

In light of these considerations, I suggest one single alteration of Housman's text of *Astronomica* 2.136–44: the deletion of the comma after *solus* in 138 in order to make clear that what follows (*uacuo ueluti . . . regentibus actus*, 138–40) is not a subordinate clause but rather a continuation of the main clause.¹⁹ A correct (if pedestrian) translation of the passage would thus be the following:

Since I desire to carry these things to the stars with inspired breath, I shall compose my songs neither in the crowd nor for the crowd; but alone—as one carried in an empty orbit—I shall freely drive my chariot with no one meeting me or steering a friendly course along the same route; and I shall sing for the sky to hear, with the stars marveling and heaven rejoicing in the songs of its poet, or for those whom they have not begrudged knowledge of the sacred motions and of themselves, which is the smallest crowd on earth.

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HOT OR STRONG? A TEXTUAL NOTE ON SENECA, *PHOENISSAE* 254

¹⁹ Alternatively, a second comma could be added after *orbe* (138), to create, as it were, parentheses around the participial construction with *uctatus*.

Seneca, *Phoenissae* 253–5 (Zwierlein's OCT) :

illo teste damnavit parens
calidoque teneros transuit ferro pedes
et in alta nemora pabulum misit feris . . .

Here the blinded Oedipus narrates the piercing of his ankles as a baby by his own father Laius as a result of the response of the Delphic Oracle. My concern is with *calido . . . ferro*. In his commentary Hirschberg cites as parallels *Aen.* 12.99–100 *crinis / vibratos calido ferro* and Lucan 4.511 *calido fodiemus viscera ferro*,¹ but neither the heating of irons for hair-curling nor the warming of a sword through contact with flesh (a Homeric idea: cf. *Il.* 16.333, 20.476) seem to be relevant here. *Transuit* suggests the piercing of flesh as with a spit (cf. *Ov. Fast.* 2.363–4 *veribus transuta salignis / exta*), and the image seems to be of passing an iron peg or rod through the thin flesh between the heel proper and the Achilles tendon, a point famously pierced at *Il.* 22.396–7. But there seems to be no point here in the iron being heated; merciful cautery is unlikely to be relevant to this brutal disabling given the rhetoric of the passage which seeks to condemn Laius' action, but torture with red-hot metal (for *calidum ferrum* in this sense, cf. Lucilius fr. 291 M, 318 W *calidum e furnacibus ferrum*), as in the apparent preparation for inflicting pain in Novius' *Lignaria* (= *Atellanae* 42 Ribbeck) *signare oportet frontem calida forcipe*, seems hyperbolic in this context. In Seneca's other two descriptions of the piercing of Oedipus' feet the verbs suggest a brutal piercing like that of an iron weapon cutting through flesh—cf. *Oedipus* 812–13:

forata ferro gesseras vestigia
tumore nactus nomen ac vitio pedum

¹ T. Hirschberg, *Senecas Phoenissen* (Berlin, 1989), 82.

and 857–8 :

*ferrum per ambos tenue transactum pedes
ligabat artus.*

In the Greek accounts of the disabling of the baby Oedipus, Euripides' *Phoenissae* 26, σφυρῶν σιδηρὰ κέντρα διαπείρας μέσων, is clearly the origin of *ferro*, but the only indication of an adjective comes at Soph. *OT* 1349 ἀγρίας πέδας.

This evidence suggests that *ferro* at *Phoenissae* 254 needs an epithet like ἄγριος which stresses the penetrating cruelty of the piercing iron, and that ideas of heating iron are in fact out of place here. I suggest *valido* for *calido*: this adjective is paired with *ferrum* several times (e.g. Lucr. 6.1011), and Tibullus uses it similarly of iron fetters (2.6.25–6):

*spes etiam valida solatur compede vinctum:
crura sonant ferro, sed canit inter opus.*

Hirschberg (n. 1) suggests that *calido* contrasts pathetically with *tenero*, citing Seneca, *Medea* 722 *tenuem cruenta falce deposuit carnem*, a view reinforced by Frank in her commentary: 'The juxtaposition of *calido* and *teneros* stresses the cruel nature of Oedipus' fate.'² This contrast would be even more effective with *valido*, since *validus* is often used of the force with which weapons are wielded as they cut through bodies: for *validus* used in similar affective contrasts between penetrating weapon and soft flesh, cf. *Aen.* 6.833 *neu patriae validas in viscera vertite viris*, 10.815 *validum namque exigit ense / per medium Aeneas iuvenem*.

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² M. Frank, *Seneca's Phoenissae*. *Mnemos. Suppl.* 138 (Leiden, 1995), 148.

THYESTES' BELCH (SENECA, *THY.* 911–12)

At the climax of the ghoulish *cena Thyestea* the hapless victim, still ignorant of the menu he has been served, erupts in a sonorous belch. To Atreus, observing from the wings, this marks the moment of supreme triumph:

*Aperta multa tecta conlucent face.
resupinus ipse purpurae atque auro incubat,
vino gravatum fulciens laeva caput.
eructat. o me caelitum excelsissimum,
regumque regem! vota transcendendi mea.* (Thy. 908–12)

Commentators have rightly called attention both to the intrinsic grossness and the bizarre incongruity in these lines. On *eructat*, Tarrant aptly remarks that 'this revolting detail is not simply a specimen of Senecan crudity: Thyestes' audible signs of pleasure show that he has fulfilled Atreus' wish, *liberos avidus pater / gaudensque*