

WJEC

Level 1 Certificate in Latin Literature

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Prescribed text for Unit 9532
Latin Literature Narratives

Section A
Tacitus, *Annales XIV.3-9*
Nero and Agrippina

This is the official examination text for the
WJEC Level 1 Certificate in Latin Literature 2012 and 2013

Tacitus, *Annales XIV.3-9* *Nero and Agrippina*

I

igitur Nero vitare secretos matris congressus; abscedentem eam in hortos aut in agrum laudare quod otium caperet. postremo praegravem eam esse ratus interficere constituit, hactenus consultans utrum veneno an ferro vel qua alia vi placuit primo venenum. sed inter epulas principis si daretur, referri ad casum non poterat tali iam Britannici exitio. et ministros temptare arduum videbatur mulieris usu scelerum adversus insidias intentae; atque ipsa praesumendo remedia munierat corpus. quonam modo ferrum et caedes occultaretur nemo reperiebat; et metuebat Nero ne quis tanto facinori delectus iussa sperneret.

5

10

The freedman Anicetus came up with a clever plan; he was in charge of the fleet at Misenum, had been Nero's childhood tutor, and he and Agrippina hated each other equally. For this reason he explained that a ship could be built, designed so that a part of it would collapse far out at sea and throw Agrippina overboard unawares. Nothing was so capable of accidents as the sea, and if she were done away with by a shipwreck, who would be so unreasonable as to regard as a crime, something caused by the winds and the sea? And the emperor would be able to put up a temple to his dead mother and altars and so on to show his piety.

II

The ingenuity pleased Nero, and the precise timing helped too, since he was at Baiae to celebrate the festival of Minerva. He enticed his mother there, saying over and over again, that parents' bad temper must be endured and their irritability soothed; in this way he tried to make up a rumour of their reconciliation, and hoped that Agrippina would accept it with the easy way women have for believing good news. When she arrived at the shore (for she was travelling from Antium), he met her with outstretched hands and an embrace and he took her to Bauli. That is the name of the villa which is on the promontory between Misenum and the bay of Baiae and is lapped by the waters of the bay. Standing amongst the others was a rather ornate ship, as if this too were being given as a compliment to his mother. She had been invited to a feast then, so that darkness could be used to conceal the crime. It is generally agreed that there was an informer, and that when Agrippina heard of the plot, she could not decide whether to believe it, and so was carried by a sedan chair to Baiae. There flattery calmed her fear: she was received in a friendly fashion and given the place of honour. Nero at one moment behaved with youthful affection and at another became serious, as if he were sharing important confidences with her. Then, talking about all sorts of things, he drew out the banquet for a long time, and followed Agrippina as she left, hanging rather too closely on her eyes and breast, either to round off the deception, or because the last sight of his mother, who was soon to die, was catching at his wild heart.

III

The gods provided a night shining with stars, and quiet with a calm sea, as if for showing up the crime. The ship had not progressed very far, and two of her household were accompanying Agrippina, one of whom, Crepereius Gallus, was standing not far from the helm, while Acerronia was reclining at her mistress's feet, as she lay back, joyfully discussing her son's change of heart, when, at a given signal, the roof, which was weighed down with a lot of lead, fell; Crepereius was crushed and immediately died. Agrippina and Acerronia were protected by the projecting sides of the couch which were, by chance, strong enough to resist the weight. The disintegration of the ship did not follow, because everyone was in confusion and the majority of the crew who were not in on the plot actually got in the way of those who were. At that point it seemed a good idea to the rowers, who knew what was going on, to tilt the ship to one side and in this way to sink it, but agreement for this impromptu plan was not swift enough amongst them and others, struggling in the opposite direction, caused them to be pitched more gently into the sea. But Acerronia, while she foolishly kept on calling out that she was Agrippina, and that help should be brought to the mother of the emperor, was killed with oars and poles and whatever chance offered in the way of naval weapons. Agrippina, remaining silent, and thus less likely to be recognised (though she received one wound in her shoulder), first by swimming and then, after coming across some fishing boats, was carried to the Lucrine lake, and then taken to her villa.

IV

There, she realised that this was why she had received the specious invitation and been received with special honour; the boat had not been driven near the shore by winds, nor was it driven onto rocks; it had collapsed from the top down like some contraption on land; also considering the murder of Acerronia, and at the same time looking at her own wound, she realised that her only chance of escape from the plot was if she seemed to know nothing about it. Therefore she sent her freedman, Agerinus, to inform her son that by the grace of the gods and by his own good fortune she had avoided a serious accident, and to beg him that, although he must be terrified about his mother's danger, he should put off his desire to pay her a visit; at the moment the important thing for her was rest. Meanwhile, pretending lack of concern, she applied medication to her wound and poultices to her body; she ordered that Acerronia's will be found, and her property be sealed - in this alone she showed no pretence.

V

at Neroni nuntios patrati facinoris opperienti adfertur Agrippinam evasisse ictu levi sauciam. tum ille pavore exanimis et adfirmans iam iamque adfore matrem ultionis properam, sive servos armaret vel militem accenderet, sive ad senatum et populum pervaderet, naufragium et vulnus et interfectos amicos obiciens. quod contra subsidium sibi, nisi quid Burrus et Seneca expromerent? quos statim accivit. longum utriusque silentium; timebant ne iriti dissuaderent, an eo descensum esse credebant ut nisi praeveniretur Agrippina pereundum Neroni esset. post Seneca respexit Burrum ac sciscitatus est num militi caedes imperanda esset. ille respondit praetorianos toti Caesarum domui obstrictos memoresque Germanici nihil atrox adversus progeniem eius ausuros. perpetraret Anicetus promissa. qui nihil cunctatus poscit summam sceleris. ad eam vocem Nero profitetur illo die sibi dari imperium auctoremque tanti muneris esse libertum; iret propere duceretque homines promptissimos ad iussa. ipse, ubi audivit nuntium Agerinum venisse, scaenam criminis ultro parat. gladium, dum Agerinus mandata perfert, abicit inter pedes eius; tum quasi deprehensum in vincla inici iubet, ut confingeret matrem exitium principis molitam et pudore deprehensi sceleris sua sponte mortem sumpsisse.

VI

interim vulgato Agrippinae periculo, omnes, ut quisque acceperat, decurrere ad litus. hi moles, hi proximas scaphas scandere; alii quantum corpus sinebat vadere in mare; alii manus protendere; questibus, votis, clamore hominum diversa rogitantium aut incerta respondentium omnis ora compleri; adfluere ingens multitudo cum luminibus, atque ubi incolumem esse Agrippinam pervulgatum est, ad gratandum sese expedire, donec aspectu armati et minitantis agminis disiecti sunt. Anicetus villam statione circumdat, refractaque ianua obvios servorum abripit, donec ad fores cubiculi veniret; ibi pauci adstabant, ceteris terrore inrumpentium exterritis. cubiculo modicum lumen inerat et ancillarum una, magis ac magis anxia Agrippina quod nemo a filio venisset ac ne Agerinus quidem. abeunte dehinc ancilla Agrippina 'tu quoque

me deseris' prolocuta est. tum respicit Anicetum trierarcho 15
Herculeio et Obarito centurione classiaro comitatum.
circumsistunt lectum percussores et prior trierarchus fusti
caput eius adflixit. iam Agrippina centurioni ferrum
destringenti protendens uterum, 'ventrem feri' exclamavit 20
multisque vulneribus confecta est.

VII

cremata est eadem nocte convivali lecto et exequiis vilibus;
neque dum Nero rerum potiebatur congesta aut clausa est
humus. accenso rogo libertus eius cognomento Mnester se
ferro transegit, incertum caritate in patronam an metu exitii. 5
hunc fore sui finem multos ante annos crediderat Agrippina
contempseratque. nam ei consulenti super Nerone
responderunt Chaldaei illum imperaturum matremque
occisurum; atque illa 'occidat' inquit, 'dum imperet'.