

same year as his father, A.D. 23. Britannicus' profile appears frequently on provincial coinage, similarly looking very mature, in fact on occasion as old as his father; unfortunately, with the exception of the item under discussion, all examples are undated. The issues of Alexandria are generally superior to most other provincials in their depictions but not consistently so. There are no other full heads of *children* to make a test comparison, but one might note the Alexandrian bronze with obverse head of Augustus (over 60) and reverse of the roughly eighteen-year-old Gaius Caesar, where the two seem almost to be coeval.¹⁰ The alternative, that the coin is Neronian, can be all but ruled out. The reverse type is exclusively Claudian, and by year three of Nero's reign Britannicus, who in any case is never depicted on Neronian coinage, had been dead for two years.

This coin offers potentially valuable evidence for the timing of Claudius' intervention. On the surrender of the Britons the emperor despatched his sons-in-law Pompeius Magnus and Lucius Silanus immediately to Rome with news of the victory. Dio implies that the Senate acted without delay (*μαθοῦσα δ' ἡ γερουσία*) in voting him a triumph (which he celebrated the following year), with triumphal arches and an annual festival, as well as the title of 'Britannicus' both for him and his son.¹¹ The significance of the coin's date is self-evident. The victory must have been achieved in time for the message to be sent to Rome, the senatorial decree to be passed and communicated to Alexandria, and the coin to be engraved, by no later than 29 August 43. This indicates that Claudius had to have achieved the surrender of the British chiefs shortly before mid-August at the very latest, which would require an arrival in the island no later than the closing days of July.¹² The existence of a unique coin must always be treated with caution and reservation, even if the editor of the collection raises no doubts. Even where the piece is undoubtedly genuine, there is always the possibility that it might have been altered by retooling. With these cautions, we can now supplement Dio's general observations, with concrete evidence for a *terminus ante* of late July for Claudius' personal intervention in the British campaign.

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¹⁰ Grandsons of Tiberius: *RPC* 946–9, cf. *RIC*² 42 (on the dates, Tac. *Ann.* 2.4.1,15); Claudius and Britannicus together: *RPC* 2314 (Ilium); Augustus and Gaius Caesar: *RPC* 5019 (Alexandria).

¹¹ Dio 60.21.5–22.2.

¹² Suet. *Iul.* 57 cites 100 miles a day as a record land speed; Pliny *N.H.* 19.3 cites nine days for a fast journey by sea from Puteoli to Alexandria.

IS NOTHING GENTLER THAN WILD BEASTS? SENECA, *PHAEDRA* 558

Hippolytus' declamation on the progress of human depravity brings him from the invention of weapons to the climactic horror of stepmothers (553–8), after which he turns to the vices of women in general and Medea in particular (559–64):¹

¹ My text is quoted from O. Zwierlein, *L. Annaei Senecae Tragoediae* (Oxford, 1986). There are no pertinent variants, and Zwierlein lists no conjectures. All references are *ad loc.* except as specified.

tum scelera dempto fine per cunctas domos iere, nullum caruit exemplo nefas: a fratre frater, dextera gnati parens cecidit, maritus coniugis ferro iacet perimuntque fetus impiae matres suos; taceo nouercas: mitius nil est feris. Sed dux malorum femina: haec scelorum artifex obsedit animos, huius incestae stupris fumant tot urbes, bella tot gentes gerunt et uersa ab imo regna tot populos premunt. sileantur aliae: sola coniunx Aegei, Medea, reddet feminas dirum genus.	555 560
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There are two problems in this passage, and both centre on the second half of 558, *mitius nil est feris*. The meaning of the words is obscure at best, and the transition from what precedes to what follows is also very difficult, no matter how we understand them. G. O. Hutchinson has argued for a lacuna after 558, since *sed* introduces no sort of contrast with the preceding words,² while both the editor and the anonymous referee contemplate excision of all or part of the line.³ Either or both of these suggestions is likely to be right. The coincidence of two separate problems in one place is a sign that they are likely to be related, and in this case both could be removed by marking a lacuna after line 558 and bracketing either the second half of the line or all of it, as a lame attempt to fill the gap. However, on the principle that minor surgery should be attempted before resorting to amputation and prosthetic substitution, I will offer a solution to the first problem only, while admitting that it leaves the connection unsatisfactory.

The difficulties of *mitius nil est feris* are best outlined by quoting the incompatible interpretations of the three most recent commentaries. M. Coffey and R. G. Mayer (Cambridge, 1990) consider the text corrupt:

mitius . . . feris: this clause, which must offer a comment related specifically to stepmothers, has long caused difficulty since its most obvious sense is that 'there is nothing gentler than wild beasts'. The context however requires 'the very beasts are altogether gentler (than stepmothers)'. S. might have written either *melius ingenium est feris* (cf. Ov. *Am.* 2.10.26 *turpe erit, ingenium mitius esse feris*), or *nulla non melior fera est* (= *H. O.* 236). The desired sense is not to be found in the transmitted text, nor have emendations which stick closely to the paradosis proved satisfactory. The clause may therefore be severely corrupt.

I would add that 'there is nothing gentler than wild beasts' would be nonsense in any context. After such devastating remarks about the paradosis, it comes as a bit of surprise to turn back to the text and find neither obelus nor apparatus, despite the 'measure of editorial independence' (from Zwierlein) professed in the preface.

In referring to 'emendations which stick closely to the paradosis', Coffey and Mayer seem to allude to Scaliger, who tentatively suggested *mitior mens est feris*,⁴ and F. Leo (Berlin, 1878–9), who emended to *taceo nouercam: mitior nil est feris*

² G. O. Hutchinson, *Latin Literature from Seneca to Juvenal* (Oxford, 1993), p. 162 n. 27.

³ As always, I am grateful to both for their comments. Both argue that *taceo nouercas* would make an unusually effective half-line, though Dr Heyworth prefers to delete all of 558 as an interpolation. The fact that the other four half-lines in Seneca (*Pha.* 605, *Tro.* 1103, *Pho.* 319, and *Thy.* 100) are followed by a change of speaker is another hint that something may be missing here. The referee also points out that *mitius nil est feris* could be sound, if the next (lost) line included something (e.g. *humanum genus*) for it to agree with.

⁴ Quoted in Scriverius' edition (Leiden, 1621): 'haec non capio. Si dicat *mitior mens est feris*, melius caperem. Aliquid tale poscit sententia. *Scal.*'

and adduced a parallel from Euripides for the adverbial use of *nil*: ἐχθρὰ γὰρ ἡ 'πιοῦσα μητρὶα τέκνοις / τοῖς πρόσθ', ἐχίδνης οὐδὲν ἡπιωτέρᾳ (Alc. 309–10). Neither corruption seems particularly likely, and Leo's conjecture has a more serious problem: it is incompatible with the context (such as it is). The following lines—assuming for the moment, with Leo, that nothing has been lost or inserted—show that *mitius nil est feris* must refer not to Phaedra alone, nor to stepmothers in general, but to all of the human criminals on Hippolytus' list.⁵ In accordance with this interpretation, Zwierlein, who considers the *paradosis* sound, takes *nil* as the subject of the sentence:⁶

Nihil faßt hier ebenso all zuvor genannten Menschen zusammen ('nihil in humano genere' paraphrasiert deshalb Carlsson) wie in 353 (*nihil immune est*) alle aufgezählten Tiere. Dem *taceo novercas* an unserer Stelle entspricht dort *vincit saevas cura novercas* (357).

This does not convince. In the parallel passage, the negative takes up a preceding *omnes*, which makes the shift from the plural beasts to the generalizing neuter singular more explicit and far less ambiguous: *uindicat omnes / natura sibi, nihil immune est* (352–3). Our passage provides no such hint, and I do not see how any reader or member of the audience (if there was an audience) could be expected to realize that *nil* means *nihil in humano genere*, or even that it is the subject: *nil horum* might just suffice, but *nil* alone will not.

Finally, A. J. Boyle (Liverpool, 1987) also finds the *paradosis* satisfactory, but sticks with Leo's interpretation of *nil*, glossing the phrase as follows:

mitius nil est feris: the subject of *est* is *nouerca* treated as neuter. *Nil* is adverbial accusative of extent (see 119n.). *Feris* is ablative of comparison (see 143n.). Lit. 'she is a thing to no extent more gentle than wild beasts'.

That is a lot of explaining for four little words, and the switch from the feminine plural before the colon to the collective neuter singular after it is very harsh, particularly as the subject of *est* is only implied and there is another neuter singular loitering in the vicinity looking like a subject, and taken as such by Zwierlein, though it is an adverbial accusative. It is also unclear whether Boyle's implied singular *nouerca* is Phaedra or a generic wicked stepmother. If the former, his interpretation is open to the same objection as Leo's conjecture. If the latter, why the awkward change of gender?

I have quoted the most recent commentators at some length because each has contributed something to my proposed solution. I believe that Coffey and Mayer are right in arguing that emendation is necessary, since the required sense cannot be extracted from the *paradosis* without violence. At the same time, Zwierlein is right to make the words apply to the whole list of human criminals, not just Phaedra, and Leo and Boyle in taking *nil* as an adverbial accusative. What we need is a conjecture that will produce a clear shift from the feminine plural to the neuter singular while

⁵ The distinction is a bit artificial. Obviously, the final position of the stepmothers in the list—not to mention the *praeteritio*—makes them the most prominent class of criminals, while Phaedra is by far the most important member of that class in Hippolytus' eyes. Perhaps we should say then that the following words (*sed dux malorum femina*) refer to all human criminals, especially stepmothers, and most especially Phaedra.

⁶ *Kritischer Kommentar zu den Tragödien Senecas* (Abh. Akad. Mainz, Geistes- und Sozialwiss. Klasse, Einzelveröffentlichung 6; Stuttgart, 1986), p. 168. The interpretation of R. Giomini (*Phaedra*, Rome, 1955) is similar. Both provide references to other scholars who have argued along the same lines.

preventing the reader from taking *nil* as the subject, since that would leave us with the nonsensical meaning quoted in my title.

In following the critical principle ‘start from the sense’, translations are often useful. Here the required meaning is expressed most clearly and succinctly by Segal’s version:⁷

‘As to stepmothers I am silent: they are a thing no gentler than beasts.’

This is an excellent rendering of just what Seneca must have written—if, that is, he wrote 558b at all:

taceo nouercas: mitius nil *sunt* feris.

The singulars and plurals are now in the right places, just where they are in Segal’s version, while the rules of Latin concord prevent the reader from taking *nil* as the subject (with Zwierlein), leaving an adverbial accusative as the only thing it can be (so Leo and Boyle). The shift from feminine plural to neuter singular is still very bold, but clearly signposted, as in Zwierlein’s parallel passage. Corruption would have been inevitable, as with Juvenal’s *quota portio faecis Achaiei?*, ‘what proportion of the dregs (of Roman society) are Greeks?’ (3.61), where nearly all manuscripts mistake the nominative plural for a genitive singular and ‘correct’ the gender to *Achaeae*.⁸ After *mitius nil*, plural *sunt* would have been equally vulnerable. The fact that ‘there is nothing gentler than wild beasts’ is nonsense in any language has not deterred modern translators from glossing it with vernacular nonsense.⁹ Why should a medieval scribe have been more fastidious when it came to copying such nonsense, or even (in at least one case) ‘correcting’ *mitius nil sunt feris* so as to produce it?

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⁷ C. Segal, *Language and Desire in Seneca’s ‘Phaedra’* (Princeton, 1986), p. 90. The interpretation, which is roughly the same as Boyle’s and not entirely different from Leo’s, is no doubt much older, though I have not attempted to trace it further back. Segal’s translation is identical to F. J. Miller’s Loeb² (London and Cambridge, 1929), if we ignore—and it is not easy—the latter’s irritatingly archaic style, which must have been hopelessly out of date the day it was published: ‘I say naught of stepmothers; they are no whit more merciful than beasts’.

⁸ Those few scribes who preserved *Achaei* may be suspected of not knowing the gender of *faex*.

⁹ L. Herrmann (Budé⁴, Paris, 1968): ‘quant aux marâtres, je les passe sous silence. Les fauves ne sont rien moins que doux.’ T. Thomann (Artemis², Zurich and Munich, 1978): ‘Ich rede nicht von Stiefmüttern: nicht Milderer gibt es als wilde Tiere.’ F.-R. Chaumartin (Budé, Paris, 1996): ‘Je passe sous silence les marâtres: il n’y a pas plus de douceur ici que parmi les fauves.’ No doubt the facing-text format encourages literalism.

DIVIDING THE DINNER: BOOK DIVISIONS IN PETRONIUS’ *CENA TRIMALCHIONIS**

The information transmitted on the numeration of the books of Petronius’ *Satyricon* is notoriously contradictory. Parts of the extant fragmentary text are variously assigned to Books 14–16: the *testimonia* are clearly set out in Müller’s recent fourth edition (whose numeration I use here), and briefly discussed by Sullivan¹: of Müller’s

* My thanks to Stephen Heyworth and to the anonymous referee for *CQ* for some useful comment and criticism.

¹ K. Müller, *Petronius: Satyricon Reliquiae* (Leipzig, 1995), pp. xxx–xxxviii; J. P. Sullivan, *The Satyricon of Petronius* (London, 1968), pp. 34–5.