

**“HERW[ERDEN] BESSER FORT”:
SHOULD HE ‘GO’, OR IS HE ‘BETTER’? EUR. MEDEA 109¹**

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This note discusses one of the largely superfluous conjectures unearthed by J. Diggle and given an honourable place in his otherwise very succinct and efficient *apparatus criticus*. Reported by none of the recent editors, and earlier by Prinz–Wecklein and Verrall, Herwerden’s μελανόσπλαγχνος in Euripides’ *Medea* 109 is an undesirable change of the sound, if idiosyncratic, mss. reading μεγαλόσπλαγχνος. Diggle, however, having (independently) conjectured the same word, patched together arguments for it. An additional attraction this conjecture gained in his eyes was due to his misreading of the remark (quoted in the heading) Wilamowitz made proofreading the first volume of Murray’s OCT in 1901. While Wilamowitz discouraged Murray from reporting this conjecture with his usual “besser fort”, Diggle, on passing acquaintance with the letters, took it to mean “Herw. besser fort[asse]”, thus corroborating his point.

Keywords: Euripides, Medea, Diggle, conjectures, critical apparatus.

(Tr.) τόδ’ ἐκείνο, φίλοι παῖδες· μήτηρ
κινεῖ κραδίαν, κινεῖ δὲ χόλον.
σπεύδετε θάσσον δώματος εἴσω 100
καὶ μὴ πελάσητ’ ὄμματος ἐγγύς,
μηδὲ προσέλθητ’, ἀλλὰ φυλάσσεσθ’
ἄγριον ἦθος στυγεράν τε φύσιν
φρενὸς αὐθάδοῦς.
ἴτε νῦν, χωρεῖθ’ ὡς τάχος εἴσω. 105
δῆλον ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς ἐξαιρόμενον
νέφος οἰμωγῆς ὡς τάχ’ ἀνάψει
μείζονι θυμῷ· τί ποτ’ ἐργάσεται
μεγαλόσπλαγχνος δυσκατάπαυστος
ψυχὴ δηχθεῖσα κακοῖσιν;
109 μελανόσπλαγχνος Herwerden².

A foreign language can defeat even a most experienced of souls. Discussing one of the forceful adjectives with which the Nurse describes Medea about to be driven to further ruin by new private woes, J. Diggle dashingly disposes of the ms. reading μεγαλόσπλαγχνος in favour of his own conjecture μελανόσπλαγχνος (“anticipated” by Herwerden)³, which, to Diggle’s mind, ticks all the right boxes. It seems he has been a trifle overconfident and has, moreover, through *Lesefehler* of his own, made Wilamowitz endorse this conjecture.

¹ I humbly offer this trifle to Prof. A. K. Gavrillov on the day of his 75th birthday.

² I cite Diggle’s text and his *apparatus criticus* (Diggle 1984) every time, if not otherwise mentioned.

³ Diggle 1969, 38–39, reprinted with an addition in Diggle 1994, 10–11.

Medea is inside the house and her wrath is ripening (92 ff.). The Nurse, knowing that once out, it will come down hard and without discrimination, is busy tucking the children away in the safety of the house (we shall not see them again alive): “for what will this haughty (or else, “heaving, or bursting”), difficult to check soul dare when stung by these troubles?” The wording is intricate, though.

The intractability of *μεγαλόσπλαγχνος* was pointed out by D. Page, “a medical technical term ... its use in poetry is extremely venturesome”, who, however, did not resort to conjecture, but inclined to the metaphorical usage, with further references to *σπλάγχνα* as ‘soul’ or ‘depth of the heart’ in Aeschylus⁴. Diggle harps rather tastelessly and unsympathetically on this medical condition and its inapplicability to Medea’s case, concluding that “Medea’s ailment⁵ is not even metaphorical great-heartedness; rather it is a fit of melancholy, an ailment induced by minimal change of *μεγαλο-* to *μελανο-*”⁶. He provides *loci* for “the image *μελανόσπλαγχνος*” — mostly combinations with *φρήν*, *καρδία* and *θυμός*, and this with good reason, for the conjectured compound never occurs by itself and is no real gain for our passage. For one thing, Medea is not “melancholic” (*κινεῖν χόλον* in 99 means she is angry), and *μελανόσπλαγχνος* would not mean ‘melancholic’ even if pressed. *μελανόσπλαγχνος*, literally, ‘with black viscera’, is a state induced by fear (which can well be the case in Aesch. *Ch.* 412–413 *σπλάγχνα δέ μοι κελαινοῦται πρὸς ἔπος κλυοῦσαι*, ‘my blood is curdling’⁷ and several other passages quoted every time this perplexing ‘blackness’ is discussed), or, less often, by sordid ‘black’ deeds⁸. What is important here is that the emotion, be it ‘fear’, ‘anxiety’, or ‘grief and hopelessness’ (at Aesch. *Ch.* 412–413 I would rather suggest ‘fits of despair and frustrated eagerness’, and not ‘grief’), is *not* rage. But Medea is overweeningly proud⁹, willful and unstoppable (103–104)¹⁰. The Nurse has good reasons to be afraid (93–94): οὐδὲ παύσεται / χόλου, σάφ’ οἶδα, πρὶν κατασκήψαι τι (and to moralise on the excesses of royals), she must know her mistress’ temper.

⁴ Page 1938, 76.

⁵ This “ailment” will send four innocent people to an early grave. Medea is no blunderer in her wish *καὶ πᾶς δόμος ἔρροι* (114).

⁶ Diggle 1994, 10 = Diggle 1969, 38. — This (mechanical) corruption of *ΜΕΛΑΝΟ-* to *ΜΕΓΑΛΟ-* is in itself suspect. In uncials it is improbable, and in minuscule would involve a curious instance of ‘looking-glass’ writing.

⁷ Along with *Suppl.* 785, *Pers.* 115–116. — The commentators vary: “the emotion is fear” (Jocelyn 1970, 42), “the emotions of grief and hopelessness” (Sullivan 1997, 65), or “black is a natural symbol for anxiety” (Garvie 1986, 154, *ad loc.*).

⁸ For the discussion of these passages, as well as a useful overview of the controversy over the “black” inner organs, see Sullivan 1997, 59–67. See Jocelyn 1970, 42 for a neat explanation of the ‘physiopathological processes’ behind the blackness of internal organs. Each time the blackness of clotted blood was the most probable point of departure. Quite against the blackness as caused by clotted blood, Kudlien 1973, 54 ff. suggests „daß man sich die Schwarzfärbung im allgemeinen sehr konkret durch einen bestimmten „Stoff“ (und nicht durch Blutandrang) verursacht vorstellte“. But why introduce some “specific black stuff” (not identified by the author) when blood is at hand?

⁹ On “psychological terminology” in Euripides in general and on *Medea* 104 see Sullivan 2000, 13. Her exhaustive and orderly approach is marred at times by facile judgement, as, for instance, on *Medea* 104: “Euripides introduces a new adjective with *phren*”.

¹⁰ See Wilamowitz, a born and bred aristocrat: „warum hat Euripides nicht seine Medea durch Selbstmord enden lassen? <...> die rein menschliche Medea sollte doch den Selbstmord mit den Kindern wenigstens planen. Ja, wenn sie eine Waschfrau wäre. Einem Weibe von wahrhaft überlegener Größe kann der Gedanke gar nicht kommen, ihren Feinden, die sie so gern los wären, den Gefallen zu tun und sich ihnen selbst aus dem Wege zu räumen“, Wilamowitz 1906, 178–179.

Now, literally, *μεγαλόσπλαγχνος* is indeed a condition of an ‘enlarged abdomen’¹¹, but *σπλάγχνον* in Euripides is used in its literal meaning ‘inner parts’ only once, in *Electra* 828, when Aegisthus is reading his doom in the *ιερά*, whereas used metaphorically it occurs in *Alc.* 1009 (*χρή... μομφὰς δ’ οὐχ ὑπὸ σπλάγχνοις ἔχειν σιγῶντ’* meaning ‘not to harbour a grudge’), *Med.* 220 (*ὅστις πρὶν ἀνδρὸς σπλάγχνον ἐκμαθεῖν σαφῶς στρυγεῖ* *δεδορκῶς* ‘judges prematurely of a man’s worth before getting to know his innermost self’, *Hipp.* 118 (*εἴ τις σ’ ὑφ’ ἤβης σπλάγχνον ἔντονον φέρων* ‘if one is tense with arrogance of youth’), *Or.* 1201 (*χρόνῳ μαλάξειν σπλάγχνον* ‘his anger will gradually wear off’). Moreover, *-σπλάγχνος* enters into brave compounds, the best and closest parallel being *Hipp.* 424: *δουλοῖ γὰρ ἄνδρα, κἄν θρασύσπλαγχνός τις ἦι*, certainly used metaphorically to mean ‘even if courageous’. D. Mastronarde simply takes *μεγαλόσπλαγχνος* to be “a poetic coinage, variation on *μεγάθυμος*, *μεγαλήτωρ*, *μεγαλόφρων*”¹². Thus, *μεγαλόσπλαγχνος* has good reasons to stay, and was, *pace* Diggle, preferred by Wilamowitz in his letters to G. Murray¹³.

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¹¹ Induced by (excessive) drinking of sweet wine, Hipp. *De diaet. in morb. acut.* 50.

¹² Mastronarde 2002, 183. Before him Weil 1914, 14 *ad loc.*: *magnanima* and Valgiglio 1959, 27, *ad loc.*: “Il primo agg. significa ‘dale grandi viscere’ (con valore tecnico, in Ippocrate), in senso metaforico”.

¹³ See Bierl *et al.* 1991, 37: „109 Herw. besser fort: ich weiß nicht, daß dies medicinisch ist, cf. Hippokrates π. διαίτης ὀξέων 53 (15 Littré)”. The letter itself is typed, but the appendix is in hand, and Murray, who must have reported Herwerden’s conjecture in the proofs, withdrew it from the *apparatus*. What happened is that Diggle had read it as “Herw. besser fort[asse]” and was happy to learn that the great man had “commended” his idea back “in 1894” (in fact some seven years later, for the appendix came with the letter of 16, June 1901). When editing his miscellany to publish in the *Euripidea*, Diggle introduced this as an additional proof, see Diggle 1994, 11. I thank my reviewers for bringing to my attention the drawbacks of this hasty sketch and for helpful suggestions which I have done my best to adopt, and Mikhail M. Pozdnev who met this nuisance with sympathy and encouragement.

**“HERW[ERDEN] BESSER FORT:
«УБРАТЬ» ЕГО ИЛИ ОН «ЛУЧШЕ?» (EUR. MEDEA 109)**

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Критический аппарат издания Дж. Дигглы в серии ОСТ (1981–1994) славится точностью, полнотой и изысканной краткостью. Тем удивительнее найти в нем конъектуру всеми забытую — в самом факте «забытости» ничего предосудительного нет, Диггль часто скрупулезно восстанавливает и защищает авторство филологов прошлых веков, — а главное, неудачную. Конъектура Хервердена μελανόσπλαγχνος к ст. 109 «Медеи» Еврипида, упомянутая лишь в изданиях Принца—Векляйна и Верролла, была вновь (независимо) сделана Дигглем в 1969 г. и внесена в аппарат к тексту «Медеи». Дополнительный аргумент в ее пользу Диггль обнаружил уже после выхода первого тома (1984 г.), когда познакомился с опубликованными в 1991 г. письмами У. фон Виламовица к Г. Мюррею. В письме от 16 июня 1901 г. сохранились комментарии Виламовица к тексту «Медеи», подготовленному Мюрреем (ст. 40–380). Поняв комментарий к ст. 109 «Herw. besser fort: (далее — выражение сомнения)» как «Herw. besser fort[asse]», Диггль нашел «авторитетное подтверждение» своего мнения.

Ключевые слова: Еврипид, Медея, Диггль, Виламовиц, Херверден, критика текста.

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