

## Intrusive Hands: Two Conjectures on Seneca's *Medea*

It is a commonplace of criticism that even the wrong conjectures of others may lead to fruitful avenues of approach. This paper deals with two passages of Seneca's *Medea* in which I believe that J. J. Cornelissen, though right to diagnose corruption, missed the mark with his proposed solutions. No doubt coincidentally, each involves a form of *manus* at line-end.

### 1

Although *Medea* is on stage when Creon enters, he addresses only the last few words of his first speech (179-191) to her:<sup>1</sup>

Medea, Colchi noxium Aeetae genus,  
nondum meis exportat e regnis pedem? 180  
molitur aliquid: nota fraus, nota est manus.  
cui parcet illa quemue securum sinet?  
abolere propere pessimam ferro luem  
equidem parabam: precibus euicit gener.  
concessa uita est, liberet fines metu 185  
abeatque tuta. — fert gradum contra ferox  
minaxque nostros propius affatus petit. —  
Arcete, famuli, tactu et accessu procul,  
iubete sileat. regium imperium pati  
aliquando discat. Vade ueloci uia 190  
monstrumque saeuum horribile iamdudum auehe.

181 manus *A* : minus *E*

The anaphora in 181, *nota fraus, nota est manus*, seems rather flat. We want either a strong contrast between *fraus* and *manus*, or some sort of climax, and I do not see either here. Cornelissen takes *molitur aliquid* as Creon's first words after he catches sight of *Medea*, and emends to *nota frons, nota est manus*. Though his words are somewhat cryptic, he seems to think that Creon is specifying how he recognizes *Medea*.<sup>2</sup> That

<sup>1</sup> Text and pertinent portions of the *apparatus criticus* are quoted from Otto Zwierlein's Oxford Classical Text (1986).

<sup>2</sup> J. J. Cornelissen, "Ad Senecae Tragoedias", *Mnemosyne* 5 (1877), 175-87. His note reads in full: "Creon, qui Medeam in exsilium mittere in animo habet, haec secum loquitur (179 sqq.): *Medea, Colchi noxium Aeetae genus, / nondum meis exportat e regnis pedem?* quibus *Medea* conspecta haec addit: *molitur aliquid: nota fraus, nota est manus*. Corrigendum est *nota frons nota est manus*." The

works well enough for *frons*, but it is difficult to see how Creon could recognize Medea's hand from a distance, or even from close by. Is he checking fingerprints? Looking for the telltale stains of the poisonous juices she has brewed or the blood of her previous victims? Either would be absurd. Besides, the command to his attendants (188) shows that Creon is eager to prevent Medea from getting too close.<sup>3</sup> In short, Cornelissen's *frons . . . manus* provides a clear contrast of the two nouns in the anaphora, but one that is entirely inappropriate in this context.

If there is a problem in the line, it is not *fraus*, which is just the word for what Creon fears in Medea,<sup>4</sup> but *manus*, which is either anticlimactic or redundant.<sup>5</sup> The manuscript variants also point to *manus* as the problem. A is prone to interpolation, and E's *minus* must be taken seriously, not despite but because of the fact that it is nonsense. Since Creon dwells on Medea's previous crimes throughout the scene (179-300), I suggest that we read *nota fraus, nota est nimis*. Seneca uses the same collocation elsewhere: *qui, notus nimis omnibus / ignotus moritur sibi* (*Thy.* 402-403) and, in a climax not unlike the one I am proposing, *Virtus Vlixis Danaidis nota est satis / nimisque Phrygibus* (*Tro.*

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dogmatic assertion, couched in arrogant language — a conjecture such as this is not a 'correction' — and supported by no argument or parallel, comports very ill with the note on the following page, where he considers it 'satis credibile' to improve the intelligibility of 283 by destroying the meter, writing *ne culpa matris natos insontes trahat*. This is just the sort of thing that gave textual criticism a bad name in the late nineteenth century — a name it has retained in some circles.

- <sup>3</sup> In the parallel scene in Euripides' *Medea* (271-356), Creon's fears are less immediate, and more for his daughter than himself (282-89): he is merely irritated when Medea grasps his knees (324) and hand (339) in supplication. Here the language, particularly *metu*, *ferox*, and *minax* in 185-87, implies a premonitory fear of the sort of viscous poison, administered by contact, that will in fact soon kill him and his daughter. Of course, he may also be thinking of a hidden dagger.
- <sup>4</sup> Towards the end of this scene, Creon says *fraudibus tempus petis* (290). Medea herself uses *fraus* to refer to her own past (475) and future (564, 693) crimes, and the chorus uses the same word in asking the messenger about the disaster (881).
- <sup>5</sup> H. V. Canter, *Rhetorical Elements in the Tragedies of Seneca* (University of Illinois Studies in Language and Literature X.1, Urbana, 1925), classifies Seneca's metonymies of *manus* under four heads (129), with meanings equivalent to 'ultio', 'auxilium', 'fortitudo et uis', and 'scelera'. Although he lists our passage in the fourth category, only the third would provide any sort of climax or contrast, with deceit topped by open violence. However, this would only be appropriate if Medea were the sort to turn to open violence when she cannot go any further with deceit, like Odysseus in *Odyssey* 22, when he strips off his rags, reveals his identity, and starts slaughtering suitors. However, Medea's deceit is her power. She only practices open violence on unsuspecting relatives and children.

757-58).<sup>6</sup> It may or may not be significant that there is another pregnant use of *nimis* near the end of this scene (294-97):

Cr. Etsi repugnat precibus infixus timor,  
 unus parando dabitur exilio dies.  
 Me. **Nimis est**, recidas aliquid ex isto licet;  
 et ipsa propero.

Confusion of *nimis* and *minus* could be attributed either to ‘inversion of three letters with further changes’ or to miscounting and misdivision of minims (*uuuuus* for *uuuuu*).<sup>7</sup> In either case, the presence of *minis* at line-end just a few lines before (174) will not have helped.<sup>8</sup>

## 2

As she steels herself to kill her second child, Medea says (986-987):

uade, perfectum est scelus —  
 uindicta nondum: perage, dum faciunt manus.

987 *om. A* perage *E*: perge *recc.* faciunt *E*: feruent *Cornelissen 187 (coll. HO 435)*

The verb *faciunt* is a well-known problem. As Zwierlein notes, Cornelissen proposed *feruent*, inspired by the very close parallel in the *Hercules Oetaeus*, where Deianeira ends a speech *scelus occupandum est: perage, dum feruet manus*.<sup>9</sup> The conjecture is particularly attractive if the *Oetaeus* is spurious, since we would expect an epigone to imitate Seneca more slavishly than Seneca echoes himself.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, Zwierlein pro-

<sup>6</sup> If I have used the Packard Humanities Institute’s Latin CD-ROM 5.3 properly, there are only four other instances of this collocation in Latin verse before 200 C.E.: one each in Vergil (*A.* 9.472) and Statius (*S.* 5.3.85) and two in Martial (1.87.7, 12.38.2). The closest verbal parallel is the first Martial passage, where the poet advises a laurel-chewing tippler: *notas ergo nimis fraudes deprensaque furta / iam tollas et sis ebria simpliciter*.

<sup>7</sup> For the first, A. E. Housman gives numerous examples in his edition of Manilius I (London, 1903), lvii. As for the second, the opposite error, *nimis for minus*, is found in two minor manuscripts of Horace, *Sat.* 1.5.6 (Keller and Holder’s  $\sigma$  and  $\gamma$ ), and is also presumed in N. Heinsius’ emendation of *Oedipus* 896 (not mentioned by Zwierlein). Since both words are common enough, I do not see that the one error would be appreciably more likely than the other.

<sup>8</sup> Though *minus* and *nimis* are not exact opposites, the corruption of one to the other also has some of the characteristics of a polar error.

<sup>9</sup> *Perage* is Pieper’s correction of A’s *perge*.

<sup>10</sup> The more incompetent the imitation, that is, the more closely it approaches a pastiche or cento in technique, the more useful it will be for repairing corruptions in the work or works imitated — and vice versa, of course, though most of us have better things to do than improving the text of centos. Most

vides good parallels from Ovid for *facere* in the sense “Wirksam sein”, “Kraft haben”, so *feruent* is unnecessary and no improvement over *faciunt*.<sup>11</sup>

There is a third possibility,<sup>12</sup> perhaps equally unnecessary but rather wittier. It seems to me that Cornelissen has again (partly) impugned the wrong word, that *manus* at line-end is again at fault, though joined in this case by its predecessor, and that we need to turn the verb into a noun and the noun into a verb. In short, I suggest that what Seneca wrote was *perage, dum facinus manet*, ‘while a crime remains (to be done)’ or perhaps ‘while a crime awaits (you)’.<sup>13</sup> This might easily have been corrupted so as to produce the *textus receptus*: the change from *facinus manet* to *faciunt manus* is almost entirely anagrammatic, indeed almost, but not quite, a simple interchange of endings: *-unt -nus* for *-nus -net*.

I had already come to the conclusions outlined above and drafted the preceding paragraphs when I learned that Daniel Heinsius had anticipated half of my idea with *perage dum facinus manu*, ‘hurry up and finish the crime with your hand’.<sup>14</sup> The few twentieth-century editors who report the conjecture do not give enough of it: I. Viansino (Torino, 1968) reports only *facinus*, while H. Moricca (Torino, 1947<sup>2</sup>), though he gives both *facinus* and *manu*, would have saved me a bit of head-scratching if he had added that Heinsius redefined *dum* as the enclitic adverb (*OLD* s.v. *dum*<sup>1</sup> 2.a), rather than the

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Seneca scholars support athetization, but R. G. M. Nisbet makes a strong plea for authenticity in “The Oak and the Axe: Symbolism in Seneca, *Hercules Oetaeus* 1618ff.” (*Homo Viator: Classical Essays for John Bramble*, ed. M. Whitby, P. Hardie, M. Whitby [Bristol 1987] 243-51, reprinted in *Collected Papers on Latin Literature*, ed. S. J. Harrison [Oxford 1995], 202-212). He lists one ally, M. Rozelaar (250 = 210) and four opponents (249 = 209, note 35), F. Leo, W. H. Friedrich, B. Axelson, and O. Zwierlein.

<sup>11</sup> O. Zwierlein, *Kritischer Kommentar zu den Tragödien Senecas* (Abh. Akad. Mainz, Geistes- und Sozialwiss. Klasse, Einzelveröffentlichung 6), Stuttgart (1986), 168.

<sup>12</sup> Perhaps I should say a fourth, since J. K. Newman defends the paradosis by redefining *manus* as an accusative plural: “Get the task over with, while they are gathering their forces” (“Seneca, *Medea* 987”, *RhM* 123 [1980], 192). He did not persuade Zwierlein (“ganz abwegig”) or the latest editor, F.-R. Chaumartin (*Sénèque, Tragedies*, Tome I, Paris, 1996).

<sup>13</sup> The first translation seems a legitimate extension of the commonest meaning of *manere*, while the second would fit under the category *OLD* s.v. *maneo* 4: “(of events, fates, etc.) To be in store for, await”.

<sup>14</sup> Heinsius’ conjecture will be found in his ‘Animadversiones et Notae’, appended to Scriverius’ 1621 Leiden Seneca: Scriverius also prints it in his text.

conjunction (*dum*<sup>2</sup>).<sup>15</sup> In modern texts, this would be printed as a single word, *peragedum*, and the implications are hortatory: ‘hurry up and finish the deed with your hand’. Of course, as Gronovius points out,<sup>16</sup> and as a glance at the relevant entry in the *Thesaurus* shows (*TLL* s.v. *dum*<sup>1</sup>, 5.1.2201-8-25), the use of *dum*<sup>1</sup> with imperatives is archaic, comic, and colloquial, and unparalleled in Seneca’s tragedies or anything of like stylistic level.<sup>17</sup> The only exceptions are *agedum*, attested for a wide range of authors, including Seneca (*TLL* s.v. *ago*, 1.1405.67-6.11), and *agitedum*, found eight times, all in Livy (1.1406.11-13). Both are almost invariably found in the company of a second verb, usually imperative, and so might almost be classified as particles. Consequently, although *peragedum* is not far from *agedum*, and Livy provides a precedent for innovation, *peragedum* without an accompanying imperative still seems impossible, all the more so when it is introduced by conjecture. Reading *dum facinus manet*, as I have suggested, will allow us to introduce Heinsius’ *facinus* while keeping *dum* an unobjectionable conjunction.

<sup>15</sup> In “Propert. I 13.29-32,” *MCr* 30-31 (1995-96) 239-245, I examine another passage where a change of punctuation implies a change of construction, and so makes more difference to the sense than many conjectures. Newman’s interpretation (note 12) changes the construction without any repunctuation.

<sup>16</sup> “Comicum magis quam Tragicum esse existimo.” I quote Schroeder’s variorum edition (Delft, 1728). In the same note, he argues that it is superfluous as well as comical: “*dum* parum ad rem faciat”.

<sup>17</sup> The *Thesaurus* quotes a single instance of *iteradum* from Pacuvius amid dozens of references to Plautus and Terence. They also list the Elder Seneca (*Contr.* 7.1.16), who is quoting an obscure rhetor named Sepullius Bassus. However, that exception is itself very dubious: the manuscripts read *necadum*, *negandum*, or *nega nunc*, and the latest editor (L. Hakanson, Leipzig, 1989) prints Novák’s *nega agedum*.