

Seneca *Apocolocyntosis* Notes 4-6

4 verses (on Parcae weaving Nero's life/Golden age of his reign): hexameter metre. Discussed by Whitton (2013), 161ff.

Contrast between Nero's future and Claudius' past reign. Claudius' looks worse in comparison. How straight do we take eulogy? Presumably sentiments meant to be taken sincerely (panegyric standard). Is Seneca poking fun at bad panegyric? "Their facile elisionless flow presents expected images in formalized word-patterns with insipid blandness. There are no formal elements of parody or satire: the author makes his literary point by holding a mirror up to uninventive mediocrity" (Eden p. 75); Eden on 4.1.1 notes frequent repetition- suggests we are meant to be wearied by banal repetition (though see now Whitton). Also move to prose deflates.

4.1.1 "turpi ... fuso" of Claudius' life: contrast glorious thread of Nero.

4.1.4 "Pieria ... lauro"- link with Muses and Apollo. Nero comp himself with; nb into poetry and music. Nero-Apollo-sun equation found in contemporary writers.

4.1.6 "felici": *felix* repeated frequently in comparison with Nero's reign cf 10; 23; 1 "initio saeculi felicissimi": "conventional phraseology for the golden expectations of a new principate" (Eden); among references, Eden notes 4.1.9 and 23f (Apollo's song) and Sen *De Clem* 2.1.3 (Nero)- and cf 5.1 "felicitas" in Claudius' death.

4.1.8-9 "mutatur uilis pretioso lana metallo, / aurea formoso descendunt saecula filo"- spinning gold for Golden Age (replacing Iron under Claudius).

4.1.9 "aurea ... saecula" foreshadowed in metallic (gold) threads. humorous concreteness? nb golden line (abAB).

4.1.12 nb spontaneity feature of Golden Age.

4.1.14 Tithonus and Nestor proverbial for living long: nb can prophesy long life for Nero at beginning of his reign.

4.1.15ff Apollo's favour; as if tricking the sisters into spinning more than usual- though they also add years.

4.1.15 Apollo helps (because leader of Fates and in honour of Nero).

4.1.20 archaic negative imperative "ne demite".

4.1.22 like Apollo in beautiful, youthful looks (nb 17 at beg) "ille mihi similis uultu similisque decore" (cf. 30-2): nb contrast handicapped Claudius...

4.1.23 "nec cantu nec voce minor"- nb Nero's artistic pretensions.

4.1.24 "legumque silentia rumpet"- hinting at Claudius' legal abuse, taking over role of lawyers; nb apart from this not much on statecraft; no promise of future campaigns.

4.1.25ff. stars comparison nb cf. beautiful ephebes e.g. Pallas *Aen.* 8, and rulers.

4.1.28 like sun.

4.1.30 talis Caesar adest: "such a Caesar is at hand,"; Whitton (2013), citing Cole (2006), suggests would be piquant if Nero were in the audience.

4.2 Greek quote (Eur. Cresphontes fr. 449 v. 4)- there should rejoice because man left misfortunes. nb contrast rejoicing when Claudius carried out dead (opposite of usual) with rejoicing at Nero's birth.

"ebulliit" "gurgled his life out"; Eden suggests Claudius the gourd being emptied. Dobesch 2002 suggests diarrhea.

"ex eo desiit uiuere uideri"- nb fits with emptiness/lack of visibility: 3.2 not thought to exist i.e. proverbial for being ignored but nb emptiness/insubstantiality e.g 4.2; 5.4 Hercules not sure if he's human; cf problems with him being understood e.g. 7.4 "haec uisus est dicere" (link with gourd?).

died whilst listening to comedians- good reason to be afraid of them. Humour dictates treatment of topics.

4.3 rude jibe at Claudius' communication problems. Reference to bowel movement which

helped defeat first poisoning (Tac. *Ann.* 12.67).

5.1 places responsibility for truth on informer (man who saw Claudius going up to heaven in 1)- how would he know what happens in heaven? nb reference to source like historian (cf. language “in caelo quae acta sint audite”).

5.2 Claudius’ defects; nb dragging right foot- Eden notes Claudius could never put auspicious foot forwards.

5.3 humour as Hercules sent to find out what kind of man Claudius is; implication he is a monster. Hercules presented as rather stupid (6.1 *minime uafro*- in comedic guise, gullible). Eden says presented in one of his comic guises- gullible, blustering, cowardly (nb *timuerit*)

5.4 “quasi homo”.

5.4 diminutive “Graeculo”- debunks mighty Hercules. Hercules quotes Hom. *Od.* 1.170 (Athene as Mentos to Telemachus).

Claudius quotes from Homer (*Od.* 9.39, Odysseus to Alcinous): showing he was emperor- i.e. a Caesar (Julius Caesar claimed descent from Aeneas); Claudius often supposed to have quoted from Greek and was ridiculed for it. Cicones= savage- as if Claudius had fallen amongst barbarians Romans.

6.1 not subjunctive because vivid.

Amusing that Fever the only god that accompanied him- had shrine on Palatine and so was neighbour “quae cum illo tot annis vixi”. Eden ad loc. suggests this implies “that he was a chronic sufferer from malarial fever, one of whose symptoms, shivering and shaking, would have been indistinguishable from his habitual trembling”.

Fever takes quote literally- says he’s from Gaul. Claudius angry (nb character flaw).

6.1 as if suburb of rival town.

6.1 “Gallus germanus”- pun. germanus= “sibling/genuine” and German: genuine Gaul and German Gaul.

6.1 “cepit Romam”: like Gauls did in past.

6.2 ref to Claudius’ despotic habits; jibe at shaking hand.

6.2 reference to freedmen’s control over him.