

Aurelius) *multo melior et feracior ad virtutes*, and the similarly 'female' *fecundus* is used of a male at Valerius Flaccus 5.204 *fecundi proles Iovis*. The image is also well suited to the context, where it gives real point to the *et* linking *ferax scelerum* to *quia prima provenerant*: *provenire* can be seen like *ferax* as a metaphor from agriculture, referring to the shooting or springing up of plants – cf. Tacitus, *Agr.* 12.5 *solum praeter oleam vitemque et cetera calidioribus terris oriri sueta patiens frugum pecudumque secundum: tarde mitescunt, cito proveniunt*; OLD s.v. *provenio* 3. Sejanus, having seen his evil designs achieve their first shoots in the death of Drusus, moves to put into practice the further criminal plans with which his mind is burgeoning.

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‘ALII DISCUNT – PRO PUDOR! – A FEMINIS’: JEROME,
EPIST. 53.7.1

In the letter which initiated his correspondence with Paulinus of Nola Jerome deplores the propensity of the inexperienced to pontificate on scripture. Three kinds of incompetence are denounced. The second takes the following form: ‘alii discunt – pro pudor! – a feminis, quod viros doceant’ (Epist. 53.7.1). As in the other two denunciations, Jerome has chosen to express himself in general terms; scholars have nonetheless assumed that here a specific individual is meant. Nautin argued that with these words Jerome was attacking Rufinus, who is here represented as being intellectually dependent on his patroness Melania.¹ More recently Testard has maintained that Jerome’s criticism is in fact directed against Ambrose.² However Nautin’s view that Rufinus is the target has now been re-affirmed by Rebenich.³ The purpose of the present note is to draw attention to a piece of evidence which has hitherto been overlooked; it would seem to indicate that the object of Jerome’s attack cannot be Rufinus.

The full text of the sentence in question is the following: ‘alii discunt – pro pudor! – a feminis, quod viros doceant, et, ne parum hoc sit, quadam facilitate verborum, immo audacia disserunt aliis, quod ipsi non intellegunt’. Jerome’s antagonist is credited with ‘quaedam facilitas verborum’.⁴ ‘Verbal facility’ is,

¹ P. Nautin, ‘Études de chronologie hiéronymienne (393–7)’, *REAug* 19 (1973), 222–3.

² M. Testard, ‘Jérôme et Ambroise: Sur un “aveu” du *De officiis* de l’évêque de Milan’, in Y.-M. Duval (ed.), *Jérôme entre l’Occident et l’Orient* (Paris, 1988), pp. 245–6. Testard’s case has evidently been accepted by Y.-M. Duval, ‘Les premiers rapports de Paulin de Nole avec Jérôme: Moine et philosophe? Poète ou exégète?’, in *Polyanthema: Studi di letteratura cristiana antica offerti a Salvatore Costanza* (Stud. Tardoant. 7; Messina, 1989), p. 195. Testard argues that Jerome’s first two denunciations of incompetence are aimed at Ambrose; for evidence that the third is also an attack on him cf. the present writer, ‘“Taceo de meis similibus” (Jerome, Epist. 53.7)’, *VetChr* 29 (1992), 261–8. Testard did not attempt a rebuttal of Nautin’s thesis; he merely set out his own as an alternative.

³ S. Rebenich, *Hieronymus und sein Kreis* (Stuttgart, 1992), pp. 230–1. Nautin’s interpretation had also been accepted by J. N. D. Kelly, *Jerome: His Life, Writings, and Controversies* (London, 1975), p. 192. Most recently P. Lardet, *L’apologie de Jérôme contre Rufin: Un commentaire* (Leiden, 1993), p. 288, has simply recorded both views and observed that ‘une cible n’exclut pas forcément l’autre’.

⁴ Nautin (op. cit. n. 1), 223, n. 51, remarks that ‘la même expression’ occurs in the *Liber de optimo genere interpretandi* (Epist. 57), where Jerome defends his translation of Epiphanius’ famous letter to John of Jerusalem: ‘ac ne forsitan accusator meus facilitate, qua cuncta loquitur...’ (Epist. 57.1.2). Nautin accordingly argues that here too the reference must be to Rufinus; his reasoning is accepted by G. J. M. Bartelink, *Hieronymus, Liber de optimo genere*

however, the last attribute that Jerome would ascribe to Rufinus. The two men enjoyed close contact in youth and again as near neighbours in Palestine: hence Jerome was thoroughly familiar with Rufinus' linguistic capabilities. The following vignette is revealing: 'testudineo Grunnius [sc. Rufinus] incedebat ad loquendum gradu et per intervalla quaedam vix pauca verba capiebat, ut eum putares singultire, non proloqui' (*Epist.* 125.18.2).⁵

In fact Jerome speaks of Rufinus repeatedly in terms which suggest the direct opposite of 'facilitas verborum'.⁶ The evidence may be adduced: *elingues* (*In Os. lib. 2 praef.*);⁷ 'audio praeterea scorpium, mutum animal... mussitare' (*In Is. lib. 10 praef.*); 'tu qui in latinis mussitas et testudineo gradu moveris potius quam incedis, vel graece debes scribere...' (*Adv. Rufin.* 1.17);⁸ 'qui interdum et in latinis haesitat' (*ibid.* 1.19);⁹ 'compeditam putes linguam eius et inextricabilibus nodis ligatam vix in humanum sonum erumpere' (*ibid.* 2.11).¹⁰ The abusive term 'Grunnius', which Jerome regularly applies to Rufinus,¹¹ itself connotes the antithesis of ease of expression.¹²

A further passage merits attention; it is by Rufinus himself. One of his few independent treatises is prefaced by the following instance of the modesty *topos*: 'nusquam tamen concitus adest nobis dicendi cursus, nulla copia... in latum distenta spatia rapidioribus cursibus superare. ideo ergo patere nos, si forte vel tardis valuerimus eo quo vocas passibus pervenire' (*Patr.* 1.1). Such protestations of inadequacy are legion in ancient literature.¹³ Nonetheless the particular wording of this passage would seem to be significant: it employs the vocabulary of speed (*concitus*, *rapidioribus*, *tardis*). No other Latin example of the *topos* uses such language.¹⁴ The passage would therefore appear to supply further evidence for Rufinus' want of fluency.

interpretandi (*Epistula* 57): *Ein Kommentar* (Leiden, 1980), p. 27 (cf. Lardet [op. cit. n. 3], p. 55). Nautin's deduction is however inadmissible: the sense of *facilitas* in the two passages is quite different. Whereas Jerome employs the term in letter 53 to signify 'facultas rei facile... perficiendae, mobilitas, agilitas' (so *TLL* 6.1 col. 73.26–80; the passage from Jerome's letter is adduced at 66–7), the meaning in letter 57 is 'cum nota vituperationis, fere i. q. negligentia, credulitas, levitas (cf. Gloss. licentia)' (so *TLL* 6.1 coll. 73.81–74.56; for letter 57 cf. col. 74.27–8).

⁵ The ensuing description of Rufinus as 'censorem... Romanae facundiae' is to be seen in the light of the phrase which introduces the anecdote: 'muti de eloquentibus iudicantes'.

⁶ Allusions to his 'eloquence' are of course sarcastic; cf. Lardet (op. cit. n. 3), p. 55.

⁷ For the reference to Rufinus cf. F. Cavallera, *Saint Jérôme: Sa vie et son oeuvre* (Louvain-Paris, 1922) i.2 131.

⁸ Here 'testudineo gradu' clearly denotes Rufinus' halting style.

⁹ Lardet (op. cit. n. 3), p. 100, points in this connection to Rufinus' statements at *Apol. adv. Hier.* 1.11 ('dicebam me... ad latinum sermonem tricennali iam pene incuria torpuisse') and *Hist. praef.* ('qui in tam multis annis usum latini sermonis amiserim'). However Lardet himself acknowledges that such avowals simply belong to the 'modesty *topos*'; they occur repeatedly in Jerome's own *oeuvre* (cf. T. Janson, *Latin Prose Prefaces: Studies in Literary Conventions* [Stockholm, 1964], pp. 137–8). Jerome's criticism must accordingly have a wider reference.

¹⁰ On 'inextricabilibus nodis' Lardet (op. cit. n. 3), p. 178, observes: 'cliché de critique littéraire'. However the parallels he adduces deal rather with argumentative involution than with halting and inarticulate style.

¹¹ For documentation cf. Cavallera (op. cit. n. 7) i.2 131–5.

¹² Cf. P. Antin, 'Jérôme, *Ep.* 125.18.2–3', *RBén* 69 (1959), 344 (à propos Grunnius): 's' il a une élocution défectueuse, c'est sans doute parce que le cochon a la gorge délicate: "guttur homini tantum et subus intumescit" (Pline, *N.H.* 11.68.1), et chez Élien, *H. anim.* 3.35, il est question de porc aphone en Macédoine'.

¹³ Cf. Janson (op. cit. n. 9), pp. 124–41 (for additions cf. the present writer, *RFIC* 112 [1984], 288, n. 3).

¹⁴ *Βραδύγλωσσο*s occurs at Gerontius, *V. Mel. iun. praef.* and Ps. Epiphanius, *Hom.* 5 p. 488^A; however, this is clearly an echo of Exod. 4.10.

In Jerome's attacks on Rufinus that were adduced above we are not dealing with the kind of polemical cliché to which Duval has drawn attention;¹⁵ nor is Jerome being gratuitously malicious. These passages offer a specific and sustained critique; the same is also true of Jerome's attacks on Ambrose. There however the very opposite fault is castigated: Ambrose is repeatedly charged with 'verbal facility'. Again the evidence may be set out: 'rhetorici pompa sermonis' (*Epist.* 22.2.2);¹⁶ 'tanto se fudit eloquio, ut, quidquid ad laudem virginum pertinet, exquisierit, ordinarit, expresserit' (ibid. 22.22.3); 'sermone composito aurem populi mulserint' (ibid. 53.7.2);¹⁷ 'eloquentiam iungere saecularem et pene in communibus locis pompaticum iactare sermonem' (*In Eph. prol.*);¹⁸ 'totum flaccidum, molle, nitidum atque formosum et exquisitis hinc inde odoribus pigmentatum' (*Didym. spir. prol.*); 'in verbis luderet' (*Hom. Orig. in Luc. prol.*). The reference to 'quaedam facilitas verborum' in Jerome's letter to Paulinus should be added to the same dossier: his target is not Rufinus, but Ambrose.

One final point may be briefly made. In restating Nautin's view that Rufinus is the object of Jerome's denunciation Rebenich asserts that this attack is to be seen in the context of Jerome's celebrated quarrel with Rufinus.¹⁹ However he would thereby seem to have overlooked the fact that this letter is concerned exclusively with exegesis: whereas Ambrose had a big reputation as an exegete, Rufinus had none.²⁰

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¹⁵ Y.-M. Duval, 'Pélage est-il le censeur inconnu de l'*Adversus Iovinianum* à Rome en 393? Ou: Du "portrait-robot" de l'hérétique chez S. Jérôme', *RHE* 75 (1980), 532-3. In his discussion of Jerome's attack on Rufinus' inarticulateness Antin (op. cit. n. 12), pp. 343-4, adduces only one parallel that does not concern Rufinus himself: it refers to a centaur (*V. Paul.* 7).

¹⁶ For the reference to Ambrose cf. the present writer, 'Ambrose and Jerome: The opening shot', *Mnemosyne* n. s. 46 (1993), 369-73.

¹⁷ For the Ambrosian reference cf. the present writer (op. cit. n. 2).

¹⁸ For Ambrose as target cf. W. Dunphy, 'On the date of St Ambrose's *De Tobia*', *SEJG* 27 (1984), 29-33.

¹⁹ Rebenich (op. cit. n. 3), p. 230, n. 167.

²⁰ For Jerome's repeated attacks on Ambrose's exegetical shortcomings cf. A. Paredi, 'S. Gerolamo e S. Ambrogio', in *Mélanges Eugène Tisserant* (*Stud. Test.* 235; Vatican City, 1964) v. 2 183-98 *passim*.