

Milton's *Samson Agonistes* what is counted as "Or do m'eyes misrepresent? Can this b' 'ee?" is actually read as "Or do my eyes misrepresent? Can this be he?" (124)—the theoretical pentameter thus becoming an actual hexameter. Again, the adjustments may run in the opposite direction, as when long-mute final *e*'s are held in modern French poetry by theory, or, in syllabic Japanese poetry, final *n*'s count as full syllables. Acoustic fact is often in tension with traditional belletristic theory. Nevertheless it is wholly possible that a Roman housewife of the first century B.C. may, in ejecting visiting children from the house at mealtime, have said *Ite dom'* instead of *Ite domum*, and on the strength of the passage in the *Ad Herennium* I believe that by Virgil's time, at least, the colloquial reading, when the final *m* preceded a vowel, had also become the literary one.

The dropping of the *-em* in *itionem*, which is followed by a consonant, is another matter. For one thing, the preservation of it in the passage we have been considering would result in *Dom' itionem*, which by a little humorous stretching or by the ignoring of the final syllable could easily be equated with *Domitium*. Moreover, it seems likely, on purely semantic grounds, that the *-um* in *Domitium* would have to be preserved because the sex of a human being is normally more significant than the gender of a common noun. We should want to know that the Domitian in question was not *Domitiam*. Proper nouns might thus have resisted a development that was occurring in common nouns, at least upon first use in any given context.

One further possibility may be suggested. May not *all* vowel-plus-*m* endings (except those in proper names when the sex had to be indicated) have been dropped in colloquial speech but those which were not followed by vowels have been retained in formal poetry? Such a halfway compromise between the colloquial and the "real" or "correct" forms (as conservative grammarians probably thought of them) in oral readings of poetry would not be unthinkable if the loss of the syllable began before following vowels. If phonologists are correct in thinking that all vowel-plus-*m* endings had dropped from the spoken language, the compromise must indeed have been made.

The course of these reflections has led to some doubt about the *-em* of *itionem*: the pun in the *Ad Herennium* would be neater if it were suppressed, but official metrical theory demands that it be sounded. As regards the *-um* of *domum*, however, the implication is unambiguous; it cannot have been sounded at all. No imaginable slurring or nasalization will avoid obscuring beyond recognition the required homophony with *Domitium*. At the beginning of the *Aeneid* we may accordingly read, unapologetically, *mult' ill'* (or, rapidly, *ille*) *et terris iactatus*; and if a bright student should ask, "Was *multum* really pronounced 'mult'?" we can reply, a little more confidently than before, "By Virgil's time a vowel-plus-*m* ending was silent before a word beginning with a vowel."

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SENECA'S *POTENTIA*

With respect to "mors Burri infregit Senecae potentiam" (Tac. *Ann.* 14. 52. 1), D. C. A. Shotter has recently argued for the truth of Tacitus' statement against G. Walter's doubts ("Two Notes on Nero," *CP*, LXIV [1969], 109 ff.).¹ His arguments are not conclusive. The Tacitean picture of the deterioration of

Nero's reign after the death of the supposed paragon Burrus does not stand up to investigation.² After Seneca's interview with Nero and retirement from the court, Tacitus describes him as *perculso* (*Ann.* 14. 17. 1), yet he can still survive secret charges concerning his friendship with Piso which were laid by a mysterious

1. R. Syme, *Tacitus* (Oxford, 1958), p. 591 says much the same, although he slightly qualifies the claim in his note *ad loc.*

2. For Burrus, and the consequences of his death, see my article "Executions, Trials, and Punishment in the Reign of Nero," *Parola del passato*, CXVII (1967) 425 ff.

Romanus.³ It may be significant that the same word *perculsus* is used to describe Romanus' discomfiture: In 64, Seneca was still able to outlive his refusal to join two alleged villains on a mission of temple plundering in Asia and Greece by pleading ill-health,⁴ and it was not easy to incriminate Seneca in the Pisonian conspiracy; only the *eques* Antonius Natalis showed any willingness to provide evidence (*Ann.* 15. 60–61).

It is also wrong to assume that Seneca's position was fatally weakened by Burrus' two successors. The division of authority was not novel; Burrus himself had replaced two men in 51 (see my article [cited n.2] p. 430). Tigellinus is too familiar to be documented here. Faenius Rufus, however, has remarkable importance.⁵ Tacitus claims that he was appointed "ex vulgi favore, quia rem frumentariam sine quaestu tractabat" (*Ann.* 14. 51). This elevation had occurred in 55, thanks to Agrippina (*ibid.* 10. 22). The year 62 is a curious one for the advancement of an old associate of Agrippina. It is not impossible that Seneca had a hand in his appointment; the two were certainly associates up to the unmasking of the Pisonian conspiracy.⁶ Burrus and Seneca were both protégés, albeit ungrateful ones, of Agrippina. Faenius might well have seemed an attractive successor to Burrus in Seneca's eyes. The hope was doomed. As soon as Seneca was *perculso*, Faenius was attacked for his old connection with Agrippina,⁷ yet Faenius, like Seneca, is not liqui-

dated until 65, after the collapse of Piso's plot. It is equally noteworthy that Piso survived until 65, although friendship with him was deemed suspicious as early as 62. The final behavior of Faenius is despicable, but his actions are those of a desperate man struggling to save his own skin. There is no evidence that he had any wish to see Seneca die; Seneca and Burrus showed an equally natural concern with their own skins during Nero's murder of Agrippina (*Ann.* 14. 7; see Baldwin, *loc. cit.*, n. 2, p. 432). Faenius is an enigmatic figure in Tacitus. He is introduced with the stigma of *segnem innocentiam* (*Ann.* 14. 51), but this is later transmuted into the accolade *vita famaue laudatum*.⁸

It can be conceded that Seneca's position was weakened by the death of Burrus. But *infregit potentiam* is without warrant. Had Faenius proved a stronger personality than Tigellinus, Seneca might have waxed as influential as before. It was not usual for a man's *potentia* to be suddenly destroyed by one particular event under Nero. The Emperor was slow to move against people currently out of his favor, and he usually had to be goaded by such people as Poppaea and Tigellinus. Seneca, Faenius, Piso, Rubellius Plautus, and Faustus Cornelius Sulla Felix are all examples. And, as Vespasian proved, favor could be regained. The *deteriores* did not have things all their own way, and paragons of virtue did not always stand up to close scrutiny.⁹

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3. It is impossible to establish the identity of Seneca's accuser. Syme, *op. cit.*, p. 745, assumes him to have been a freedman of Nero; the text provides no warrant for this. Tentative identification has been made with T. Claudius Romanus, freedman of Claudius; see Furneaux *ad Ann.* 14. 65. 2 and P. Fabia, *Onomasticon Taciteum*, p. 594. Romanus Hispanus has been thought of, but his name may have been Romanus; see Syme, *op. cit.*, p. 326, n. 5.

4. *Ann.* 15. 45. The incident provoked rumors of an attempt to have Seneca poisoned. The idea of sending Seneca on such a mission is grimly comic, though it would suit Dio's picture of him! See J. Tresch, *Die Nerobücher in den Annalen des Tacitus* (Heidelberg, 1965), p. 165.

5. The salient references to L. Faenius Rufus are collected by Stein, *PIR*², III, 116, and by Fabia, *op. cit.*, p. 273. Syme seems not to discuss him.

6. Dio 52. 24 does not mention Piso, but ascribes the plot to Seneca and Rufus.

7. *Ann.* 14. 57. We assume that Tigellinus was behind these charges, though he too had a history of adulteries with Agrippina and Julia for which he had been exiled by Gaius.

8. *Ann.* 15. 50. Both comments are designed to contrast him with Tigellinus.

9. Even Barea Soranus had a skeleton in his cupboard. See Syme, *op. cit.*, p. 544.