them.³³ The concept of a leader who possesses *clementia* is very common in Roman thought, especially from the time of Julius Caesar and beyond,³⁴ and Agamemnon in Seneca's *Troades* is a model of a leader clearly influenced by such beliefs.

A comparison between *De clementia* and *Troades*

Furthermore, in Seneca's depiction of Agamemnon here many of the writer's personal theoretical views from his philosophical works are also applied in practice, especially those expressed in his *De clementia*,³⁵ a theoretical treatise dedicated to Nero, where Seneca analyses the notion of clemency and delineates the proper way for a leader to behave according to this virtue. According to this prose treatise, *clementia* is related to justice,³⁶ serves the ruler's good reputation (cf. e.g. Sen. *Clem.* 1.9.6; 1.21.3) and differentiates the good ruler from the tyrant, who is characterized by cruelty (Sen. *Clem.*

³³ For this trend in the literature of the Imperial period, see e.g. Vessey (1982) 502.

³⁴ On the notions of clemency and forgiveness in the Roman world the bibliography is extensive; see e.g. Coulter (1930-1931); Treu (1948); Leggewie (1958); Griffin (2003); Konstan (2005); Dowling (2006); Braund (2009) 30-44; Konstan (2010); Flamerie de Lachapelle (2011)a; Várhelyi (2012).

³⁵ For similarities between Seneca's *Troades* and his *De ira* and *De clementia*, see Flamerie de Lachapelle (2011)b, who argues that in the play the ideal leader is represented by Agamemnon and Ulysses: the former promotes *clementia* against Pyrrhus' *saevitia* while the latter promotes *severitas* against Andromache's *miseratio*. Generally, for Seneca's views on war and peace in his philosophical works, see e.g. André (1965); Mazzoli (1991); Stok (1999) 13-15; Hasic (2016). On 'the dilemma of power gradation, namely the use of either force or gentleness, determination or patience, severity or kindness towards political opponents and/or public enemies' in Seneca's philosophical works, with an emphasis on his *De clementia*, see recently Malaspina (2022, quotation from p. 191).

³⁶ On the relation between the two concepts in Seneca's *De clementia*, see Könczöl (2008); cf. Braund (2009) 40-42.

1.11.4-12.4). As is known, the matter of punishment and forgiveness plays a central role both in Seneca's treatise (cf. e.g. *Clem.* 1.20.1-24.2) and in the debate between Agamemnon and Pyrrhus in the *Troades*. In this context, it is worth mentioning that the adjective *misericos*, which in Seneca's tragedies occurs only in *Troades* 329 and 330,³⁷ further facilitates the connection of this play with the *De clementia*, where the notion of *miser cordia* plays a significant role (cf. e.g. 1.1.4; 2.4.4-6.6). Additionally, the idea that it is not right for the sovereign to act with total freedom expressed in *Tro.* 336: *Minimum decet libere cui multum licet* is expounded in *De clementia* (1.5.1-2; 1.8).

Similarly, the interest in kingship and the contrast between the tyrant and the *sapiens* that dominate the *De clementia* are also shared by Seneca's tragedies, *Troades* included.³⁸ Seneca's views on the clement treatment of the defeated king at *Clem.* 1.21.3 could be read in parallel with relevant discussions in the debate between Agamemnon and Pyrrhus (cf. e.g. *Tro.* 327-328). Agamemnon's *sententia* regarding the value of *moderatio* and its role in prolonging rule at *Tro.* 258-259: *violenta nemo imperia continuit diu, / moderata durant* recalls similar views in the *De clementia*, where it is also argued that moderation brings rulers greater safety and protection and thus long duration of their power.³⁹ Furthermore, in the prose treatise the opposite of *clementia* is *saevitia*, *crudelitas* and *feritas*;⁴⁰ the same opposition also underlies Agamemnon's words in the tragic play: cf. 310-313: *Haud equidem nego / hoc esse Pyrrhi maximum in bello decus, / saevo peremptus ense quod Priamus iacet, / supplex paternus*, where Agamemnon attacks Pyrrhus' *saevitia*; 281-283: *quidquid indignum aut ferum / cuiquam videri potuit, hoc fecit dolor / tenebraeque*, where he condemns the atrocities (*ferocitas*) of the victors,⁴¹ while his opposition to *crudelitas* (a word etymologically derived from *cruor*) is implied in lines 295-300 (cf. especially 297: *fluatque nulli flebilis matri cruor*), when he disagrees with the human sacrifice of Polyxena. Moreover, at *Clem.* 1.18.1: *aequi bonique natura, quae parcere etiam captivis et pretio paratis iubet* ('but how much you are

³⁷ See Keulen (2001) 250.

³⁸ Braund (2009) 73-76; Flamerie de Lachapelle (2011)b 175.

³⁹ See above, n. 14; cf. Flamerie de Lachapelle (2011)b 174 with n. 22, who further remarks (174-175 with n. 23) that the idea that clemency provides the leader with immortal glory is shared by both texts.

⁴⁰ Braund (2009) 39.

⁴¹ Cf. also 246-248: *iam placita nunc subito improbas / Priamisque natam Pelei gnato ferum / mactare credis?* ('Do you suddenly now condemn approved policy, and consider it brutal to sacrifice Priam's daughter to Peleus' son?'); 264-265: *Troia nos tumidos facit / nimium ac feroces?* ('Does Troy make us too arrogant and self-assured?').

permitted to inflict by the principles of equity and right, which require that mercy should be shown even to captives and purchased slaves') the philosopher underlines that even captives of war and purchased slaves should be spared and attributes it to the nature of equity and goodness; this very idea is rejected by Pyrrhus at *Tro.* 333: *Lex nulla capto parcat aut poenam impedit*⁴² and is supported by Agamemnon in the next line (334: *Quod non vetat lex, hoc vetat fieri pudor*), who believes that the mistreatment of the prisoners of war is forbidden by a sense of restraint (*pudor*).⁴³

What is even more interesting in my view is the choice of Agamemnon as the character who argues for mercy for the defeated Trojans in the *Troades*. In ancient sources the Greek commander was notorious for his cruelty, but in this tragic play he is presented as a person who has left his old self behind and now embodies an *exemplum* of philanthropy and clemency. This depiction perfectly corresponds to the depiction of Augustus in the *De clementia* (1.9.1-11.3): although the first emperor appears as a role model for Nero,⁴⁴ Seneca does not hesitate to refer to Augustus' cruelty in his youth, which is contrasted to both his clemency in his later years and Nero's constant clemency (1.11.1-3). In other words, from this perspective, Seneca's Agamemnon in the *Troades* could be seen as an analogous to Augustus in the *De clementia*, as for both *clementia* was learned in maturity. The similarities between the two works indicate that the tragic play participates – in its own way – in the discussion of political and ethical issues that were trendy in Seneca's time.⁴⁵ It has a didactic role and supplements the *De clementia* by approaching the same subject from a tragic and gloomy perspective. This perspective highlights the disastrous results of the absence of *humanitas*, a notion that is a desideratum in the prose treatise, and implicitly reinforces the latter's argumentation.

The parallels with the Aeneid and with Cicero's views on the ethics of war

One could also draw a connection between Agamemnon's views and Anchises' famous exhortation to Aeneas and their descendants to spare

⁴² Keulen (2001) 252.

⁴³ Flamerie de Lachapelle (2011)b 175-177.

⁴⁴ For the presentation of Augustus in the *De clementia* as a domestic example that Nero has already surpassed, see Malaspina (2005) 292-319; Braund (2009) 61-64, 288-294.

⁴⁵ Generally, for political thought in Seneca's tragedies and their relationship with the historical period of their composition, see Malaspina (2004).

the conquered and battle down the proud in Vergil's *Aeneid* 6.853: *parcere subiectis et debellare superbos* ('to spare the vanquished and to crush the proud').⁴⁶ The Greek general seems to share this view and want to put it into practice by showing mercy to the vanquished Trojans, and it is worth noting his use of *parcere* at 350-351: *sed meus captis quoque / scit parcere ensis* ('But my sword is capable of sparing even prisoners', cf. also Pyrrhus' words at 333: *Lex nulla capto parcat aut poenam impedit* 'No law spares a prisoner, or forbids reprisal'), which makes the connection even stronger. In his own way, Seneca presents Agamemnon's thoughts as a parallel to Anchises' exhortation but demonstrates that, at the end, the Greek leader was unable to implement this idea. The failure of the Greeks to show mercy to their defeated opponents supplements Vergil's instruction from the opposite point of view, as it highlights the tragic consequences – for both the victors and the vanquished – of the failure to adopt the principle of leniency towards the subjugated. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that Anchises' exhortation occurs in the context of the well-known *Priamel* that compares the Greeks with the Romans (Verg. *Aen.* 6.847-853). Thus, one could suggest that Seneca seems to endorse Vergil's views regarding clemency as a Roman virtue, as he implies that the Greeks were less successful in following this principle.

Agamemnon's stance also reminds me of Cicero's views on the ethics of waging and conducting war,⁴⁷ especially those at *De officiis* 1.34-35.⁴⁸ Based on the conceptions of the natural law and the unwritten *ius*

⁴⁶ Fantham (1982) 257; Boyle (1994) 168; Keulen (2001) 252; Casamento (2022) 162. From a different point of view, Stok (1999) 19 sees here a parody of Vergil's line. More generally, for cases of Vergil's presence in the *Troades*, see Zissos (2008); Biondi (2013) 122-129; Trinacty (2014) 41-43 and 167-169.

⁴⁷ On Cicero's just war theory, see e.g. Keller (2012)a; Keller (2012)b; Barnes (2015)a; Stewart (2018); Atkins (2023); Lockwood (2025).

⁴⁸ For a detailed commentary on the broader passage of Cicero *Off.* 1.34-40, see Dyck (1996) 133-153. Cf. also Cicero *Rep.* 3.34-35, where the philosopher discusses the question of when a war can be considered just. This subject is also discussed in Cicero *Off.* 1.36. Another relevant passage is that at Cicero *Leg.* 3.9: *Imperia, potestates, legationes, quom senatus creverit populusve iusserit ex urbe exeunto, duella iusta iuste gerunto, sociis parcont, se et suos continento, populi sui gloriam augento, domum cum laude redeunto* ('Officials with and without imperium and ambassadors shall leave the city when the Senate shall so decree or the people so command; they shall wage just wars justly; they shall spare the allies; they shall hold themselves and their subordinates in check; they shall increase the national renown; they shall return home with honour'), where Cicero refers to the ethical duties of the magistrates in the provinces; cf. also Cicero *Off.* 2.26-29, discussed below (n. 53).

gentium ('the law of nations'),⁴⁹ in this passage Cicero argues that there is a limit to revenge and to punishment, disagrees with the complete and total destruction of Corinth, argues for justice toward the vanquished, and stresses that 'when the victory is won, we should spare those who have not been blood-thirsty and barbarous in their warfare'. A few lines later, he adds: 'Not only must we show consideration for those whom we have conquered by force of arms, but we must also ensure protection to those who lay down their arms and throw themselves upon the mercy of our generals, even though the battering-ram has hammered at their walls.':

Sunt autem quaedam officia etiam adversus eos servanda, a quibus iniuriam acceperis. Est enim ulciscendi et puniendi modus; atque haud scio an satis sit eum, qui lacessierit, iniuriae suae paenitere, ut et ipse ne quid tale posthac et ceteri sint ad iniuriam tardiores. Atque in re publica maxime conservanda sunt iura belli. Nam cum sint duo genera decertandi, unum per disceptationem, alterum per vim, cumque illud proprium sit hominis, hoc beluarum, confugiendum est ad posterius, si uti non licet superiore. Quare suscipienda quidem bella sunt ob eam causam, ut sine iniuria in pace vivatur, parta autem victoria conservandi ii, qui non crudeles in bello, non immanes fuerunt, ut maiores nostri Tusculanos, Aequos, Volscos, Sabinos, Hernicos in civitatem etiam acceperunt, at Carthaginem et Numantiam funditus sustulerunt; nollem Corinthum, sed credo aliquid secutos, opportunitatem loci maxime, ne posset aliquando ad bellum faciendum locus ipse adhortari. Mea quidem sententia paci, quae nihil habitura sit insidiarum, semper est consulendum. In quo si mihi esset optemperatum, si non optimam, at aliquam rem publicam, quae nunc nulla est, haberemus.

Et cum iis, quos vi deviceris, consulendum est, tum ii, qui armis positis ad imperatorum fidem confugient, quamvis murum aries percusserit, recipiendi. In quo tantopere apud nostros iustitia culta est, ut ii, qui civitates aut nationes devictas bello in fidem recepissent, earum patroni essent more maiorum.

Again, there are certain duties that we owe to even to those who have wronged us. For there is a limit to retribution and to punishment; or rather, I am inclined to think, it is sufficient that the aggressor should be brought to repent of his wrong-doing, in order that he may not repeat the offence and that others may be deterred from doing wrong. Then, too, in the case of a state in its external relations, the rights of war must be strictly observed. For since there are two ways of settling a dispute: first, by discussion; second, by physical force; and since the former is characteristic of man, the latter of the brute, we must resort to force only in case we

⁴⁹ On the notion of *ius gentium*, see mainly Kaser (1993).

may not avail ourselves of discussion. The only excuse, therefore, for going to war is that we may live in peace unharmed; and when the victory is won, we should spare those who have not been blood-thirsty and barbarous in their warfare. For instance, our forefathers actually admitted to full rights of citizenship the Tusculans, Aequians, Volscians, Sabines, and Hernicians, but they razed Carthage and Numantia to the ground. I wish they had not destroyed Corinth; but I believe they had some special reason for what they did—its convenient situation, probably—and feared that its very location might some day furnish a temptation to renew the war. In my opinion, at least, we should always strive to secure a peace that shall not admit of guile. And if my advice had been heeded on this point, we should still have at least some sort of constitutional government, if not the best in the world, whereas, as it is, we have none at all. Not only must we show consideration for those whom we have conquered by force of arms but we must also ensure protection to those who lay down their arms and throw themselves upon the mercy of our generals, even though the battering-ram has hammered at their walls. And among our countrymen justice has been observed so conscientiously in this direction, that those who have given promise of protection to states or nations subdued in war become, after the custom of our forefathers, the patrons of those states.

As it seems, Seneca is well aware of the theoretical discussions on the ethics of war.⁵⁰ He resumes Cicero's discussion of the *ius belli* and elaborates on it with an emphasis on the *ius post bellum*.⁵¹ As we see in the *Troades*, although Agamemnon wanted to defeat the Trojans, he did not want to ruin Troy and level it to the ground (277-279); his stance corresponds to Cicero's preference that Corinth had not been levelled (which he attempts to interpret by attributing it to the intention of his ancestors to avoid a future threat),⁵² although he does not disagree with the razing of Carthage and Numantia to the ground. Agamemnon suggests to the

⁵⁰ It seems that the discussion about the concepts of *bellum iustum* and *bellum iniustum* also occupied other writers of the same period, as, for instance, Lucan, Seneca's nephew; for these concepts in Lucan, see Casamento (2008-2009).

⁵¹ For an example that could be included in the so-called *ius in bello*, cf. the references to Achilles' merciful stance towards Priam, when the latter ransomed the body of Hector, which contrasts to Pyrrhus' cruelty towards the Trojan king (308-315, 325-329).

⁵² For Cicero's disagreement with the destruction of Corinth, cf. also Cicero *Off.* 3.46: *Sed utilitatis specie in re publica saepissime peccatur, ut in Corinthi disturbance nostris* ('Through a specious appearance of expediency wrong is very often committed in transactions between state and state, as by our own country in the destruction of Corinth'), where it is again attributed to *utilitas*, and see Dyck (1996) 139-140; Stewart (2018) 15-16; Atkins (2023) 189-190.

Greeks that they show mercy to the defeated Trojans and spare the lives of innocent people; this corresponds to Cicero's view that those who have not been blood-thirsty and barbarous in their warfare should be spared.⁵³

Conclusion

Cicero justifies his views by appealing to the natural law and the *ius gentium* and attributes some of his forefathers' actions to the notion of *utilitas*. Seneca's Agamemnon justifies his views i) with theological arguments (related to the fear of the gods and the protection of the victors from the envy and fickle nature of fortune), ii) with arguments related to the responsibility of a leader and the future of his power, i.e., arguments that could also be (and are) applied to imperial rule (the violent actions of his forces make the leader guilty; moderation secures a long-lasting power of a leader), iii) with references to the *invidia* and the *odium* that accompany those who mistreat the defeated, and, finally, iv) with humanitarian arguments that highlight the moral obligations of the victors and extol the role of shame (*pudor*), which makes up for the absence of a legal framework. Consequently, in Agamemnon's words one could reconstruct aspects of a just war theory which focus on the *ius post bellum* and enrich Cicero's views on the merciful treatment of the defeated with further arguments.

As the quarrel between Pyrrhus and Agamemnon leads to an impasse, Calchas, the seer, is called to offer a solution by interpreting the will of the gods. The fact that the latter demand that Polyxena is sacrificed, at first seems to invalidate Agamemnon's argument regarding

⁵³ Cf. also Cicero *Off.* 1.38, where Cicero argues that when a war is fought out for supremacy or for glory and not for survival it must be carried out less bitterly; 2.26-29, where he notes: *Verum tamen, quam diu imperium populi Romani beneficiis tenebatur, non iniuriis, bella aut pro sociis aut de imperio gerebantur, exitus erant bellorum aut mites aut necessarii, regum, populorum, nationum portus erat et refugium senatus, nostri autem magistratus imperatoresque ex hac una re maximam laudem capere studebant, si provincias, si socios aequitate et fide defendissent* ('Let me add, however, that as long as the empire of the Roman People maintained itself by acts of service, not of oppression, wars were waged in the interest of our allies or to safeguard our supremacy; the end of our wars was marked by acts of clemency or by only a necessary degree of severity; the senate was a haven of refuge for kings, tribes, and nations; and the highest ambition of our magistrates and generals was to defend our provinces and allies with justice and honour', 2.26) and believes that a *res publica's* unjust behaviour causes it to lose its honourable status. On Cicero's strategy in the *De officiis* to align justice and glory, see mainly Atkins (2023) 199-202; see also Dyck (1996) 401-408.

the merciful treatment of the defeated.⁵⁴ This, however, is only one possible interpretation. In Seneca's tragedies, and especially in the *Troades*, *nefas* triumphs and the notion of death prevails, usually shown to be a liberating escape from the trials and tribulations of an unbearable and undignified life.⁵⁵ Many of the work's characters (as e.g. Hecuba and Andromache) desire death, preferring it to a life of captivity and humiliation.⁵⁶ This approach is clearly influenced by Stoicism, where death is believed to be a 'reasonable exit' (εὐλογος ἔξοδος) *in extremis*,⁵⁷ when there is no other way to escape suffering. So does the play complicate arguments about *ius post bellum*: Agamemnon thinks that the gods would condemn violence against the conquered, but perhaps that is because he has one eye on *preserving* his kingdom's supremacy; the gods themselves know what is best for the conquered – death and liberation. Thus, the gods' will concerning Polyxena should probably be read as a paroxysmal manifestation of the triumph of *nefas* and of the ethical subversion that governs the world of Seneca's tragedy, as it proclaims the end of any form of theodicy,⁵⁸ and not as a condemnation of the view that the defeated should be treated leniently. The latter is the safer choice for the victors, as it ensures that they avoid being punished by the gods, while death itself might in fact be the better choice for the defeated when they face the savagery of the victors.

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⁵⁴ Heldmann (1974) 181-182; Fantham (1982) 252; Malaspina (2004) 276.

⁵⁵ On the predominant role of death and *nefas* in Seneca's *Troades*, see e.g. Lawall (1981-1982); Fantham (1982) 78-92; Wilson (1983) esp. 39-51; Motto/Clark (1984); Motto/Clark (1988) 246-257; Davis (1989); Shelton (2000); Mowbray (2012) esp. 407-418; Stroh (2014) 436, 446-447; Shelton (2016) esp. 194-200.

⁵⁶ Generally, for the emotions of the Trojan women in the play, see Fabre-Serris (2015); cf. López (2008).

⁵⁷ On this Stoic view, see e.g. Griffin (1986) 73; Tzounakas (2011) 348-349 with n. 14; Sherman (2021) 173-174.

⁵⁸ Picone (1984); Mazzoli (2016) *passim*.

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