Metaquotation: Homer and the Emperor*

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ABSTRACT

For the emperor, quoting Homer was both a danger and an opportunity. Suetonius' Lives shows that anecdotes of quotation circulated widely to characterise the emperor for good or for ill. Subsequently, these moments could themselves become the subject of allusion. If you quote a line of Homer that was famously quoted by the emperor, are you quoting the poet or Caesar? This phenomenon, whereby a poetic cliché could be reborn as charged reference to a prior use of that tag by a well-known figure, might be termed metaquotation. This ambiguity of reference was exploited throughout Seneca's Apocolocyntosis, *and in turn by readers of that text in antiquity.*

Keywords: Suetonius; Seneca; *Apocolocyntosis*; Augustus; Claudius; Epictetus

I INTRODUCTION

One of the marks of an educated Roman was the ability to produce an apposite literary quotation, especially one from Homer. But for the emperor, this situation was fraught with danger. Even the most hackneyed quotation carried the risk that its original context might be activated by those who heard it, despite the speaker intending it as a detached and proverbial cliché. Anyone who quoted a Homeric tag needed to be alert to the potential burden of the original context. A major theme of the Homeric poems is kingship, and they abound in unflattering and unedifying examples of leadership.[1] A line of Homer that in the hands of an ordinary person would be nothing more than a proverb could, in the mouth of an autocrat, acquire a suddenly pointed significance. Suetonius preserves many examples of emperors quoting Homer, showing that such anecdotes were scrutinised as public performances.[2] Virgil famously said that it was harder to steal Hercules' club than to steal a line of Homer, and it turns out that competence in managing intertextual complications was a requirement not only for poets.[3]

The focus of this article will be on the way that acts and styles of quotation from Homer by various emperors grew famous and became themselves sites of allusion. For want of a better term, I call this phenomenon metaquotation, which is when a quotation of a canonical text alludes, at least in part, to a previous quotation of that text by someone else. This practice is analogous to a phenomenon discussed by scholars of ancient poetry

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[1] The undignified behaviour of Homeric heroes was a central problem in ancient Homeric criticism; it was treated, for example, by Philodemus in his *On the Good King According to Homer*, which was addressed to a late republican Roman elite readership (Asmis 1991).

[2] For a survey of literary quotation by Suetonius' emperors, see Mitchell 2015 (adding *Calig*. 22.4); for a comparison of the practice of Greek quotation in Suetonius and in other authors, see Horváth 1996: 71–3.

[3] Donat., *Vit. Verg*. 46.

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under the rubric of 'window reference', whereby one poet alludes to another poet's allusion to a third text.[4] An ambiguity is thereby created. When you quote a line of Homer that was famously quoted by another person, are you innocently quoting Homer, or are you alluding to that other occasion? Quotation may seem to be a straightforward act of reference, but philosophers of language know otherwise.[5] This complexity can be useful, particularly in a political context. It provides a mechanism by which an apparently vapid cliché can be transformed into an ideologically charged gesture and vice versa. One important feature of metaquotation is its deniability.

The present discussion does not presuppose that the episodes transmitted by Suetonius in which emperors seem to quote Homer spontaneously are genuine in all their particulars. They can, however, reveal how such anecdotes were polished and distorted through their repeated retelling by the friends and enemies of the emperor. The most famous example of the careful curation of such a moment comes from Polybius. The historian represented himself as standing next to Scipio as the latter gazed in tears upon the burning ruins of Carthage and quoted Homer's words on the future destruction of Troy:[6]

> ἔσσεται ἦμαρ ὅτ' ἄν ποτ' ὀλώλῃ Ἴλιος ἱρὴ
> καὶ Πρίαμος καὶ λαὸς ἐϋμμελίω Πριάμοιο.
>
> The day shall come when holy Ilium shall be destroyed, and Priam, and the people of Priam, who was well armed with an ashen spear.

These lines were proverbial, as Walbank notes, so one might doubt whether at that moment Scipio was thinking deeply about the precise original context(s) of these lines in the *Iliad*. But given the theatrically staged quality of the anecdote, rather than wondering whether Scipio was 'really' thinking about Homeric intertextuality in the heat of battle, a better question is how far the details of the Homeric context were active for Polybius as a writer and for his readers. The historian carefully crafted the moment to show how his relationship with Scipio exemplified Greek wisdom supporting and tempering Roman power. As Vercruysse observes, the Homeric context is subtle and complex, because these lines are spoken both by Agamemnon to Menelaus and by Hector to Andromache.[7] They thus reflect the way Polybius' Scipio is, like Agamemnon, a leader of an expeditionary force successfully sacking a city and simultaneously, like Hector, the hero of a Trojan city also fated one day to be destroyed.[8] Many of the acts of Homeric quotation recorded in Suetonius' *Lives*, apart perhaps from those that are cited directly from letters, will have been subjected to similar stage-managing as demonstrations of the emperor's intertextual mastery or its opposite. The issue is not the historicity of the anecdotes or the level of knowledge of Homeric contexts that a given emperor could call upon extemporaneously, but the nature of the discourse that arose around these public acts of Homeric quotation.

This article will begin by looking at an illustrative example of the complexities of imperial metaquotation. I will then examine how Suetonius represents the contrasting styles of quotation of Augustus and Claudius and how Seneca in the *Apocolocyntosis* reflects these two historical emperors' styles of quotation in his satire.[9] When Seneca's fictional emperors quote Homer, they allude to the manner in which the historical emperors tended to quote Homer and perhaps even to specific incidents of quotation. This, then, is a satirical form

[4] Thomas 1986: 188–9.
[5] The classic discussion is Davidson 1979.
[6] Polybius 38.21.1–3, on the reconstruction of which see Walbank 1979: 722–5.
[7] *Il.* 4.164–5 and 6.448–9; Vercruysse 1990: 295.
[8] Thus Feeney 2007: 55.
[9] On the title and Senecan authorship, see Eden 1984: 1–4, 6–8, whose text and translation I have used throughout.

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of metaquotation. For both Seneca and Suetonius, Augustus deftly modifies Homeric originals and makes sophisticated allusions to the full complexity of the original context in order to imply more than he explicitly says. The Claudius of both authors, by contrast, tries very hard and has a good superficial knowledge of Homer, but he lacks the wit to negotiate the subtle dangers of his Homeric tags. The problem is not that Claudius does not know his Homer; his mode of failure is more subtle. Claudius has a store-house of literary knowledge but has a poor understanding of the dynamics of intertexuality, failing to realise that you cannot quote a line of Homer without suggesting a superimposition of the original context upon the current one. These similarities of characterisation suggest that Suetonius drew on anecdotal material that was already circulating in Seneca's day.

Finally, I will turn briefly to a more general consideration of the function of metaquotation in Seneca's satire. Just as Seneca's fictional emperors quote Homer in a way that is designed to recall the practice of historical emperors, many of the other poetic quotations embedded in the satire, which at first appear to be proverbial and detached from their original context, are in fact allusions to previous acts of quotation of those lines. The tension between poetic cliché and disguised intertext is something that Seneca plays on and exploits everywhere in this remarkable work.[10] In other words, Seneca often quotes poetic texts in parodic imitation of another person's habit of quoting those texts, and this practice of metaquotation runs well beyond its overt employment for characterising Augustus and Claudius. I will conclude with an example of a series of later authors self-consciously reusing Seneca's technique of metaquotation to allude to the *Apocolocyntosis*: that is, pretending to quote Homer while really quoting Seneca's representation of an emperor quoting Homer.

II INTERTEXTUALITY AND THE EMPEROR

One was never the first to quote a line of Homer; multiple secondary contexts could come into play as well as the original context. The potential complexity of imperial metaquotation can be illustrated by the evolution of one particular line from the second book of the *Iliad*. Agamemnon foolishly tests the resolve of the Greek forces by ordering them to return home and in the uproar that follows Athena prompts Odysseus to go around recalling the allies from their ships. He says to them (2.203–5):

> οὐ μέν πως πάντες βασιλεύσομεν ἐνθάδ' Ἀχαιοί·
> οὐκ ἀγαθὸν πολυκοιρανίη· εἷς κοίρανος ἔστω,
> εἷς βασιλεύς.
>
> Surely we Achaeans will not all be kings here. A multitude of masters is no good thing; let there be one master, one king.

Odysseus succeeds in recalling the Greeks to council, and when Thersites insults Agamemnon, Odysseus abuses him and succeeds in reestablishing the authority of the king. Unsurprisingly, these Homeric lines were subsequently used throughout the Greek world to justify the principle of one-man rule.[11] Cornelius Nepos attests that this passage was well known in Rome when he records that Dion of Syracuse, impatient of sharing power with his erstwhile ally Heraclides, cited this passage after killing his rival.[12] The coming of the Principate made these lines and the deadly purpose to which

[10] See Rühl 2011: 78–80.

[11] Aristotle discusses this passage in the context of the different kinds of democracy (*Pol.* 1292a).

[12] Nepos (*Dion* 6.4) paraphrases Homer's Greek: 'uersum illum Homeri rettulit ex secunda rhapsodia, in quo haec sententia est: non posse bene geri rem publicam multorum imperiis'.

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they could be put pointedly relevant to Rome's own situation. In fact, they became part of its founding story when the philosopher Arius Didymus advised Octavian in Alexandria to kill Caesarion, the child of Cleopatra and Caesar. He quipped: οὐκ ἀγαθὸν πολυκαισαρίη ('A multitude of Caesars is no good thing').[13]

Arius' pun was presumably still known in Alexandria when Philo, in his account of his embassy to Caligula on behalf of the Jews of that city, quoted the unmodified words of Homer in order to praise Augustus' establishment of the Principate.[14] Caligula himself certainly knew the Homeric passage well, as we discover from Suetonius' biography of the emperor. He begins his account of Caligula's monstrousness by describing how the emperor quoted Homer's original words ('let there be one master, one king') to a group of client kings who had come to Rome on official business and whom he overheard as they were disputing their relative nobility.[15] For Suetonius, this is a simple example of Caligula's cruelty: he implicitly frames it within the tradition of rulers using this Homeric passage to justify the political assassination of rivals. That aspect of the quotation was undoubtedly relevant, and it would have been a nervous moment for those client kings. But Suetonius gives us enough information to see that Caligula was, in fact, also thinking of the original context in the *Iliad*. His position with respect to the visiting client kings precisely reflects the situation between Agamemnon and the other Greek leaders, who were kings in their own right, but subordinate to him. Seen in this light, it is interesting that Caligula, while occupying the supreme position of Agamemnon, quoted the words of Odysseus. At this moment in the epic, the Ithacan has borrowed Agamemnon's sceptre, the symbol of his supreme authority, and is trying to resolve a crisis which has been brought about by the supreme commander's ineptitude. By conflating the roles of the two Greek heroes, Caligula sets himself up as the combination of the merits of both Homeric figures: a king of kings like Agamemnon, but clever like Odysseus.[16] Caligula took a Homeric tag that had been turned into a cliché and gave it new meaning by linking it back to its original context.

Suetonius treats Caligula's clever reframing of Homer unsympathetically, and he does this again in his biography of Domitian in another anecdote involving this phrase. By juxtaposing Caligula and Domitian as quoting the very same words of Homer, the biographer reinforces his tendentious depiction of both emperors as equally paranoid, cruel and mad. For Suetonius, these Homeric words were designed to evoke the tradition of political assassination represented by Dion of Syracuse and nothing more. But, like Caligula, Domitian had a more complex and witty purpose in mind. Suetonius provides the background to Domitian's quotation of this Homeric tag during his enumeration of the prominent men that the emperor had executed (*Dom.* 10.4):

> Occidit … Flauium Sabinum alterum e patruelibus, quod eum comitiorum consularium die destinatum perperam praeco non consulem ad populum, sed imperatorem pronuntiasset.
>
> He killed … Flavius Sabinus, one of his cousins, because on the day of the consular voting assemblies the herald erroneously announced him to the people not as consul, but as emperor.

In January of 82 C.E., Domitian became consul as emperor for the first time, and his colleague in the chief magistracy was his cousin T. Flavius Sabinus, who was married to

13 Plut., *Ant.* 81.5.

14 *Leg.* 149.

15 Suet., *Calig.* 22.1: 'cum audiret forte reges, qui officii causa in urbem aduenerant, concertantis apud se super cenam de nobilitate generis, exclamauit: εἷς κοίρανος ἔστω, εἷς βασιλεύς'.

16 The force of Caligula's clever misreading is illustrated by Mitchell 2015: 348, who accidentally attributes these words to 'Homer's Agamemnon'.

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the late Emperor Titus' daughter Julia Flavia.[17] Suetonius tells us here that at the culmination of the consular *comitia* the previous October, only one month after the death of Titus, the herald had accidentally announced not two consuls, but two emperors.[18] At the *comitia*, after announcing Domitian's election to the consulship by pronouncing his name as 'Imperator Titus Flavius Caesar Domitianus Augustus', the herald must have accidentally inserted some part or parts of Domitian's title into his junior colleague's name, which was very similar: Titus Flavius Sabinus. This anecdote pinpoints the historical context of another detail about Sabinus that Suetonius relates two chapters later (*Dom.* 12.3):

> generum fratris indigne ferens albatos et ipsum ministros habere, proclamauit: οὐκ ἀγαθὸν πολυκοιρανίη.

> He took it ill that his brother's son-in-law also had attendants clad in white, and he cried out: a multitude of masters is not a good thing.

The presence of attendants dressed in white indicates a festive occasion, such as the subsequent January when the two consuls entered office together and jointly made a public sacrifice.[19] The garb of Sabinus' attendants would have been identical to that of Domitian's attendants on that occasion in order to maintain the fiction of their equality as consuls. But Domitian was surely harking back to the unfortunate herald's mistake several months earlier at the consular elections.

Suetonius says that in October the herald inadvertently addressed both men as 'Imperator' and that three months later Domitian made a joke about the undesirability of them sharing the office of princeps as they did the office of consul. It is possible that the joke he made was even better. Suetonius is so hostile to Domitian that he may have deliberately obfuscated details that would have cast a favourable light on his subject's wit. It would have been an easy mistake for the floundering herald to slip in 'Caesar' after the two names 'Titus Flavius', which both men shared. If the herald accidentally called Sabinus 'Titus Flavius Caesar Sabinus', then it is quite possible that what Domitian actually did was to quote Arius Didymus' modified version of the Homeric phrase: οὐκ ἀγαθὸν πολυκαισαρίη ('A multitude of Caesars is no good thing'), which would have been an extremely funny quip (except perhaps to Sabinus and the unfortunate herald). In any case, even if that did not happen and Domitian quoted the Homeric original, he was definitely alluding to Arius' punning advice to Octavian.

In Octavian's day, 'Caesar' was just a cognomen. Cleopatra's son Caesarion was a threat to him because of his name, which was a reminder of the fact that he was a son of Caesar by blood, as Octavian was not. But by Domitian's day, 'Caesar' had been transformed into a title. So, ironically, with the passage of time Arius' πολυκαισαρίη came to mean what πολυκοιρανίη had meant in the Homeric original: a multiplicity of supreme leaders. Whichever of those words he quoted, the context of entering the consulship reveals that Domitian was making a shrewd observation about the changed nature of the Roman constitution, which was built upon the opposite of the Homeric idea: at Rome, a multitude of masters was traditionally held to be a vitally necessary thing. The collegial principle was fundamental to all of the magistracies in the Republic. There really should

[17] Domitian had previously held the ordinary consulship only once, in 73, in addition to five times as suffect; see Gallivan 1981. On Sabinus' designation by Domitian as co-consul, see Jones 1992: 45–7.

[18] On the conduct of consular elections under the principate and on the dating of this occasion to October 81, see the full account of Jones 1996: 95.

[19] Some have tried to justify the substance of Suetonius's charge against Domitian by claiming that this white attire of the attendants was genuinely an imperial presumption on the part of Sabinus — e.g. Jones 1996: 94, 106 — but good evidence for this is lacking. The conventional significance of white clothing was primarily religious, particularly sacrificial: see *TLL* s.v. 'albatus'. On the wearing of the white *toga pura* by those attending a sacrifice (as in the procession of the *Ara Pacis*), see Stone 2001.

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have been two Caesars, according to the old Roman way of thinking, just as there were two consuls. Domitian's intervention pointed out that Rome had come to see the wisdom of Homer's Odysseus: two largely ornamental consuls, but only one Caesar.

When Domitian did eventually execute his cousin, as Suetonius tells us he did, it was not because his attendants wore white nor because the herald had made a slip of the tongue at the *comitia*, but because of dynastic intrigue.[20] Sabinus was one of the most senior members of the Flavian dynasty and was married to the daughter of the fondly remembered Titus, so it would not be surprising if Domitian saw him as a threat.[21] Domitian's allusion to Arius' Homeric quip therefore operated on multiple levels. On one level, it was a comment on how the herald's slip highlighted the changing nature of the Roman constitution; but at the same time it was a chilling warning to Sabinus and his supporters.

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Suetonius deliberately divorced Domitian's quotation of Homer from its historical context in order to make it seem less clever and more senselessly cruel than it was. This is in keeping with the way the biographer consistently downplays the emperor's interest and expertise in literature.[22] Of the four emperors that Suetonius writes about whose profound interest in literature is well attested, Augustus, Tiberius, Claudius and Domitian, only Augustus is represented positively. So we need to be careful not to accept uncritically Suetonius' framing of anecdotes of imperial quotation when they seem to imply a lack of erudition on the part of the emperor. In some cases, Suetonius reports that an emperor quoted a Homeric tag so that the original context was pointedly incongruous. When Vespasian turned Homer's awesome description of Ajax's spear to obscene, phallic purposes, it served to emphasise his unpretentious and down-to-earth image.[23] It seems likely that the 72-year-old Galba had his tongue lightly in his cheek when he asserted his continuing physical vigour by quoting the words of Diomedes about his own strength while in the midst of his great *aristeia*.[24] Domitian took a pathetic line in which Achilles looks forward to his own death and applied it to his receding hairline.[25] In none of these cases should we conclude from the deliberate incongruity that the emperor in question was ignorant of the original Homeric context.

It is important to bear in mind the caution of Adams that, when a Greek phrase had become proverbial, there is no guarantee that the Roman speaker quoting it had a deep understanding of it.[26] But the stakes were high when the speaker was the emperor, who would have expected his pronouncements to be scrutinised carefully. The tradition we have just examined of emperors quoting and re-quoting a particular line from the second book of the *Iliad* demonstrates that the repeated invocation of a Homeric tag by different public figures in different situations does not necessarily mean that it had become purely proverbial. To support his unsympathetic portraits of Caligula and Domitian, Suetonius implies that they quoted this line as a decontextualised apothegm of viciousness, but his own evidence shows that they had a nuanced understanding of the original Homeric context of the line and of its later association via Arius with the establishment of the Principate. Sometimes, successive acts of quotation add additional layers of meaning and context to a phrase rather than isolating it as a maxim: public acts of Homeric quotation by and about the emperor could themselves become sites of allusion.

[20] On the claims made after Domitian's death that he had an affair with his niece Julia, Sabinus' wife, see Jones 1992: 38–40 ('a farrago of nonsense').
[21] Sabinus may have been executed by Domitian as a rival soon after his consulship in 82: Jones 1992: 46–7.
[22] See *Dom.* 2.2 with Coleman 1986: 3088–95.
[23] Suet., *Vesp.* 23.1, quoting Hom., *Il.* 7.213.
[24] Suet., *Galb.* 20.2, quoting Hom., *Il.* 5.254; thus Adams 2003: 336 n. 77, *contra* Power 2011: 728 n. 6.
[25] Suet., *Dom.* 18.2, quoting Hom., *Il.* 21.108, on which see Morgan 1997.
[26] Adams 2003: 335–7.

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III AUGUSTUS AND HOMER

For Suetonius and for Seneca in the *Apocolocyntosis*, Augustus sets the standard for sophisticated and appropriate use of Homeric quotations, even though Suetonius at one point claims that Augustus could not speak Greek fluently or write in the language.[27] This comment arose from the emperor's restraint, which Claudius would unwisely abandon, from using Greek in public business. Suetonius' mixing of the public and private persona of the emperor leads him to make a series of apparently self-contradictory statements about Augustus' Greek.[28] A better indicator of his linguistic ability is the anecdote, which Suetonius relates in the course of describing his final days, in which he composed, allegedly extemporaneously, some Greek verses.[29] Augustus' competence as a Greek versifier is reflected in his manner of Homeric quotation, whereby he subtly modified Homer's text to make it fit a new context.

This is evident in Suetonius' report of how he lamented the sorrows brought to him by his daughter Julia and by two of her children, the younger Julia and Agrippa Postumus, saying (*Aug*. 65.4):[30]

> αἴθ' ὄφελον ἄγαμός τ' ἔμεναι ἄγονός τ' ἀπολέσθαι
>
> Would that I had never married and had died without offspring.

This is a very subtle rewriting of a line from the *Iliad* in which Hector reproaches Paris (3.40):

> αἴθ' ὄφελες ἄγονός τ' ἔμεναι ἄγαμός τ' ἀπολέσθαι
>
> Would that you had never been born and had died unwed.

Augustus changed the second-person ὄφελες to the first-person ὄφελον, taking exactly the same metrical liberty as Homer had done in lengthening its final syllable; he thus turned the reproach upon himself. In so doing he also changed the meaning of one of the words. For Homer, ἄγονος is passive and expresses Hector's wish that Paris had never been born, whereas Augustus uses it in an active sense to wish that he had not had (or had been incapable of having) children; both active and passive senses of the word are legitimate.[31] As a result, Augustus had to swap the order of the metrically equivalent words ἄγονος and ἄγαμος, since being born logically comes before being married, but being with or without children usually comes after marriage. It is not easy to make two emendations to a Homeric hexameter which change the sense entirely and yet end up with a line that scans in precisely the same way.

The link Augustus constructed between the original context and his own situation is quite telling. He adopted the persona of Hector, beleaguered and doomed protector of the Trojan royal house. But Hector's reproach was aimed at his brother Paris, whereas Augustus is speaking about his disappointing descendants. The wish to have died without offspring makes it clear that his primary target is the elder Julia, his only child.[32] She had the same character defect as Paris — promiscuity and a slight regard

[27] Suet., *Aug*. 89.1.

[28] For example, in this same section (89.1) Suetonius says that Augustus delighted in Old Comedy.

[29] Suet., *Aug*. 98.4.

[30] On this link between this passage and the depiction of Augustus in the *Apocolocyntosis*, see Wolf 1986: 50 and 65.

[31] See Kirk 1985: 271. The entry in LSJ s.v. ἄγονος mentions the Homeric usage 'which Augustus translated childless', incorrectly implying that the emperor misunderstood the Homeric line rather than that he creatively rewrote it.

[32] Suetonius (*Aug*. 65) says that Augustus was accustomed to exclaim this line at every mention of Agrippa

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for marriage vows — but the reversal of gender is startling. In the previous line, Hector memorably called Paris 'mad about women' (γυναιμανής); Augustus hints here at a parallel charge against his daughter, implying that she was just as mad about men (ἀνδρομανής, as it were) as Paris was about women. The mythological tradition sometimes considered Helen as a shameless harlot, sometimes as an innocent victim; there was no such ambiguity about Paris. Putting Julia in the place of Paris rather than Helen made it clear that Augustus considered Julia's sexual agency as a seducer of men to be the problem: she was no innocent victim of scheming men. With supreme subtlety, Augustus limned the threat that his daughter's uncontrolled sexuality posed to his careful plans for the succession of his imperial household. The patriarchal culture of Rome had few resources for discussing the sexual desire of respectable citizen women; Augustus resorted to a deft Homeric intertext about the sex-obsessed Paris to imply what he could not say out loud about his own daughter.

Augustus also employed Homer to speak more highly of his family, as we find out from Suetonius' biography of Tiberius. Suetonius offers a variety of evidence from the letters of Augustus to Tiberius that he had a genuinely high regard for his heir's prudence and wisdom. In one, Augustus adapts a famous phrase from Ennius; in another, he quotes two lines from the night raid of *Iliad* 10 (246–7):

> τούτου γ' ἑσπομένοιο καὶ ἐκ πυρὸς αἰθομένοιο
> ἄμφω νοστήσαιμεν, ἐπεὶ περίοιδε νοῆσαι.
>
> With this man accompanying me, we would both return safe even out of blazing fire, for he is skilled in counsel.

These are the lines in which Diomedes chooses Odysseus as his companion on account of his courage and wisdom. It is a nice compliment to Tiberius, especially in light of the wider Homeric context, because Diomedes is here responding to Agamemnon's instruction that he must choose the very best man of the gathered heroes, paying attention only to ability and not to nobility of birth (10.237–9). In the light of the persistent rumours that Augustus adopted Tiberius reluctantly, after all the heirs related to him by blood had died, the Homeric context adroitly implies that Augustus' adoption of Tiberius represented a free choice of the best man for the job. The context indicates that Tiberius' preferment represents the triumph of ability over heredity, and offers an implicit rebuttal to Julia's sneering condescension at Tiberius' supposedly low birth.[33]

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I will turn now from the historical Augustus to his fictional representation in Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis*, which tells the story of the emperor Claudius' unavailing efforts to attain apotheosis after his death. During a debate in the divine Senate over Claudius' admission to the ranks of the gods and after a variety of comically undignified speeches on both sides of the question, the deified Augustus rises to give his opinion against the motion, which proves to be decisive.[34] It has been observed that the language of the

Postumus and the two Julias, but that may be a generalisation due to the fact that the biographer is treating all three of them together as Augustus' great disappointments in this section of his biography. For all of his faults, Agrippa Postumus was no Paris (cf. Tac., *Ann.* 1.3). In any case, if Augustus had not begotten his daughter, the non-existence of his grandchildren inevitably follows. It is thus clear that this line was mainly about the birth of the elder Julia.

[33] 'spreveratque ut inparem' (Tac., *Ann.* 1.53). Suetonius is here quoting from the private correspondence of Augustus to Tiberius, so this may not have been a publicly known anecdote. But it is an interesting coincidence that Nero quoted a line from the end of this episode of the *Iliad* (10.535) right before his death (Suet., *Nero* 49.3). The Julio-Claudian succession thus began with a quote from the beginning of the night raid and ended with a quote from its conclusion.

[34] On Seneca's Augustus as a complex foil for his Claudius, see Bonandini 2012a: 16–17.

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speech delivered by Seneca's fictional Augustus is peppered with the humorous colloquialisms and proverbial expressions in Latin and Greek for which the emperor was renowned.[35] It is therefore not surprising that Seneca also imitated the emperor's particular manner of quoting Homer. In particular, this speech was influenced by Augustus' genuine habit of recasting lines of Homer to allude to the strengths and weaknesses of his descendants.

In the middle of enumerating the vast number of men and women of high rank killed by Claudius, Seneca's Augustus mentions Jupiter as a counter-example: a supreme ruler and a god who never killed any of his peers or near relations despite the length of his reign. This is, of course, a joke. Jupiter could not kill the gods who opposed him: they were immortal. The worst he could do to his awkward relatives was to eject them from Olympus, or bind them in the underworld like the Titans and Giants.[36] The fictional Augustus then quotes a line of Homer drawn from the divine council in the first book of the *Iliad*, which is the ultimate model for all scenes of divine councils, including the parodic tradition to which this section of the *Apocolocyntosis* belongs (11.1):

> ecce Iuppiter, qui tot annos regnat, uni Volcano crus fregit, quem
>
> ῥῖψε ποδὸς τεταγὼν ἀπὸ βηλοῦ θεσπεσίοιο
>
> et iratus fuit uxori et suspendit illam: numquid occidit? tu Messalinam, cuius aeque auunculus maior eram quam tuus, occidisti.
>
> Look at Jupiter who has been king for so many years. Vulcan was the only one whose leg he broke:
>
> taking hold of [his] foot he hurled [him] from heaven's own threshold.
>
> And he got angry with his wife and hung her up. Did he ever kill? *You* killed Messalina, whose great-great uncle I was just as much as yours.

The main reason for mentioning Vulcan here is his disability, which he shared with Claudius.[37] The implicit point is that, just as Zeus cast the lame Hephaestus from Olympus in Homer's account, so too should the divine Senate cast the lame Claudius out from their midst. But there is much more to this quotation than that.

Augustus quotes this line from the first book of the *Iliad*, where it is spoken by Hephaestus as he recalls how Zeus threw him from Olympus when he was trying to protect his mother Hera (*Il.* 1.591). Augustus adds a learned, interpretive gloss to the line with the words *crus fregit*: he makes it explicit that this was the trauma that caused Hephaestus to became lame in the leg, a connection that the Homeric passage leaves unstated. Augustus also subtly transforms the original. By quoting this line in isolation, he has left out the first-person personal pronoun in the previous line (με), which specifies that Zeus threw the speaker, Hephaestus, from heaven. Augustus needs the parallel to apply to Claudius rather than himself, so he leaves out that first-person Greek object pronoun and supplies a third-person relative pronoun in Latin to take its place (*quem*), which, like Homer's με, refers back to Vulcan. This deft substitution changes the grammatical person of the object of the main verb in a way that is reminiscent of the way Suetonius' Augustus changed the grammatical person of the subject of the main verb in the line he modified to refer to Julia.

This reframing of the intervention by Homer's Hephaestus has broader implications for the way Seneca alludes to the Homeric context. The comedic elements of that scene are

[35] See Suet., *Aug.* 87 with Eden 1984: 115 on the style of Seneca's Augustus; Bonandini 2010: 234 on Augustus and Greek proverbs; and Green 2016 and Bonandini 2012a: 12 on Seneca's Augustus and the *Res Gestae*.

[36] As Bonandini 2010: 87 points out, part of the humour is that Augustus is using as an example of the clemency of Jupiter a passage from Homer which was intended to show his severity. See further Wolf 1986: 60–8.

[37] On Claudius' disability in the *Apocolocyntosis*, see Michalopoulos 2018.

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fundamental to the tradition of satirical depictions of divine councils, the tradition to which Seneca's scene belongs.[38] But there is an important difference. In the *Iliad*, Hephaestus deliberately and knowingly plays the fool. After delivering the line quoted by Augustus, he defuses the tension by going around to fill the cups of the other gods; they fall about themselves laughing. The physical comedy arises from the way the ugly and lame god limps around in the place of the usual cupbearer, Ganymede, the quintessential beautiful boy.[39] By quoting a line from that scene, Seneca's Augustus implies that the attempt of the lame Claudius to pass himself off as a deified emperor is as ludicrous as Hephaestus playing at Ganymede. But Hephaestus was playing the fool deliberately. Claudius might have some purpose in heaven if he had the wit to know that his only possible role there would be as comic relief; but he lacks the self-knowledge of Hephaestus.

In the words that follow his Homeric quotation, Seneca's Augustus further demonstrates his mastery of Homer by alluding to a closely related scene from later in the *Iliad*. In Book 1, Hephaestus leaves unspecified the precise occasion on which he tried to rescue his mother from Zeus and was thereupon cast from Olympus. We get more information in Book 15, when Zeus angrily reminds Hera of the time he suspended her by her wrists and hung anvils from her ankles, throwing from Olympus those who tried to rescue her. This presumably gives us the context for Hephaestus' earlier story, as the scholia indicate.[40] Seneca's Augustus immediately goes on to mention that story ('suspendit illam'), demonstrating that he understands the connection between the two passages every bit as well as the scholiasts. This additional context is also pointedly relevant to Claudius. In Book 15, Zeus has just been tricked by his wife, a thing which happened constantly to Claudius. The crucial difference is that Zeus is capable of waking up and putting his wife in her place by stringing her up. The very next words of Seneca's Augustus mention Claudius' execution of Messalina. Augustus' complex of Homeric allusions hints that history might have been very different if Claudius had dealt with Messalina's early disobedience by punishing her severely as Zeus did to Hera instead of tolerating her increasingly public misbehaviour and unfaithfulness to such a point that he had to execute her for publicly plotting against him with one of her lovers.

Seneca's satirical Augustus manipulates a Homeric quotation to discuss Claudius' unfitness as his successor in very much the same way as Suetonius represented the historical Augustus as framing the limitations and merits of Julia and Tiberius respectively. In other words, this is not just a case of Seneca quoting Homer, but of metaquotation, by imitating in a precise way the manner in which the historical Augustus quoted Homer. One of the main functions of Augustus in the *Apocolocyntosis* is to serve as a foil for the foolishness of Claudius, who is also fond of quoting Homer. As we will see, Seneca's fictional Claudius likewise reflects the habits of quotation of the historical Claudius as recorded by Suetonius. Instead of showing a similar species of excellence, however, he shows a near-identical manner of ineptitude.

IV CLAUDIUS AND HOMER

Both Suetonius and Cassius Dio record an anecdote in which Claudius made himself ridiculous by using a line of Homer as a watchword for the palace guard. It is worth examining this episode in detail, for it illustrates how difficult it was for an emperor to invoke Homer without becoming entangled in awkward intertextual complications, and

[38] Bonandini 2010: 87.
[39] On the ugliness of Claudius, see Braund and James 1998.
[40] Kirk 1985: 113; see also Bonandini 2010: 85.

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because Seneca seems to have picked up on precisely this issue in his satirical depiction of Claudius. Suetonius mentions the episode while describing Claudius' tendency to use Greek at inappropriate times (*Claud.* 42.1):[41]

> multum uero pro tribunali etiam Homericis locutus est uersibus. quotiens quidem hostem uel insidiatorem ultus esset, excubitori tribuno signum de more poscenti non temere aliud dedit quam:
>
> ἄνδρ' ἀπαμύνασθαι, ὅτε τις πρότερος χαλεπήνῃ.
>
> Indeed he often expressed himself from the bench with lines from Homer, and whenever he had taken revenge on an enemy or a conspirator and the tribune of the guard asked in the customary manner for the password, he did not respond at random but rather gave him this:
>
> to ward off a man when someone has made an assault.

Dio's version of this incident specifies that it happened when Claudius was punishing those who had participated in the conspiracy of Annius Vinicianus and Camillus Scribonianus in 42 C.E.[42]

> Κλαύδιος … σύνθημα τοῖς στρατιώταις τὸ ἔπος τοῦτο συνεχῶς διδόναι, τὸ ὅτι χρή·
>
> ἄνδρ' ἀπαμύνασθαι, ὅτε τις πρότερος χαλεπήνῃ.
>
> καὶ ἄλλα δὲ πολλὰ καὶ πρὸς ἐκείνους καὶ πρὸς τὴν βουλὴν τοιουτότροπα ἑλληνιστὶ παρεφθέγγετο, ὥστε καὶ γέλωτα παρὰ τοῖς δυναμένοις ἔστιν ἃ αὐτῶν συνεῖναι ὀφλισκάνειν.
>
> Claudius [at that time] … constantly gave to the soldiers as a password that it was necessary:
>
> to ward off a man when someone has made an assault.
>
> And he uttered many other such things in Greek both to them and to the senate, such that he provoked laughter among those who could understand any of them.

Laughter will have been provoked in part by the impropriety and pretension of putting Homer to this mundane purpose.[43] But Dio says that it was particularly funny for those who could understand the Greek, and the fact that both writers go to the trouble of reporting the particular line that Claudius used suggests that it was not just the general incongruity of using Homer in this way that was responsible for the mirth. This line is not intrinsically ridiculous, so it seems likely that the broader Homeric context made it inappropriate. Even in a situation where the emperor quoted a line from Homer in a way that was designed to detach it as an isolated passphrase, observers were nevertheless ready to interpret the juxtaposition of the Homeric scenario or scenarios that the line brought with it.

Why was Claudius' Homeric quotation judged by contemporaries to be ridiculous? Power rightly saw that the emperor's quotation backfired on him because he neglected to take sufficient account of the line's original, multiple Homeric contexts.[44] He further points out the relevance of Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis*, where the fictional Claudius quotes a line of Homer and is likewise caught out by the original Homeric context.[45] For Power, Claudius was foolish to quote a line which, he claims, in three separate

[41] See Bonandini 2010: 76. The reference to Claudius' habit of quoting Homer while presiding over court cases should be read in the light of Suetonius' earlier litany of Claudius' inappropriate ways of behaving as a judge (*Claud.* 15). On Tiberius' contrasting care not to use Greek in official public contexts, see Suet., *Tib.* 71. On code-switching to and from Greek in official contexts, see Adams 2003: 383–96.

[42] Cass. Dio 60.16.7–8.

[43] The praetorian tribune was probably an equestrian and might therefore have understood the reference. On the daily watchword, see Mottershead 1986: 137–8.

[44] Power 2011.

[45] Power 2011: 730–1: 'There appears to have been a tradition, represented by passages in Seneca, Suetonius and

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Homeric contexts indicates a feeble incapacity. But that is not quite right: Claudius' intertextual failure was the product of a more subtle malfunction than that. The Iliadic context that Claudius presumably wished to evoke was, in fact, entirely appropriate. The unique appearance of this line in the *Iliad* (24.369) comes in a speech delivered by the disguised Hermes to Priam as he crosses the plain of Troy to Achilles' tent.[46] Sent by Zeus and disguised as a young man, Hermes points out to the terrified Priam that he and his Trojan companion are too old to defend themselves against an attacker (24.369).[47] Since the line is spoken here by the disguised Hermes to Priam, Power maps the Iliadic context onto the Roman one by imagining Claudius as Hermes and the praetorian guard as Priam, which would indeed be ridiculous. But this objection is not sound, for Claudius gave this line as a watchword, a phrase to be repeated back to him by the tribune of the palace guard, who stands in the role of Hermes.

Claudius was already 50 years old when he became emperor; not exactly a Priam, but old enough, especially relative to the soldiers of the guard. Claudius saw himself as a descendant of the Trojan royal house and the pathos, solitude and vulnerability of the courageous and dignified Trojan king would have served to evoke sympathy for Claudius. The reference was flattering for the tribune of the guard as well. It cast him as Hermes, disguised as a mortal soldier, but in reality a god walking among men. Thus far, therefore, Claudius appears to have chosen a thoughtful and appropriate line for his bodyguard to echo back to him. Claudius understood how intertextual quotation was supposed to work—he did not merely spout this line as a detached cliché—but he failed to execute it properly. The problem he ran into is endemic in Homer: the same line often appears in multiple places. A line quoted from one context may therefore also belong to other, potentially less relevant or less flattering contexts. Claudius' watchword is such a line, for it also appears in the *Odyssey*, where it is spoken twice by Telemachus.[48]

Telemachus first utters this line to Eumaeus (*Od.* 16.72), who has suggested that the hospitality of the palace should be offered to the visiting stranger whom we know to be Odysseus in disguise. Telemachus responds that he is too young and defenceless to defeat the suitors and that they will abuse the visitor despite his presence. The second time Telemachus speaks this line, it is to the suitors themselves in Book 21, during the contest of the bow. He has tried three times to string his father's bow and just when he is about to succeed on the fourth attempt, Odysseus gives him a signal and the son deliberately breaks off and pretends that he cannot. Telemachus then makes a dissembling speech in which he complains that he is too young to defend himself against an attacker, repeating as a lie (21.133) the very same line that he had spoken in earnest to Eumaeus five books earlier. This use of deceitful words to dissemble his own newly found strength marks the point at which Telemachus comes of age. The repetition of a formulaic line in a new context, as a clever deception rather than an admission of despair, reveals that he has become a son worthy of his father. He is no longer incapable of defending himself, as events will shortly prove.

Dio, in which Claudius was well known for quoting passages of Homer that could easily be turned against him to humorous effect.'

[46] Power 2011: 727, n. 3. There is another line in the *Iliad* (19.183) which is similar, except that the infinitive verb has been changed, which gives it a completely different meaning: Odysseus explains that it is not blameworthy for a king (Agamemnon) to appease (ἀπαρέσσασθαι) a man (Achilles) who has attacked him.

[47] The infinitive verb in the line quoted by Claudius is epexegetic with γέρων in the preceding line: Richardson 1993: 312.

[48] Power 2011: 728 claims that 'the point is the lack of ability to defend oneself due to age: Priam is too old, Telemachus too young'. But this formulation is not quite right: the second time Telemachus speaks this line in the *Odyssey* it is in the form of a lie, and it in fact indicates the opposite: at that precise moment, Telemachus has in fact matured into a man who is capable of defending himself.

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What betrayed Claudius and turned him into a laughing-stock was the inadvertent mapping of his circumstances onto the *Odyssey* rather than the *Iliad*. Rather than a Priam, Rome judged Claudius to be a defective Telemachus/Odysseus who never managed to grow up and clear his wives' suitors from his own palace. Odysseus, when he was a king in danger in his own house, took on a temporary disguise of incapacity and ignobility. Before becoming emperor, Claudius may have survived palace intrigues by pretending to be less clever than he really was, but he never managed to cast off the mantle of disability. After the contest of the bow, we know that Odysseus is about to discard his beggar's rags and Telemachus is about to show himself as a man and a warrior, but Claudius had no way of divesting himself suddenly of the infirmities that made him seem unequal to his office.

Once one begins to start mapping Claudius' palace onto Homer's Ithaca, a whole host of unwelcome associations come into view. Odysseus was away from home for twenty years, which excuses him from any blame for the way the suitors have behaved. Claudius, however, stood by while his household was controlled by his freedmen and by his wives, who were no Penelopes. He divorced his first wife, Plautia Urgulanilla, on account of her unfaithfulness, while she was pregnant with another man's child.[49] Dio dates the anecdote with the Homeric watchword to 42, when Claudius was married to his third wife, Messalina. The culmination of her heroic feats of serial infidelity and the act that made her a true anti-Penelope was her bigamous marriage to her lover, Gaius Silius. Penelope was faithful to Odysseus while he was away from Ithaca for twenty years, but Messalina got married to another man while Claudius was away in Ostia for the day.[50] Odysseus teamed up with Telemachus to reclaim his palace; Claudius drove away his own son by Messalina, Britannicus, and permitted his fourth wife, Agrippina, to promote her son by a previous marriage, the future emperor Nero, in his place.

When Claudius chose his watchword for the guard, he was thinking of Priam and Hermes in the *Iliad*, showing that he imagined himself as a courageous and isolated figure in a hostile landscape. But Suetonius and Dio seem to attest a tradition that reinterpreted the line in a comical vein, as if coming from the *Odyssey* instead. This hostile interpretation painted Claudius as a stunted Telemachus, never to become a man, or a defective Odysseus, unable to throw off his disguise of infirmity and incapacity and to clear the suitors, parasites and usurpers from his ancestral palace. In the next paragraph of his biography, Suetonius reports that Claudius, not long before his death, had promised to Britannicus that he would soon reverse the recent preferment he had been showing to Nero, quoting from some lost Greek tragedy the oracle to Telephus that he who caused the wound will heal it.[51] The irony is that, when Claudius had been poisoned by the mushrooms and was not quite finished off, those who rushed to his assistance allegedly administered an additional dose of poison under the pretext of offering medical aid.[52] Instead of the wounder healing, the healers wounded. Even after his death, Claudius' quotations from Greek literature may have been reinterpreted by his contemporaries in a darkly ironic vein.

*

The historical Claudius' tendency to quote Homer in a manner prone to backfiring awkwardly is one of the many idiosyncrasies documented in Suetonius' biography of the emperor that Seneca had earlier turned to the purpose of savage ridicule in the *Apocolocyntosis*. The passage in which Seneca satirises Claudius' Homeric habit comes when the dead emperor first presents himself at the threshold of the gods, demanding

[49] Suet., *Claud*. 26.2, 27.1.
[50] Tac., *Ann*. 11.26–38.
[51] ὁ τρώσας ἰάσεται: Suet., *Claud*. 43.
[52] Suet., *Claud*. 44.3; Tac., *Ann* 12.67 implicates Agrippina and a doctor.

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admission as one of their number. Jupiter sends Hercules to see who it is, and the two men exchange ham-fisted Homeric tags in the manner of pseudo-intellectuals:[53]

> accessit itaque et quod facillimum fuit Graeculo, ait:
> τίς πόθεν εἰς ἀνδρῶν, ποίη πόλις ἠδὲ τοκῆες;
> Claudius gaudet esse illic philologos homines: sperat futurum aliquem historiis suis locum. itaque et ipse Homerico uersu Caesarem se esse significans ait:
> Ἰλιόθεν με φέρων ἄνεμος Κικόνεσσι πέλασσεν
> (erat autem sequens uersus uerior, aeque Homericus:
> ἔνθα δ' ἐγὼ πόλιν ἔπραθον, ὤλεσα δ' αὐτούς).

> So Hercules went up to him and, as was extremely easy for a Greekling, said:
> Who are you, and from where? What kind are your city and parents?
> Claudius rejoiced that there were men of letters there; he hoped that there would be some place for his historical works. So he too used a verse of Homer to explain that he was Caesar and said:
> The wind, bearing me from Ilium, brought me to the Cicones.
> (But the next verse, likewise from Homer, was truer:
> There I sacked the city and destroyed the people.)

Hercules' question is a formulaic line that appears a number of times in the *Odyssey*, and it had a 'long history of parody and humorous misapplication'.[54] One distinctive feature of this question in its various Homeric contexts is that, more often than not, the answer that comes back is a lie. When Telemachus puts the question to Athena in Book 1 of the *Odyssey*, she responds that she is 'Mentes' (1.170); Odysseus spins his Cretan tale to Eumaeus (14.187), then he refuses to answer Penelope (19.105), and he even lies to poor Laertes, at least initially (24.298).[55] So this question is not the most propitious way for Hercules to elicit a truthful answer from the stranger. Unlike Athena and Odysseus, however, Claudius' answer is not so much deceptive as ridiculous.[56]

Claudius responds with a line from Book 9 of the *Odyssey* (9.39), in which Odysseus begins his narration of his wanderings by telling of how, right after leaving Troy, he sailed directly to the land of the Cicones in Thrace. Claudius apparently wants to tell Hercules that since his death he has been on a quest, like Odysseus, for his rightful homecoming to Olympus. But his response is made absurd by the bizarre non-sequitur of mentioning the Cicones. The randomness and incongruity of the answer is funny in itself, but there is a reason for this particular reference. The encounter between Athena and Telemachus was the most famous episode in which the question quoted by Hercules was spoken, coming as it does from the beginning of the *Odyssey*. Athena responds to the question by saying that she is Mentes, a friend of Odysseus and king of the Taphians. But there is another Mentes in Homer. In the *Iliad*, Apollo disguises himself as a different Mentes, a Trojan ally and king of the Cicones, to encourage Hector in the fight over Patroclus' armour. It seems that Claudius has confused in his mind these two

[53] For examples of the practice of capping Homeric quotations, see Eden 1984: 87 on the phrase *aeque Homericus*. For extended discussions of this passage, see O'Gorman 2005 and Bonandini 2010: 65–83.
[54] The quote is from Eden 1984: 85; for details, see Weinreich 1923: 68–72. On its clichéd quality, see Lund 1994: 80 ('geflügeltes Wort') and Schmitzer 2000: 193 ('Allerweltszitat'). On a possible, very distant echo of the lines quoted by Hercules and Claudius in a passage of Heliodorus' *Aethiopica* (2.21.4–5), see Roncali 1978 and Bonandini 2010: 78, n. 137.
[55] On the other hand, Theoclymenus answers Telemachus truthfully (15.264), and Circe answers her own question (10.325). See Schmitzer 2000: 192–3.
[56] As we will later find out, it is deceptive insofar as Claudius is not really Trojan, which is to say Roman, because the goddess Fever points out that Claudius was not born in Rome at all, but in Gaul; see Maugeri 1985: 75–6. On Odysseus — or rather the duplicitous Roman Ulysses — as a model for the lying Claudius, see Heil 2006: 200.

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Homeric scenes in which a divinity assumes a disguise as a mortal named Mentes. He has recognised Hercules' question as the words of Telemachus, and he attempts to play along by adopting, in the manner of Athena, the persona of Mentes, but he has confused the Mentes of the *Iliad* and Mentes of the *Odyssey*. Claudius is a mortal who wants to be a god, attempting to impersonate a goddess impersonating a mortal. But he picks the wrong mortal. In fact, he chooses to quote the words not of the Ciconian Mentes, but of Odysseus, the very man who sacked Mentes' kingdom.

Claudius is trying to say that he is a Caesar because he comes 'from Troy', but he confuses ultimate origin with immediate provenance, taking the word Ἰλιόθεν 'coming from Troy' out of context.[57] Odysseus has indeed 'come from Troy', but not in the sense that Claudius' purpose requires.[58] This is what the narrator points out by quoting the next line of the *Odyssey*, which highlights that Claudius has inadvertently taken on the persona of Troy's great enemy.[59] Not only did Odysseus sack the land of the Cicones, a Trojan ally; he did so immediately after sacking the city of Troy itself. Thus the narrator implies that Claudius has destroyed Rome as thoroughly as Odysseus did Troy.

Claudius has identified with the wrong side of the conflict. If he really wanted to show that he was a member of the Julian family ('Caesarem se esse significans'), he should have quoted a line of Homer that would have created a parallel with a Trojan leader, such as Priam, Hector or Aeneas, not with Odysseus.[60] Indeed, the satire opens with a reference that highlights Claudius' inability to live up to a proper model from Trojan epic. Near the beginning of the *Apocolocyntosis*, a witness who claims to have seen Claudius traveling along the Appian Way to heaven with his characteristic limp: 'non passibus aequis' (1.2), which are words that Virgil uses to describe little Ascanius and his failing attempts to keep up with his father Aeneas as they flee from Troy.[61] The limping Claudius thus is compared not to Aeneas, but to a child who cannot keep up with him. At the same time, Seneca frames his own satire as a deformed, hobbling successor to the *Aeneid*: a grotesque literary monument appropriate to Claudius rather than Augustus.[62] Claudius' failure to self-identify with a proper Trojan hero such as Aeneas when introducing himself to Hercules is part of his failure to live up to the Virgilian paradigm of leadership.

Seneca's Claudius is so intent upon parading his Greek and is so enamoured of his own self-image as the wily wanderer Odysseus that he self-identifies with the wrong hero on the wrong side of the war from the wrong epic poem. He has confused the two Mentes from the different epics and he has failed to establish a parallel with the Trojan king Priam or with Aeneas as the founder of the Julian line; he has instead adopted the role of the

[57] See Bonandini 2010: 79. Athanassakis 1974: 14, n. 12 argues that the Homeric wind encodes a reference to Claudius' flatulence (i.e. the wind propelling him to heaven is coming *de ilio*); this line of argument is elaborated further by Heil 2006: 197–8. See also Paschalis 2009: 212 and Roth 1987: 806–7.

[58] The other appearance of the word Ἰλιόθεν in Homer relates to Heracles leaving Troy after sacking it (*Il.* 14.251).

[59] The narrator does not quote the first word in the next line (Ἰσμάρῳ), since it belongs grammatically with Claudius' line. The suppression of Ismarus, a Thracian place-name which is irrelevant to the present context, highlights by contrast the bizarre presence of the Cicones in Claudius' quotation. On the narrator's trumping of Claudius' line, see Schmitzer 2000: 196.

[60] Schmitzer 2000: 193 notes, however, that the *gens Claudia* traced its descent to Odysseus.

[61] *Aen.* 2.723–5, on which see Whitton 2013: 157 and Bonandini 2010: 146–9. The pun is that 'non … aequis' here simultaneously means unequal to the one leading the way and unequal to each other.

[62] In support of the notion that the image of Ascanius and Creusa following in the footsteps of Aeneas leaving Troy could have a strong metapoetic character, compare the end of Statius' *Thebaid*, where the poet commands his epic to follow in the footsteps of the *Aeneid* in terms borrowed from Creusa following Aeneas (*Theb.* 12.816–17 and *Aen.* 2.711). On this trope in general, see Heerink 2015: 141–53, who suggests that Virgil's *non passibus aequis* may allude self-reflexively to his own struggle to keep up with Homer. For a very different view of the connection between the *Apocolocyntosis* and the *Aeneid*, see Binder 1974.

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Greek destroyer of Troy. He is so focused on playing within the paradigm of the *Odyssey* introduced by Hercules' quotation that he fails to notice that he ought to have emulated a Trojan from the *Iliad*. The historical Claudius, in the episode of the Homeric watchword for the tribune of the guard, tried to present himself as analogous to the dignified Priam but ended up comparing himself unfavourably to Telemachus and Odysseus. The satirical Claudius has likewise confused Trojan and Greek, *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. The parallel with the historical incident of the watchword is striking, and it is quite possible that Seneca was inspired by this well-known episode when he created the scene. Hercules is, after all, serving as a palace guard for the Olympian gods here, and his Homeric question is a sort of a watchword, a challenge to a suspected interloper, a challenge at which Claudius fails. In other words, this passage is a metaquotation: Seneca's quotation of Homer is a caricature of the particular manner and perhaps even a precise instance in which the emperor Claudius quoted Homer.

V METAQUOTATION IN THE APOCOLOCYNTOSIS

One of the most distinctive features of the *Apocolocyntosis* as a prose text is the way it embeds within its extremely heterogenous texture explicit quotations of and references to poetry.[63] This practice has recently been subject to an excellent and exhaustive study by Bonandini, who rightly views Seneca's habit of embedding short verse quotations in the prose parts of the text as fundamentally related to his alternation between prose and verse, which is an essential aspect of Menippean satire.[64] But metaquotation is another important aspect of Seneca's intertextual playfulness. As Roncali points out, most of the verse tags strewn through the *Apocolocyntosis* come right out of ancient rhetorical handbooks.[65] If that were all they are, they would be very dull. But, as we have seen, a rhetorical cliché can unexpectedly be transformed into a pointed intertext by means of metaquotation. As we will now see, in the *Apocolocyntosis* this phenomenon goes beyond the characterisation of Augustus and Claudius: it applies also to many of the other poetic quotations peppered though the text. Many of them are on some level quotations of quotations, a mechanism that provides plausible deniability when the satire cuts close to the bone.

We begin with what appears at first to be a Greek proverb. One of the charges against Claudius is that, when sitting as a judge, he decided cases upon having heard from only one side ('una tantum parte audita', 12.3.21). Now, after Pompeius has delivered his speech for the prosecution, the judge, Aeacus, refuses permission for Claudius to say anything in his own defense, on the principle that the emperor often did the same thing when sitting in judgement himself. Aeacus quotes a Greek proverbial expression (14.2):

> αἴκε πάθοις τὰ ἔρεξας δίκη εὐθεῖα γένοιτο.
>
> If you should suffer what you have inflicted, direct justice would be done.

The earliest expression we have of this idea is in Hesiod, though in a slightly different form.[66] Our knowledge of the source of this line derives from the scholia to the *Nicomachean Ethics*, for it is quoted by Aristotle when defining the principle of reciprocal justice, the *lex talionis*, which he calls 'the justice of Rhadamanthus'. This

[63] On the text's generic eclecticism, see Blänsdorf 1986.
[64] Bonandini 2010, esp. 11–47 on the question of the genre of the text and its relationship to the Menippean tradition; see also Relihan 1993: 75–90.
[65] Roncali 2014: 681.
[66] F 286 M-W. On the different wording of the quotation in Seneca, see Bonandini 2010: 105.

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connection with a judge in the underworld strongly suggests that Seneca is thinking of Aristotle's prior quotation of this proverb.[67] He attributes the words to Aeacus rather than Rhadamanthus, but the three judges of the dead are largely interchangeable in that role.[68]

The context of Aristotle's prior act of quotation (*Eth. Nic.* 1132b) could not be more relevant to the question at hand. Aristotle gives a counter-example to disprove the proverbial principle of giving an eye for an eye: he asserts that a magistrate who does someone an injury as a consequence of exercising his office should not be subject to retaliation. That is precisely what Seneca's Aeacus is doing: he is punishing Claudius by inflicting on him the same flawed process that he had inflicted on others in his capacity as judge. It is an interesting philosophical question: is it just to subject an unjust judge, when he is judged, to the same kind of injustice he himself has meted out? Seneca seems to be indicating that this case constitutes an exception to Aristotle's condemnation of reciprocal justice. For it is 'not the punishment but the procedure' which is being reciprocated.[69] Seneca's keen interest in philosophical ethics underlies the humour. The oblique reference by way of metaquotation to the *Nicomachean Ethics* indicates that Claudius was such an exceptionally wicked man that the crude eye-for-an-eye justice proverbially meted out by Aeacus is in this case uniquely exempt from the strictures of Aristotle.[70]

This same phenomenon, whereby a detached proverbial expression serves to allude to a secondary context of prior quotation, can also be observed in Latin. There are two proverbial quotations from Ennius in the *Apocolocyntosis*, and it is striking that both are also quoted and discussed by Cicero in a single passage of *De re publica*.[71] It is as if Seneca wants us to know that he has never bothered to read Ennius, a poet he held in utter contempt (Gell., *NA* 12.2); he is only familiar with the bits quoted by Cicero.[72] It is remarkable that Ennius appears here in the very same form as we modern readers encounter him: as a fragmentary poet, a set of dismembered quotations extracted from Cicero.[73] Seneca seems to know already that this is the republican poet's destiny.

The first of the two Ennian fragments is quoted by Seneca in the debate in the divine assembly, when one of the interlocutors (whose identity is lost in a lacuna) illustrates Claudius' obtuseness by quoting a phrase from Ennius' *Iphigenia* which had become proverbial (8.3):

> quid in cubiculo suo faciat nesciet: iam 'caeli scrutatur plagas'.

> He will not know what he is doing in his own bedroom: he is already 'scanning the tracts of the sky'.

[67] Cicero explicitly discusses the *Nicomachean Ethics* in *De finibus* (5.12), so it is not problematic to assume that it was known to Seneca and some of his readers: Nielsen 2012: 10–12.

[68] The presence of Aeacus here is explained by the connection with Horace's mock-catabasis, which was quoted just before (13.3), and where Aeacus is the judge (Hor., *Carm.* 2.13.22).

[69] Eden 1984: 146. See Bexley 2022: 54–5: 'Essentially, Aeacus contravenes the law in order to apply it better'.

[70] A similar case could be made for the Homeric tag (*Il.* 9.385) employed by Pedo Pompeius, the prosecutor at the infernal tribunal, who says that Claudius' victims were 'like grains of sand and specks of dust' (ὅσα ψάμαθός τε κόνις τε, 14.1), which might be a distant echo of the way Aristotle uses this Homeric phrase in his *Rhetoric* (1413a) as an example of how hyperbole is used to express anger. If so, the joke is that the Homeric quotation is inserted into Pompeius' flat formal indictment rather than into his prosecutory oration, where such rhetorical flourishes would be more appropriate.

[71] As noted by Maugeri 1985: 66; see also Bonandini 2011: 313.

[72] Mazzoli 1964: 309 notes that all of Seneca's Ennian quotations are also found in Cicero, apart from one which comes in the course of a discussion (*Ep.* 108.33) of *De re publica* and so was almost certainly quoted in a lost section of that work. He further notes that Seneca twice explicitly quotes Ennius via Cicero and that while Cicero sometimes quotes Ennius more fully than Seneca, the reverse is never true. See also Mazzoli 1970: 187.

[73] On the process of Ennius' dismemberment in Cicero and subsequent reconstitution, see Čulík-Baird 2022: 1–29.

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The phrase probably comes from a speech of Achilles to Clytemnestra in which he abuses Calchas, and it is quoted by Cicero in its fullest form in *De re publica* (1.30.3). The full line is:

> quod est ante pedes nemo spectat, caeli scrutantur plagas.
>
> no one looks at what's in front of his feet; they are scanning the tracts of the sky.

Seneca's speaker has changed the first half of Ennius' line, referring not just to Claudius' general failure to see what was in front of him, but more pointedly to his failure to know what was being done by his freedmen and his wives in his own household, even in his own bedroom.[74] In the immediately preceding lines of the Ennian passage, Achilles is speaking contemptuously of the constellations as ridiculous creatures in the heavens invented by astrologers: *nomen aliquod beluarum* ('some name taken from one of the beasts'). Claudius was earlier compared by Hercules to the monsters of his labours, and his strange voice and limping gait put him in mind of 'sea beasts', using the same word as Ennius: *marinis beluis* (5.3). Claudius in the *Apocolocyntosis* thus attempts to enact precisely what Ennius' Achilles ridicules: the elevation of an absurd beast into the heavens.

Moreover, the part of Ennius' line which is suppressed by Seneca in order to introduce the reference to Claudius' failure to see what was going on in his own bedroom is also, despite its absence, highly relevant here. The familiarity of the proverb would have ensured that its original form was in the mind of readers: 'quod est ante pedes nemo spectat'.[75] Claudius' feet play a very important role in the *Apocolocyntosis*, being the deformity which is the external, bodily sign of his unfitness as both *princeps* and prospective god. He is presented by Seneca as a monster and a beast because of his limp, and it his lack of awareness of his unsuitability for deification which drives the plot of the piece. If Claudius had looked down toward his feet instead of up to the heavens, he would have realised that the apotheosis of his deformed body is a ridiculous prospect in precisely the way Ennius' Achilles views the bizarre and fanciful creatures of the constellations.

The other reference to Ennius in the *Apocolocyntosis* is a phrase embedded in one of its verse passages: Claudius' mourners call him 'pulchre cordatus homo' ('a beautifully well-witted man', 12.3.3).[76] This phrase is adapted from a line of Ennius' *Annals*, 'egregie cordatus homo catus Aelius Sextus' ('Sextus Aelius, a shrewd and exceptionally fine-witted man').[77] As Skutsch says, Seneca is being 'doubly ironical because Claudius is *uecors* ['witless'; cf. 'nec cor nec caput habet' ('he has neither intelligence nor individuality' 8.1)] and because Seneca thought the language of Ennius ridiculous'.[78] Furthermore, since Seneca has drawn both of his quotations of Ennius from a single section of Cicero's *De re publica*, this invites us to consider the relevance of this secondary context in which both of these Ennian cliches are embedded.[79] That is,

[74] The Ennian juxtaposition of idle star-gazing and earthly blindness evokes, as Eden 1984: 105 points out, a passage in which Suetonius assigns both of these attributes to Claudius (*Claud.* 39.1).

[75] Thus Bonandini 2011: 314.

[76] On the possibility of a parody here of Nero's *laudatio funebris* for Claudius, written by Seneca, see Heil 2006: 195.

[77] Skutsch 1985: no. 329. On the change of wording, see Bonandini 2010: 420.

[78] Skutsch 1985: 505.

[79] It is true that both Ennian quotations were proverbial, and that they come to us from multiple sources: Cicero quotes the Ennian line with the phrase *egregie cordatus homo* twice more in other works, and the phrase from the *Iphigenia* once more elsewhere: *De or.* 1.198, *Tusc.* 1.18; *Div.* 2.30. It is the combination of the two Ennian phrases in a single passage of *De re publica* which makes this context uniquely significant as an intertext.

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metaquotation activates Cicero's text as a further context for us to consider in addition to Ennius' *Iphigenia* and *Annals*.

In this passage, Cicero's interlocutors have been discussing the recent appearance of a parhelion, or phantom sun (*Rep.* 1.15), a phenomenon that Seneca himself discusses at length in his *Naturales Quaestiones* (1.11). This leads them to debate the usefulness of purely theoretical intellectual pursuits such as mathematics and astronomy. Lucius Furius Philus promotes the model of C. Sulpicius Gallus, whose learning in astronomy enabled him to predict the eclipse on the eve of the battle of Pydna (1.21–3). Against him Laelius praises the practical wisdom of Sextus Aelius Paetus, who was an ancestor of one of the interlocutors, Q. Aelius Tubero (1.30). Laelius quotes Ennius' description of Aelius as an *egregie cordatus homo* and then notes that Aelius used to criticise Gallus' studies by quoting to him the lines from Ennius' *Iphigenia* which he himself then quotes. In other words, Seneca's Ennian phrase is already a metaquotation in Cicero, whose character, Laelius, is quoting Tubero's ancestor, Sextus Aelius, quoting Ennius' drama to Gallus. Laelius then insists that the subject of their discussion ought to be not the studies of the Greeks, but rather the troubles currently afflicting the Roman state. Seneca has therefore pointed us toward a passage in which Cicero debates the merits of theoretical versus practical wisdom for the statesman.

Against this background, Seneca's Claudius can be seen as an example of a Roman leader who wrongly privileged Greek theoretical knowledge over Roman practical wisdom. Aelius Paetus, the *cordatus homo* whose cleverness earned Ennius' praise, was primarily known as a jurist. Claudius, with his interest in Roman law, might have followed in the footsteps of this *cordatus* and *catus* Roman exemplar, but he failed to apply his theoretical knowledge appropriately, as Suetonius' account of his erratic behaviour as a judge attests (*Claud.* 15). Claudius' problem is not that he had intellectual interests; his failure was that he was not able to subordinate those to the traditional Roman virtues of statesmanship. Seneca's secondary Ciceronian intertext, which dramatises a serious debate about the value of Greek theoretical knowledge for Roman leaders, highlights how far from these ideals Claudius had fallen. A further level of irony arises from the fact that this Aelius Paetus, whose example Claudius fails to emulate as a legal scholar, was an ancestor not only of Cicero's character Q. Aelius Tubero, but also of Aelia Paetina, Claudius' casually discarded second wife.[80] Seneca's apparently trivial and cliched Ennian tags do much more work than is first apparent.

VI PLAUSIBLE DENIABILITY

Many of the quotations and intertextual games in the *Apocolocyntosis* are of a parodic nature, but by means of metaquotation and related techniques, Seneca is able to approach in the most oblique way possible some serious and indeed exceedingly dangerous topics. For example, the entirety of the *Apocolocyntosis* is an elaborate joke about the mechanisms of the apotheosis of the Roman emperors, but it takes for granted that such a thing existed. For the purposes of satire he had to do so, in order to depict Claudius as unworthy of that honour. But Seneca the philosopher knew that after the finality of death apotheosis awaits no one. There is a subtle allusion to this fact in the final verse passage of the satire, a hexameter account of the punishment of Claudius. This is an orthodox poetic window allusion, which is a close relation of metaquotation: a reference to a second poem that simultaneously alludes to a third poem to which the second poem also alludes. In this instance, Seneca overtly evokes Virgil's account of the underworld in the *Aeneid* while also alluding to Virgil's Homeric model for that passage.

80 Suet., *Claud.* 26.2.

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On analogy with the classic punishments of Sisyphus, Tantalus and Ixion, a new punishment is created specially for the dice-addicted Claudius: to throw dice eternally from a dice-box without a bottom. The general flavour of the passage derives from the Sibyl's account of the punishment of the wicked in the sixth book of the *Aeneid*, especially one particular Senecan hexameter (15.1.4):

> lusuro similis semper semperque petenti
>
> always like someone on the point of playing and in the act of searching

This echoes Virgil's description of the rock hanging over someone, presumably Tantalus (6.602–3):[81]

> quos super atra silex iam iam lapsura cadentique
> imminet adsimilis
>
> over whom hangs a black rock on the point of slipping at any moment, as if already falling

The common elements are: an expression of similarity (*similis/adsimilis*), the future participle (*lusuro/lapsura*), dative present participle (*petenti/cadenti*) and duplicated temporal adverb (*semper semperque/iam iam*).[82] The Virgilian pair of lines is particularly memorable for the hypermetric elision between *cadentique* and *imminet* at the start of the next line, vividly representing the precariousness of the stone. On the other hand, the pathetic effort of Claudius throwing the dice but not succeeding is also reminiscent, as Eden points out, of Virgil's model: *Odyssey* 11, where Homer describes Heracles in the underworld, about to shoot the other shades around him with his bow: αἰεὶ βαλέοντι ἐοικώς ('always like a man about to shoot', *Od.* 11.608). The common elements in Homer and Seneca are: the word for similarity (*simili*/ἐοικώς), on which depends a dative participle (*petenti*/βαλέοντι), modified by an adverb meaning 'always' (*semper*/αἰεί). Claudius' dice-box is a parody not only of the Virgilian punishments of Tantalus, the Danaids and Sisyphus, but also of the pathetic futility of Homer's Heracles instinctively drawing his bow as if to kill shades that are already dead.

Seneca's allusion to *Aeneid* 6 thus conceals a deeper allusion to the shade of Heracles in *Odyssey* 11, which was a passage of enormous controversy in antiquity. What was Heracles doing in the underworld? Had he not undergone apotheosis? Was he not therefore a god? This scandal was rectified in antiquity by the interpolation of three lines (11.602–4) which interjected that this was only a phantom of Heracles; the real thing was living happily on Olympus with his immortal consort, Hebe.[83] These lines were recognised as an interpolation in antiquity; in Homer's universe no one, not even Heracles, overcomes death.[84] For comic effect, throughout the *Apocolocyntosis* Seneca has treated apotheosis as a genuine possibility and has depicted Hercules in particular as living on Olympus. But through this window allusion to Homer, Seneca reminds us with exquisite subtlety that all apotheosis is fiction. Not only Claudius, but all of us must end up in the underworld, even Hercules, Augustus and Nero.[85]

Another delicate matter that Seneca twice alludes to by means of strategic quotation is the circumstance of Claudius' death. The first instance is a quotation of a line from Virgil's

[81] On the uncertainties here, see Horsfall 2013: 416–20.
[82] See Bonandini 2010: 476–7.
[83] Gantz 1993: 460.
[84] The scholia attribute the interpolation to a famous Athenian forger called Onomacritus; on the extent of the interpolation, see Petzl 1969: 36.
[85] For a different account of Seneca's general view of deification in the *Apocolocyntosis*, see Whitton 2013: 157–61.

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Georgics early in the satire: Mercury urges the Fates to make a quick end to Claudius, quoting Virgil's recommendation that the beekeeper, after a war between two swarms, should put to death the weaker king bee to let the better one rule alone:[86]

> dede neci, melior uacua sine regnet in aula.
>
> Give him over to slaughter; let his better reign in the vacated palace.

This quotation explicitly frames the succession of Nero as the consequence of a deliberate decision to execute Claudius.[87] It is only the fact that these words come from the mouth of a god that saves them from being an accusation against Nero and his mother: it was the gods who decided that the inferior Claudius must be put to death, and thus it was the gods who put him out of his misery. But Seneca has also evoked the broader theme of violent succession. The civil war in Virgil's beehive served, of course, as an allegory for the conflict between Octavian and Antony. In the verse passage that follows immediately in the *Apocolocyntosis*, Apollo sings in praise of the new emperor, who will be the god's equal in beauty and talent.[88] The shining features that Apollo ascribes to Nero (*Apocol.* 4.1.31–2) echo Virgil's victorious bees, who gleam with a golden colour and flash with light (*G.* 4.91–3, 98–9). Claudius, by contrast, is physically deformed, like Virgil's vanquished swarm of bees (*G.* 4.93–8).

In the light of this parallel, it is relevant that Claudius was directly descended from Mark Antony and that he cultivated his memory.[89] Unlike Caligula and Nero, Claudius was not directly descended from Augustus.[90] Nero had a similar if more remote link with Antony on his father's side, but he could also boast of being a direct descendant of Augustus on his mother's side: he was his great-great-grandson via Julia and Agrippa. Seneca's quotation of Virgil's civil war among the bees subtly frames the contrast between Claudius and Nero as a repetition of the conflict between Antony and his erstwhile brother-in-law Octavian. The quotation thus functions as a kind of window allusion, looking back through Virgil's allegory to the battle of Actium. Seneca suggests that the supersession of Claudius by Nero will be just as momentous and propitious an occasion in Roman history as Actium, while also hinting at the intra-familial violence that brought it about.

A further example shows Seneca coming even closer to hinting at the suspicious circumstances of Claudius' death. After Apollo's hymn of praise to Nero, the Fates order Claudius' term of existence to come an abrupt close, so that his body should be carried out amid general rejoicing (4.2):

> Claudium autem iubent omnes
> χαίροντας, εὐφημοῦντας ἐκπέμπειν δόμων.
>
> But as for Claudius, they ordered everybody
> to carry him out from the house with rejoicing and fair-speaking.

This line comes from a passage in Euripides' *Cresphontes* (F 449.4 N) which expresses the tragic and paradoxical sentiment that human life is so hard that birth should be a cause for grieving and death a cause for celebration among one's friends and family. This passage had become a proverbial expression of pessimism, and it was translated in full by Cicero

[86] *Apocol.* 3.2, quoting *G.* 4.90.
[87] See Dobesch 2002: 66.
[88] On this passage, see Whitton 2013: 161–5.
[89] Suet., *Claud.* 11.3.
[90] Later in the satire, Claudius' unsavory advocate, Diespiter, claims on his behalf that his client was connected by blood with Augustus, which is either an exaggeration or a lie, depending on how literally we take the phrase 'sanguine contingat' (9.5). See Kraft 1966: 102–3 and Binder 1974: 306–7.

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(*Tusc.* 1.115).[91] Seneca drains the line of paradox and simply says that Claudius' death should be a cause for general celebration, turning a tragic universal into a comic particular. At first sight, that is all there is to it; the line is a decontextualised cliché. But if we choose to explore its potential as an intertextual reference to the *Cresphontes*, another possibility emerges.

Euripides' play does not survive, but we may surmise that the pessimistic lines in question were spoken at some point by Merope, who was forced to marry the man who had killed her husband and her older sons. Hyginus reports that her surviving son eventually returned home, disguised as his own murderer, ostensibly to claim the price that had been put on his own head. Merope nearly kills him, but they recognise each other, join forces and conspire together to kill her usurping husband.[92] Given that the *Apocolocyntosis* is so deeply rooted in the particular circumstances of Claudius' demise, and given that this quotation introduces Seneca's unsympathetic account of his death, there is an unmistakable resonance in the story of a mother and son conspiring to kill her subsequent husband, the wicked and illegitimate king, in order to place the son, who is a child of her first husband, on a throne which is rightfully his by direct descent from Augustus. Cast in those terms, the parallel with the rumours around Nero's accession are striking. Agrippina was widely regarded as having organised the death of her current husband, like Merope, in order to place Nero, her son by a previous husband, on the throne. It was Merope's son, Cresphontes, who actually killed the usurping tyrant, which might hint — but no more — at a possible role for Nero himself in Claudius' death. Of course, Seneca never explicitly refers to the possibility that Agrippina had poisoned Claudius with the help of Nero. And the parallels with Merope are not perfect. But the general congruence with the contemporary situation in Rome is striking.

In this passage we see Seneca profiting from the undecidability of whether a literary cliché can be divorced from its context. Like Augustus quoting Homer to allude obliquely to his daughter's sexual appetite, Seneca used a strategic quotation to imply something that could not be spoken, concealing an accusation of murder in a manner that was completely deniable.[93] He could plausibly claim that the Euripidean context was irrelevant and that the line was simply a commonplace, a disembodied cliché. On the other hand, Seneca the tragedian was steeped in Euripides, and he must have known this play well.[94] Did Nero understand the intertextual innuendo? Did Agrippina? The actions of Merope and her son were heroic and entirely justified in Euripides' play, so it was not in fact an unflattering parallel for the new emperor, just impolitic to mention. It is entirely possible that Nero was in on the joke. On the other hand, it is equally possible that Seneca knew better than anyone else that this reference would go over the head of his pupil.

VII CONCLUSION

To show that the rules of metaquotation were widely understood in antiquity, I will conclude with an example in which a series of figures from antiquity elaborated upon one of the examples we have already examined. We saw that Seneca's Claudius claimed

[91] See Bonandini 2011: 307–10.
[92] Hyg., *Fab.* 137.
[93] For further claims of innuendo about the truth of Claudius' death hidden in the *Apocolocyntosis*, see Leach 1989: 207–9. For arguments that Seneca's text contains an implicit justification of Agrippina's deed, see Dobesch 2001: 574–6; 2002: 64–6. On the other hand, as Damon 2010: 65–7 points out, with respect to the narrative of the event of Claudius' death, Seneca actually adheres to the official version.
[94] See Maugeri 1985: 73 and Bonandini 2010: 100.

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a place among literary types ('philologos homines', 5.4) by quoting the Homeric line about Odysseus arriving among the Cicones, a bizarre non-sequitur.[95] Coincidentally, this same line is also quoted by Epictetus in one of his *Discourses* as an equally random non-sequitur response.[96] Epictetus is ridiculing pseudo-philosophers who can rattle off philosophical doctrines and arguments with great facility and cite authorities for all them, but who have not examined their truth for themselves. Such a person is no better than a grammarian (γραμματικός, *Disc.* 2.19.6), who has a bottomless store of authoritative knowledge about irrelevant things:[97]

> ἀλλ' ἐρεῖς ἡμῖν Ἑλένην καὶ Πρίαμον καὶ τὴν τῆς Καλυψοῦς νῆσον τὴν οὔτε γενομένην οὔτ' ἐσομένην. Καὶ ἐνταῦθα μὲν οὐδὲν μέγα τῆς ἱστορίας κρατεῖν, ἴδιον δὲ δόγμα μηδὲν πεποιῆσθαι. ἐπὶ τῶν ἠθικῶν δὲ πάσχομεν αὐτὸ πολὺ μᾶλλον ἢ ἐπὶ τούτων. 'εἰπέ μοι περὶ ἀγαθῶν καὶ κακῶν.' 'ἄκουε·
> Ἰλιόθεν με φέρων ἄνεμος Κικόνεσσι πέλασσεν.'

> But you will tell us of Helen and Priam and the island of Calypso which never was and never will be. And here it is of no great consequence to master the mythological stories without having formulated one's own proper judgement. In the case of ethics, however, we suffer much more from this than in those other matters. 'Speak to me of good and evil.' 'Listen:
> The wind, bearing me from Ilium, brought me to the Cicones.'

Epictetus suddenly leaps into playing the role of a half-educated fool who only can parrot received information without understanding it. Upon being challenged to discourse on ethics by a hypothetical interlocutor, he responds by quoting an absurdly irrelevant line of Homer. He then continues in this comical vein, spouting pseudo-philosopical gibberish for which he cites Hellanicus the mythographer as an authority.

What is striking here is that Seneca and Epictetus both have chosen, apparently at random, exactly the same line of Homer for a bizarre response delivered by a superficially learned but dim-witted buffoon. Could this be more than a coincidence? It might seem surprising that Epictetus would be familiar with Seneca's satire, but it is in fact quite likely that he had a close personal connection with the text. He spent his youth as a slave to Epaphroditus, the freedman of Claudius who subsequently became secretary (*a libellis*) to Nero.[98] Epictetus was born around the time that Claudius died and was still young when Seneca died, but his master would have known every detail of the circumstances around the death of Claudius and the accession of Nero. Epaphroditus was part of the very small group of Palatine insiders that constituted the ideal audience for the *Apocolocyntosis*. Given his master's connections with the circumstances of its composition, it is not hard to imagine that Epictetus had read it.[99]

Seneca's satire had much that might appeal to Epictetus, who suffered from the same disability as Claudius, a lame leg. Epictetus began life as a slave, but ended it as a world-famous philosopher, sought by the great and good of the Roman world, and who counted an emperor as a friend.[100] Claudius' trajectory in the *Apocolocyntosis* is the

[95] On Seneca's parody of fatuous philology, see Schmitzer 2000.
[96] This same Homeric hexameter is also sometimes quoted by the ancient grammarians as an example of a dactylic line (Bonandini 2010: 77–8); but that is a very different matter.
[97] Epict., *Disc.* 2.19.12, on which see Bonandini 2010: 78.
[98] Epictetus tells a story of his master (*Disc.* 1.19) which makes it clear that he must have been an imperial freedman, despite the scepticism of Weaver 1994: 475–9.
[99] On the links between the *Apocolocyntosis* and Epictetus, see Roncali 1987: 104–8 and Bonandini 2010: 78. Bonandini 2012b: 141–2, 173 points out an interesting parallel between the Homeric banter of Hercules and Claudius and an anecdote recorded by Epictetus (*Disc.* 3.22.92) in which Diogenes and Alexander exchange Homeric tags from successive lines. For a discussion of the contrast between Epictetus' sense of humour and Seneca's, see Nussbaum 2009: 88–9.
[100] *SHA Hadr.* 16.

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precise opposite: he begins as an emperor aspiring to be a god but ends as a slave in the underworld. It would not be surprising if Epictetus saw himself as an anti-Claudius; this would be perfectly in keeping with Epictetus' constant insistence upon the moral equivalence between himself as a former slave and the most powerful Romans of his day.[101]

If all this is right, Epictetus was deliberately evoking the Claudius of Seneca's caricature when he jokingly impersonated a *grammatikos* uncritically spouting rote trivia. In the process he further amplified the absurdity of the quotation. 'The wind, bearing me from Ilium, brought me to the Cicones' is a ridiculous answer to 'where are you from?' but it at least addresses the geographical question. As an answer to the prompt 'speak to me of good and evil' it is far more absurd, an amplification of the Senecan original. Greek authors of the early Imperial period did not, as a rule, mention the existence of Latin literature, but that does not mean they did not read it.[102] In this case, Epictetus was able to allude to Seneca without breaking that rule, because the text he is ostensibly quoting is not Seneca, but Homer. It is a metaquotation: the philosopher seems to be quoting Homer, but he is actually quoting Seneca's Claudius' quotation of Homer. Epictetus thereby invoked the deified emperor Claudius as a paradigm of the learned fool, but did so in a way that was plausibly deniable.

This passage from the *Discourses* of Epictetus, a collection put in writing by Arrian, later acquired a certain notoriety. Gellius tells an anecdote in which he was invited by Herodes Atticus to his villa at Cephisia, northeast of Athens.[103] One of the other guests was a young Stoic philosopher who kept ruining their after-dinner discussions by pontificating at great length in speeches bursting with technical philosophical terminology. In order to silence this pompous know-it-all, Herodes called for a copy of Epictetus' *Discourses* and he read aloud the passage we have just discussed. The thrust of Herodes' rebuke was to characterise his unpleasant guest as a figure just like Epictetus' buffoon: full of philosophical knowledge but without wisdom.[104] But Herodes was not just quoting Epictetus; he was also repeating Epictetus' metaquotation of Seneca.

The obnoxious Stoic guest had a high opinion of himself and a low opinion of Romans (Gell., *NA* 1.2.4):

> praeque se uno ceteros omnes linguae Atticae principes gentemque omnem togatam, quodcumque nomen Latinum rudes esse et agrestes praedicabat.
>
> He boasted that, in comparison with him, all the other leading figures of the Greek language and the entire race that wears the toga and the entire Latin people were uncivilised and boorish.

Gellius issues a sly rebuke to the young man's disdain for Roman culture by inserting here the Virgilian phrase 'the race that wears the toga', as if in rebuttal: a culture that produced Virgil was perhaps not entirely boorish.[105] That is not the only rebuke here to this young man's attitude to Roman culture. Herodes himself, by quoting to him this passage in which Epictetus recalls Seneca's quotation of Homer, implicitly holds Epictetus up as an example of a Greek Stoic philosopher who had a more positive opinion of and engagement with Latin literature than his young guest, even if, as required by the rules of the game whereby Greeks did not generally mention the existence of Latin literature, the engagement with Seneca was conducted obliquely, by means of metaquotation.

[101] See e.g. *Disc.* 4.1.
[102] For a defence of this position, see Jolowicz 2021: 1–34.
[103] Gell., *NA* 1.2. On the villa, see Rife 2008: 96–9.
[104] 'tamquam si ea omnia non ab Epicteto in quosdam alios, sed ab Herode in eum dicta essent' ('as if the whole thing had been pronounced, not by Epictetus against others, but against him by Herodes', *NA* 1.2.13).
[105] 'gentemque togatam', *Aen.* 1.282, a favourite line of Augustus (Suet., *Aug.* 40.5).

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We have now arrived at a point in the tradition where we can see Aulus Gellius quoting Herodes Atticus quoting Arrian quoting Epictetus quoting Seneca quoting the fictional Claudius quoting Homer: this is an instance of meta-meta-meta-meta-metaquotation. It did not happen by accident. All of these writers surely understood the game they were playing and were aware of the underlying, deniable allusion to the caricature of Claudius. Each participant in the chain of metaquotation could reasonably deny that they meant any slight to the dignity of the deified emperor, just as Seneca could deny that he meant any allusion to Nero's parricide when he quoted an apparently proverbial line from Euripides' *Cresphontes*.

The central theme of this article has been the instability of the distinction between poetic cliche and active intertext and the way both emperors and writers played upon this indeterminacy. Due to their prominent place in public life, the Roman emperors had to be acutely aware that their Homeric tags might not be treated innocently, as detached proverbs. Their resonance was examined closely. Intertextuality was not only a matter of professional concern for poets; it was a mode of thought that ran through Greco-Roman culture.

Metaquotation was the practice of ostensibly quoting Homer or some other classic text while actually alluding to another episode of quotation of that passage or even to a whole tradition of quotation. This mechanism served as both an opportunity and a danger: even an apparently proverbial line of verse could acquire a newly pointed secondary context if it was prominently quoted by an emperor, real or fictional. It is a key aspect of the *Apocolocyntosis*, where fictitious Roman emperors are made to quote Homer in ways that recall actual instances of those emperors quoting Homer. Seneca also uses this technique more broadly; for example, implicitly alluding to Cicero by quoting passages of Ennius that Cicero had quoted.

Anyone who quoted Homer, however casually, needed to be aware of the possibility that his or her hearers might superimpose the original Homeric context or another context in which someone else had previously quoted the same line. On the other hand, the circulation and widespread use of Homeric quotations as genuinely detached proverbs provided a mechanism whereby a writer could deny, where that might be expedient, the existence of any allusion to any pointed context whatsoever. Intertextuality was a complex game that even emperors had to play carefully, and, with the signal exception of Claudius, some of them played it remarkably well.

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