CHAPTER 5

Addressing Autocracy under Nero

When Nero became *princeps* in 54 CE, Roman thinkers had been adapting the metaphor of the body politic to the parameters of sole rule for nearly a century. Although this project began under Augustus, it only came into full view under his successors. While Tiberian writers celebrated the Principate as a civic rebirth, those who witnessed the reign of Caligula proved more measured in their assessments. Their portrayals of the third *princeps* harming rather than healing the body politic under his care implied that the Principate had not necessarily solved the intertwined problems of discord and decline. Although the encomiastic inflection of their texts often mitigated the force of their critiques, they still triggered a shift in the norms of discourse. This shift became more pronounced in the Neronian era, which is often identified as a watershed in the construction of a rupture between the Republican past and Imperial present.[1] Less invested in the paradigm of Roman Republicanism than their predecessors, the Younger Seneca and Lucan proved willing to explore the vulnerability of a political community dependent on a ruler whose selection lay beyond their control and whose power was only contestable through violence. Interrogating the nature of sole rule through the metaphor of the body politic, they represented a rhetorical tradition that was now looking forward to the Imperial future as much as back to the Republican past.

This chapter begins with a reading of Seneca's *De Clementia*, which is the first text to subject the Imperial model of the body politic to explicit theorization.[2] It portrays Nero and the Roman people as interdependent parts of a single organism; the former acts as an *animus*, *mens, caput*,

[1] See Gowing 2005: 68 on the "diminishing appeal of the Republican past" under Nero, which coincided with a regime that did not portray itself as a continuation of the Republic. Littlewood 2017: 83 argues that the construction of a rupture between past and present was a "live issue" in Neronian Rome.

[2] The late date of this theorization speaks to Romans' disinterest in the abstraction familiar from the Greek world, as noted by Hammer 2014: 7.

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spiritus, and *vinculum*, while the latter takes on the role of a *corpus*. Yet even as Seneca naturalizes a persuasive hierarchy of ruler and ruled, he also reminds Nero that interdependence goes both ways. He argues that the vitality of the head depends upon the strength of the body that supports it, so that clemency becomes a matter of self-interest. He reinforces his case through the familiar model of physician and patient, to which we will turn our attention in the second section. Because the *princeps* is a part of the *corpus* he treats, he is ultimately the recipient of the punishments he prescribes. Depicting the execution of citizens as the amputation of Nero's own limbs, Seneca tries to restrain his use of the scalpel. Insofar as he blames previous *principes* for excessive bloodletting, however, he also acknowledges their capacity to do harm. Attuned to both the weaknesses of the Imperial body politic and the threat of civil war, Seneca portrays the Principate as a necessary if not ideal governing form.[3]

Seneca's engagement with these questions set the stage for his nephew Lucan, whose *Bellum Civile* is the subject of the final section. The epic opens with Rome plunging her hand into her own intestines, a programmatic image that foregrounds the self-destruction entailed by civil war. In the books that follow, Lucan uses the conflict between Caesar and Pompey to engage in a broader meditation on the life cycle of the *res publica*. The vulnerability of an organism dependent on one man emerges in Book 2, when Sulla performs gruesome civic surgeries that disrupt the boundary between harming and healing. Alluding to Seneca's portrait of Nero in his own portrait of Sulla, Lucan suggests that the *princeps* has taken up the scalpel his tutor urged him to avoid. The limitations of the head of state model, in turn, are exposed in Book 8, when Lucan uses the death of Pompey to stage a figurative mutiny of the body politic. Set in the aftermath of Pharsalus, Lucan describes how Pompey's forces, frustrated by his inadequacy as a leader, foment a rebellion that culminates in his decapitation on the Egyptian coast. Rather than lead to the refoundation of the old *res publica*, however, the separation of head and body traps Rome in a seemingly endless repetition of civil war. When the consequences of the scene are extrapolated to the present, they convey the futility of trying to return to an idealized Republican past and prompt readers to confront the reality of the Principate. This foreclosure of constitutional alternatives marks the end of the conceptual project we have been tracing thus far.

[3] Wallace-Hadrill 1981: 318 writes, "The élite were little concerned with the justification of the system of autocracy. It was accepted as a fact of political life that this was the only condition under which stability was possible."

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The Ideal of Imperial Interdependence

In the last chapter, we saw how those writing under Caligula and Claudius began to complicate a normative narrative of ancestral refoundation under sole rule. Foremost among them was the Elder Seneca, whose *Historiae* periodized Roman history around the arrival of autocracy. The diverse works of the Younger Seneca share in and build upon the historical perspective of his father.[4] In a famous passage praising the Stoic fortitude of Cato, for example, Seneca asks, *quidni ille mutationem rei publicae forti et aequo pateretur animo?* ("Why should he [Cato] not have tolerated the transformation of the *res publica* with a brave and level spirit?" Sen. *Ep.* 71.12). His reference to the *mutatio rei publicae* is often taken as the first explicit acknowledgment of the transition to sole rule in Latin literature.[5] It hints at a metaphor of the body politic that is invested with intricate detail in *De Clementia*, a treatise on rulership written to commemorate Nero's inauguration.[6] Throughout the text, Nero is identified as the breath, binding link, mind, and head of his subjects, who are only able to achieve corporeal coherence under his command. This section explores how these images naturalize the hierarchical interdependence of ruler and ruled, an idea that underpins Seneca's portrayal of clemency as a matter of Nero's own self-interest.[7]

The organic metaphors of *De Clementia* have typically been viewed in relation to the Stoic theory of the wise king, which played a central role in the naturalization of monarchy in the ancient world.[8] Stoicism was amenable to monarchy insofar as it saw sole rule as an ordering principle of nature; the relationship between a king and his subject could be productively compared to that of a trainer and horse, for example, or a hunter and

[4] On the Younger Seneca's admiration for his father's old-fashioned morals (*maiorum consuetudini deditus*, Sen. *Helv.* 17.4), see Sussman 1978: 26.

[5] See Sion-Jenkis 2000: 23 and Gowing 2005: 69, who writes, "Seneca is the first imperial writer to concede *explicitly* that the Augustan Principate marked a real change in the character of the *res publica*." For *mutatio* as "a political or constitutional change," see *OLD* s.v. 5(b). Degl'Innocenti Pierini 2014: 171 draws attention to the construction of Cato as a Republican sage at Sen. *Const.* 2.2, where he dies alongside liberty (*neque enim Cato post libertatem vixit nec libertas post Catonem*).

[6] I follow the conventional dating of *De Clementia* to Nero's eighteenth year (15 Dec. 55–14 Dec. 56 BCE), on which see Braund 2009: 16–7.

[7] Dowling 2006: 196 notes, "The pragmatic argument for clemency dominates the *De Clementia*."

[8] For *De Clementia* as "a conduit for Greek kingship theory into Roman imperial ideology," see Stacey 2007: 32 alongside Adam 1970. Murray 2007: 19–21 addresses the role of Stoic thinkers in the development of Hellenistic kingship treatises, the study of which was sparked by Goodenough 1928. The Roman reception of this tradition goes back to at least the Late Republic, on which see Braund 2009: 17–9; Rawson 1975: 154; Murray 1965: 178–82. Wallace-Hadrill 1982: 35 stresses Roman ambivalence towards it under the Principate.

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dog (Sen. *Clem.* 1.16.4–5).[9] Such analogies locate the philosopher in the role of an advisor who guides the king in readings and engages him in conversations that illuminate the path of wisdom. To the extent that the king attains such wisdom, his rule can be considered just.[10] In the preface to *De Clementia*, Seneca signals his assumption of this role by comparing himself to a mirror that reflects an idealized Nero back to himself: *scribere de clementia, Nero Caesar, institui, ut quodam modo speculi vice fungerer et te tibi ostenderem perventurum ad voluptatem maximam omnium* ("I have undertaken to write about clemency, Nero Caesar, so that I might, in some way, perform the duty of a mirror and show you to yourself as you are about to reach the greatest pleasure of all," Sen. *Clem.* 1.1.1).[11] The metaphor of the mirror sets up the essential fiction of the text: the wise *princeps* whom Seneca goes on to depict is nothing more than a description of Nero as he already is.[12] Moral exhortation is cloaked under the guise of praise, so that prescriptive mandates on rulership can operate simultaneously as idioms of panegyric.[13] This combination of "praise and programme," as Susanna Braund terms it, is foundational to the imagistic framework of the text.[14]

Seneca's unapologetic incorporation of Hellenistic kingship theory into *De Clementia* confirms his own willingness to move beyond the Republican façade of the Principate. He sanctions this potentially controversial idea through the voice of Nero himself, who delivers a speech at the beginning of the treatise that lays claim to absolute power: *ego vitae necisque gentibus arbiter; qualem quisque sortem statumque habeat, in mea manu positum est* ("I am the arbiter of life and death for mankind; it has been put in my hand what sort of lot and standing each person has," Sen. *Clem.* 1.1.2).[15] The speech grants Nero agency in setting aside the fiction of Republican continuity; Seneca simply adapts his language to that already

[9] See Noreña 2009: 276 for further examples.

[10] Although Stoicism held that only the wise man was king and that no truly wise man had ever existed, Murray 2007: 19 writes, this doctrine posed little practical problem for those advising monarchs. Shaw 1985: 49 approaches Stoicism as "a common ideological field, a common language of political thought and behavior" that could be used to express a range of perspectives on sole rule. This idea helps resolve what Brunt 1975: 9 calls the "apparent inconsistency" of Stoic opposition to and support for the Principate.

[11] Text of *De Clementia* follows Braund 2009.

[12] On the mirror's elision of the gap between theory and practice, see Stacey 2007: 36. Bartsch 2006: 184 points out that Seneca's mirror does not promise to reveal self-knowledge but rather pleasure (*voluptas*), a surprisingly sensual term for a treatise on ethical rulership. She calls the terminology of the treatise's opening paragraph "deeply problematic."

[13] Kaster and Nussbaum 2010: 134. [14] Braund 1998: 72.

[15] Star 2012: 31 notes that Seneca does not only want Nero to look at himself in the mirror; he also wants Nero to talk to himself and thereby begin the process of self-fashioning. Fears 1975: 489 argues that

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being used by his addressee. This rhetorical move gives him the freedom to ignore the traditional distinction between *rex* and *princeps*: *nullum tamen clementia ex omnibus magis quam regem aut principem decet* ("Yet of all men clemency befits no one more than a king or first citizen," Sen. *Clem.* 1.3.3).[16] He reinforces the interchangeability of these terms in the next section, referring to *principes regesque et quocumque alio nomine* ("First citizens and kings and whatever other names they go by," Sen. *Clem.* 1.4.3). The ethical stakes of the treatise depend upon this direct acknowledgment of autocracy. In the absence of constitutional constraints on Nero's behavior, Seneca suggests, his moral standing becomes a determinative political force.[17] It is therefore imperative to persuade him that clemency is a virtue whose expression facilitates his own interests. Among its many benefits is the reinforcement of his own power, an idea sure to produce the pleasure promised in the preface.[18]

Seneca argues that the stability of Nero's position in the *res publica* depends upon his pursuit of a merciful rather than cruel form of power. Characterizing the former as salutary and the latter as pestilential, he introduces an organic analogy that will become increasingly explicit over the course of Book 1: *ita enim magnae vires decori gloriaeque sunt, si illis salutaris potentia est; nam pestifera vis est valere ad nocendum* ("In fact, great strength is only a source of honor and glory if its power is salutary; for the ability to do harm is a pestilential sort of strength," *Clem.* 1.3.3). While *salutaris potentia* will increase Nero's prestige, *pestifera vis* will decrease it: *illius demum magnitudo stabilis fundataque est, quem omnes tam supra se esse quam pro se sciunt, cuius curam excubare pro salute singulorum atque universorum cottidie experiuntur* ("Greatness is stable and well-established only for the one whom everyone knows commands them as much as he supports them, whose vigilance on behalf of the health of both individuals and the collective they discover daily," Sen. *Clem.* 1.3.3). Seneca interweaves medical and structural metaphors to correlate the security of the ruler

Seneca represents the gods, not any human institution, as the source of Nero's status as *vitae necisque gentibus arbiter*.

[16] Martindale 1984: 72 stresses Seneca's use of *rex* and *princeps* as "virtual synonyms," a rhetorical move that Griffin 2000: 542 suggests is meant to urge his readers "to concentrate on the reality of the Principate, not the euphemistic title." She and Schofield 2015: 70 nevertheless note that Seneca never explicitly calls Nero a *rex*.

[17] "In the absence of any countervailing force or constraint of law, then, it is only these internal states of mind that determine when and how he applies violent, status-altering force to those under his sway," Roller 2001: 240 writes. Noreña 2009: 267 considers the "ethics of autocracy" that arose in relation to this reality.

[18] Bartsch 2006: 186.

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with the well-being of the ruled. He thereby reveals pestilential strength, which undermines the power it is meant to buttress, as a contradiction in terms. Harmful to both Nero and his subjects, its indulgence risks undermining the foundations of the Principate.

Seneca's argument hinges on the ideal of reciprocity, which is encapsulated in the parallel between *supra se* and *pro se*.[19] Whatever care a ruler takes on behalf of his subjects is returned to him in kind, so that he becomes the recipient of his own beneficence. An elaborate series of verbal and thematic parallels show how the actions of the ruled mirror those of the ruler: *obicere se pro illo mucronibus insidiantium paratissimi et substernere corpora sua, si per stragem illi humanam iter ad salutem struendum sit. somnum eius nocturnis excubiis muniunt, latera obiecti circumfusique defendunt, incurrentibus periculis se opponunt* ("They are completely prepared to throw themselves in front of assassins' swords on his behalf and to lay down their own bodies, if his path to safety must be built through human slaughter. They guard his sleep with nocturnal watches, defend his flanks by surrounding and blocking him, and put themselves in front of approaching dangers," Sen. *Clem.* 1.3.3). Because the people understand that their ruler governs on their behalf (*pro se*), they are willing to die on his behalf (*pro illo*).[20] Because he concerns himself with their welfare (*pro salute*), they concern themselves with his (*illi . . . ad salutem*). Because he is vigilant in his protection of them (*excubare*), they are vigilant in their protection of him (*nocturnis excubiis*). Even the jarring description of their dead bodies building (*struendum*) a path to safety recalls the structural imagery with which the passage began (*stabilis fundataque est*).[21] This symmetry reproduces textually what Seneca argues for thematically: it is in Nero's self-interest to care for those under his command.

Seneca reinforces this point by identifying Nero and the Roman people as interdependent parts of a hierarchically structured organism.[22] The analogy allows him to explain the logic of collective sacrifice on behalf of a single head (*pro uno capite*, Sen. *Clem.* 1.3.4). Although it might seem

[19] As Dowling 2006: 201 points out, "Clemency implies not only hierarchy but also reciprocity." As Saller 1982: 7–40 illustrates, the relationship between the emperor and his subjects was mediated through the ideal of reciprocity.

[20] Leach 1989: 222 draws attention to the vividness of the dangers facing the *princeps* in a treatise purportedly about a *res publica* at peace.

[21] "Seneca deploys virtually every resource in Latin to indicate how his people create a barrier," Braund 2009: *ad loc.* notes, "between him and any threat," whether internal or external.

[22] See Stacey 2014: 134 on Seneca's "systematic reworking of the image of the body politic" in the treatise. Griffin 1976: 205 contextualizes the metaphor in relation to the Stoic conception of an organic cosmos.

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irrational to prioritize the life of one over many, the same principle enables the functioning of the human body: *quemadmodum totum corpus animo deservit et, cum hoc tanto maius tantoque speciosius sit, ille in occulto maneat tenuis et in qua sede latitet incertus, tamen manus, pedes, oculi negotium illi gerunt, illum haec cutis munit, illius iussu iacemus aut inquieti discurrimus* ("Just as the whole body serves the mind and, although the former is much larger and showier than the latter, and the mind is hidden and delicate and the area in which it lurks is uncertain, nevertheless the hands, feet, and eyes do its bidding; this skin defends it, at its command we lie down or run restlessly," Sen. *Clem.* 1.3.5). Seneca professes uncertainty as to where the *animus* resides in the body, but he later identifies the head as its home (Sen. *Clem.* 2.2.1). Its unity stands in contrast to the multiplicity of parts under its command, which diverge in their functions but converge in their subordination to a higher power. As Seneca switches to the first person, he implicates not only Nero and himself, but also the reader, in this universalizing principle of nature. He then acknowledges that its consequences can be good or bad. If the mind is a greedy master (*avarus dominus*), it makes us scour the sea for wealth; if it is hungry for glory (*ambitiosus*), it makes us plunge our hand into fire (*dextram flammis obiecimus*, Sen. *Clem.* 1.3.5). It is therefore imperative that the mind governing the body politic is morally sound. The best way to achieve this aim, Seneca implies, is through the tutelage provided by the treatise.

Lest his readers miss the political implications of the mind–body duality, Seneca uses the second half of the simile to bring the Principate to the forefront of his analysis. He continues, *sic haec immensa multitudo unius animae circumdata illius spiritu regitur, illius ratione flectitur pressura se ac fractura viribus suis, nisi consilio sustineretur* ("In the same way, this huge crowd, encircling the life of one man, is ruled by his spirit, directed by his reason, and would overwhelm and destroy itself with its own strength, if it were not held up by his counsel," Sen. *Clem.* 1.3.5).[23] *Multitudo* denies the Roman people a civic identity independent of their ruler.[24] Like the hands, feet, skin, and eyes, they can only achieve wholeness under the command of the *princeps*. Nero's fulfillment of this role is conveyed through the overlapping metaphors of *anima, spiritus, ratio*, and *consilium*, the

[23] See Schofield 2015: 72 on Seneca's "monarchist adaptation of the already common metaphor of the body politic."

[24] Seneca first introduces this idea in the preface (*tum immitere oculos in hanc immensam multitudinem discordem, seditiosam, impotentem, in perniciem alienam suamque pariter exultaturam si hoc iugum fregerit*, "Then to cast your gaze upon this huge crowd, discordant, unruly, out of control, equally enthused for the destruction of itself and others, if it should break its yoke," Sen. *Clem.* 1.1.1).

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imagistic redundancy of which reinforces his privileged position. Seneca illustrates the necessity of the arrangement by introducing the familiar trope of Rome's strength turned against itself.[25] His phrasing evokes that which Lactantius attributed to his father, who described a body politic unable to support itself without leaning upon the support of its rulers. Whereas the Elder Seneca criticized the *princeps* as a cane, however, the Younger Seneca celebrates him as an *animus*. He thereby positions him as an integral component of rather than external aid to the body politic. Central to his duties is the prevention of civil war, the specter of which is evoked without being named as such.

While Nero relies on his subjects for the security of his own power, his subjects also depend upon him to prevent civic collapse. The impossibility of their survival in his absence is conveyed through his figuration as a bond: *ille est enim vinculum per quod res publica cohaeret* ("That man, in fact, is the bond through which the *res publica* coheres," Sen. *Clem.* 1.4.1).[26] A century prior, Cicero had argued that the existence of a *civitas* depended upon the *vincula* of *ius* and *aequitas* (Cic. *Parad.* 28). Seneca concentrates these and other ideals into the personage of a single man whose life is coeval with that of the *res publica*.[27] If he were lost, the demise of the Roman citizenry would soon follow: *ille spiritus vitalis quem haec tot milia trahunt nihil ipsa per se futura nisi onus et praeda, si mens illa imperii subtrahatur* ("He is the vital breath, which so many thousands draw, who would be nothing except burden and plunder on their own, if that mind of the empire were taken away," Sen. *Clem.* 1.4.1). A body that has lost the ability to breath and think is little more than a battlefield corpse ready to be looted. The prospect of war is thereby used to argue against the viability of any alternative constitutional arrangements. Whether Nero truly approximates the ideal of a benevolent king is a question largely beside the point; when the choice is between his command and self-destruction, there is no real deliberation to be had. Much of the persuasive force of *De Clementia* lies in its construction of this false bargain.

[25] See discussion of this trope in Ch. 4.

[26] Braund 2009: *ad loc.* speculates that Seneca's figuration of a person as a *vinculum* is "possibly unparalleled." In the *Consolatio ad Polybium*, he uses similar language to lament how the death of Julia dissolved the peace between Caesar and Pompey (*cuius morte optime cohaerentis Romanae pacis vincula resoluta sunt*, "Because of her death the well-integrated bonds of Roman peace were dissolved," Sen. *Polyb.* 15.1). The same bonds of peace are at stake in *De Clementia* but their preservation now depends upon the well-being of the *princeps*.

[27] Stacey 2014: 147 argues that the Roman citizenry is "unambiguously subject to the *ius*" of the *princeps*.

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Seneca introduces the analogy of the king bee and hive to reinforce the model of civic dependence constructed through the dichotomy of mind and body.[28] Quoting a famous pair of Vergilian lines (*Georg.* 4.212–3), he writes, '*rege incolumi mens omnibus una, | amisso rupere fidem*' ("As long as the king is safe, all share one mind; if he is lost, they break faith," Sen. *Clem.* 1.4.1). Vergil had already invested these lines with political resonance by comparing his devoted bees to the subjects of Eastern kings.[29] As Eleanor Leach points out, however, Vergil's beehive is not presented "as a model for emulation by Roman government . . . the connotations of the image for the Roman world are ambivalent, if not outright negative."[30] In coopting these lines to naturalize the Principate, Seneca underscores the extent to which monarchical symbolism had become an acceptable element of political discourse by this time. Just as Vergil's crazed worker bees rip apart their honeycombs in response to the loss of their king (Verg. *Georg.* 5.213–4), so too will the loss of the *princeps* entail the end of Roman peace: *hic casus Romanae pacis exitium erit* (Sen. *Clem.* 1.4.2).[31] With the loss of the *pax Romana* comes the loss of the empire, which is figured through imagery of an unraveling tapestry: *haec unitas et hic maximi imperii contextus in partes multas dissiliet* ("This unity and this fabric of the greatest empire will dissolve into many parts," Sen. *Clem.* 1.4.2). *Partes* looks back to the plundered limbs of the previous section, suggesting that the realization of the *corpus imperii* is only possible under sole rule.[32] Subservience at home paradoxically enables subjugation abroad: *idemque huic urbi finis dominandi erit qui parendi fuerit* ("The end of this city's obedience will also be the end of its domination," Sen. *Clem.* 1.4.2). Seneca uses Rome's dominion over her empire to make the experience of subordination at home more palatable for his elite readers. They might be worker bees in relation to the *princeps*, but they are king bees in relation to the territory they help govern.

[28] Apian metaphors went back to Classical Greek political discourse, on which see Brock 2013: 159–60 and Overmeire 2011. This theme is developed at greater length at Sen. *Clem.* 1.19, where the king bee is described as necessarily merciful due to his lack of a stinger. Nero, unlike the king bee, has the capacity to do harm, on which see Star 2012: 121 and Roller 2001: 242. Papaioannou 2020: 117–21 addresses Seneca's engagement with Vergil's bees elsewhere in his philosophy.

[29] See Lowrie 2015b: 322 on Vergil's "classic gesture of orientalism" in these lines, "which project an obsession with kingship onto others" in response to recent political events in Rome.

[30] Leach 1989: 221. Dahlmann 1954, in contrast, sees Vergil's bees as a positive model for the Principate.

[31] Morley 2007: 467 argues that Vergil's "bee state is, like Rome, seen to be permanently vulnerable to dissension and self-destruction unless kept under close control." The same can be said of Seneca's metaphor.

[32] Cornwell 2017: 195 notes Seneca's explicit connection between the existence of the *pax Romana* and the person of the emperor, who embodies Roman *imperium*.

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They are thereby granted at least some of the political autonomy that threatens to recede from view in *De Clementia*.

While Seneca's extended metaphor of the body politic stresses the reliance of the *populus Romanus* on its *princeps*, it concludes by reminding Nero that interdependence goes both ways. A body might not be able to survive without a head, but neither can a head without a body: *olim enim ita se induit rei publicae Caesar ut seduci alterum non posset sine utriusque pernicie; nam et illi viribus opus est et huic capite* ("In the past, in fact, the *princeps* intertwined himself with the *res publica* in such a way that one is not able to be removed without damage to the other; for the former needs strength and the latter needs a head," Sen. *Clem.* 1.4.3).[33] Seneca's use of the verb *induo*, which Braund describes as "highly unusual," invites readers to envision Nero not so much donning the *res publica* like a piece of clothing but rather incorporating it into himself.[34] Unlike a toga, it cannot be separated from him without inflicting irreparable damage on both. The inextricability of ruler and ruled is made legible through the dichotomy of head and body, a comparison that feels familiar by this point in the text despite its appearance for the first and only time. Having already laid the groundwork for the idea through his association of Nero with the reasoning faculties, Seneca offers the first extant theorization of a body politic topped by a head of state in Latin literature. Undoing the careful work of the Augustan and Tiberian writers who preceded him, he restores the head's original function as a signifier of monarchy. In this sense, he illustrates a metaphor that had come full circle in Roman political thought.

The Problem of Bad Rule

The last section considered Seneca's use of organic analogies to naturalize a model of civic interdependence that carried consequences for both ruler and ruled. Because the longevity of Nero's reign depended upon the well-being of his subjects, it was in his best interest to pursue clemency over cruelty. Because the Roman people's survival required the existence of a *princeps*, it was in their best interest to obey his commands. Although Seneca frames this arrangement as natural, he also acknowledges its precarity. At issue is not only the collapse that would follow the loss of a good *princeps*, but also the damage that could be wrought by a bad one.

[33] As Syme 1986: 449 puts it, "The head existed, organic, and it could not be dissevered."

[34] Braund 2009: *ad loc.* It is worth noting that Cicero used the same verb to describe the suspicion that fell upon Catiline in the aftermath of his *caput populi* speech (*non se purgavit sed indicavit atque induit*, Cic. *Mur.* 51).

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This section focuses our attention on the latter concern. I argue that Seneca combines the dualities of mind–body and physician–patient to address the problem of bad rule. By portraying Nero as the healer of a body politic of which he is also a member, he suggests that the *princeps* must endure the treatments he prescribes to others. In this way, he merges two imagistic traditions to restrain the use of violence in the House of the Caesars. Yet insofar as he points to Nero's predecessors as examples of bad physicians and disordered minds, he also confirms that the Principate has not always lived up to the treatise's ideals. Elaborating upon this problem in *Epistulae Morales* 114, Seneca ultimately conveys ambivalence towards the prospects of a political community that is unable to regulate the virtue of its rulers.

Although Roman writers had long figured the *princeps* as the healer and head of the body politic, *De Clementia* is the first extant text to integrate them into a single imagistic framework. Seneca merges them to facilitate his portrayal of clemency as an ideal to which Nero should aspire for his own benefit. Immediately after figuring him as the *caput rei publicae*, Seneca clarifies the relevance of this role to the topic at hand: *nam si, quod adhuc colligitur, tu animus rei publicae [tuae] es, illa corpus tuum, vides, ut puto, quam necessaria sit clementia; tibi enim parcis cum videris alteri parcere* ("For if, and this is what has been suggested thus far, you are the mind of the *res publica* and it is your body, you see, I think, how necessary mercy is; for you spare yourself when you seem to spare another," Sen. *Clem.* 1.5.1). Nero might occupy a privileged position in the body politic, but he is still a member of it. The mercy that he shows to others is therefore also that which he shows to himself, an idea underscored through the parallel between *tibi* and *alteri*.[35] The interests of ruler and ruled are once again in perfect alignment, suggesting that there is little to be gained but much to be lost from the infliction of bodily harm. The frequent comparison of mercy to a remedy, which Seneca himself employs (e.g. Sen. *Clem.* 1.2.1), hints at a physician–patient analogy that becomes explicit as the passage continues.

Unlike the Julio-Claudian writers who preceded him, who employ generalizing language of civic restoration and revival, Seneca uses surgery to portray Nero's relationship to the body politic. Calling to mind the bloody metaphors of Cicero's oratory rather than the celebratory paeans of Augustan poetry, he encourages the *princeps* to use the blade sparingly in his treatments: *parcendum itaque est etiam improbandis civibus non aliter*

[35] The identification of the *princeps* and *res publica*, Braund 2009: *ad loc.* points out, necessarily erodes the distinction between self and other.

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quam membris languentibus, et, si quando misso sanguine opus est, sustinenda est <acies> ne ultra quam necesse sit incidat ("And so there must be mercy even for corrupt citizens, as if they were languishing limbs, and, if blood-letting is ever necessary, the blade must be held back, so that it does not cut more deeply than necessary," Sen. *Clem.* 1.5.1).[36] Although comparisons between statesmen and surgeons had a long history in Roman political discourse, Cicero and his contemporaries did not use them in relation to the ideal of clemency. Seneca defines *clementia*, after all, as the leniency that a superior shows to an inferior in the application of a punishment (*lenitas superioris adversus inferiorem in constituendis poenis*, Sen. *Clem.* 2.3.1).[37] This power dynamic was one that Cicero carefully avoided in his own model of civic healing, which was rooted in privileged oversight rather than absolute command. Restoring the analogy to its authoritarian roots in Platonic philosophy, Seneca confirms the depth with which Nero's scalpel can plunge into the *res publica*. The disquieting implications of the idea are nevertheless mitigated through the *princeps*' membership in the body politic he treats. The surgery he performs is ultimately on his own limbs, allowing the excessive punishment of Roman citizens to be cast as an irrational act of self-harm.

Seneca returns to this theme to differentiate between the disordered mind of the bloodthirsty tyrant and the mild disposition of the merciful king.[38] He defines the latter in terms of his awareness of and appreciation for the model of organic interdependence theorized earlier in the treatise: *e contrario is cui curae sunt universa, qui alia magis, alia minus tuetur, <qui> nullam non rei publicae partem tamquam sui nutrit* ("He stands in contrast, whose care encompasses everything, who watches over both great and small matters, who nourishes every part of the *res publica* as if a part of himself," Sen. *Clem.* 1.13.4).[39] As Braund points out, his language is quite close to that which Cicero used to describe the duties of Roman statesmen in *De Officiis* (*ut totum corpus reipublicae curent*, Cic. *Off.* 1.85). Cicero, as we saw

[36] Braund 2009: *ad loc.* supplies *acies* as the noun missing in the manuscript; others have proposed *manus* or *dextra*. Despite the uncertainty, the surgical metaphor is clear. See later on Lucan's allusion to this passage.

[37] Konstan 2005: 339 warns against reading Seneca's definition of clemency back into Late Republican sources, but the power to exact a penalty would not have been viewed as a straightforward prerogative of Republican statesmen.

[38] Seneca activates many familiar paradigms of authority to illustrate the difference between a king and tyrant. "In each case," Roller 2001: 243 writes, "Seneca considers whether the empowered figure gains better results by using violence against those under his sway, or by using other means."

[39] See Béranger 1953: 186–217 on the role of *cura* in Imperial ideology and Lowrie 2020 on the concept of *securitas* that arose in relation to it.

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earlier, used the plural to adapt the traditionally singular physician–patient analogy to the context of collegial governance. Seneca's ideal of civic care is instead linked to an individual who has incorporated the body politic into himself. As an integral component of rather than external actor on the *res publica*, the *princeps* is invited to see gentle remedies as a matter of self-interest as much as wise policy: *inclinatus ad mitiora, etiam si ex usu est animadvertere, ostendens quam invitus aspero remedio manus admoveat* ("He is inclined towards gentle treatments, even if it is useful to censure, showing how unwillingly he applies his hand to a harsh treatment," Sen. *Clem.* 1.13.4). The orientation of the metaphor towards self-interest, which plays no role in the Ciceronian passage to which it alludes, hints at the limitations of the political vision laid out in *De Clementia*. Although Seneca expresses faith in virtue as a regulatory mechanism under the Principate, his organic analogies are oriented towards the baser instincts of the *princeps*. Only by equating Nero and Rome can the philosopher ensure the propriety of his pupil's punishments.

Approaching the theme of self-interest from a different direction, Seneca goes on to tell Nero that his reputation depends upon the efficacy of his treatments on the body politic. Only an incompetent physician, he explains, would give up on the hope of a cure (*mali medici est desperare ne curet*, Sen. *Clem.* 1.17.2). Lest similarly negative judgments fall upon Nero, he must treat even those who seem incurable: *idem in iis quorum animus affectus est facere debebit is cui tradita salus omnium est, non cito spem proicere nec mortifera signa pronuntiare* ("He to whom the health of all has been entrusted should apply the same principle to those whose minds are impaired: to not give up quickly and pronounce the symptoms fatal," Sen. *Clem.* 1.17.2). Civic healing is not framed as an intrinsic good, but rather a path to the protection of Nero's legacy. Seneca gestures towards this legacy through a reference to the scar that the *princeps* leaves behind: *agat princeps curam non tantum salutis sed etiam honestae cicatricis* ("Let the *princeps* aim not only for the restoration of health but also an honorable scar," Sen. *Clem.* 1.17.2). The ambiguity of the image prompts Braund to ask whether the scar belongs to the body politic or its ruler.[40] The answer seems to be both; the condition of the former, after all, determines that of the latter. The honorability of the scar, in turn, depends upon the circumstances of its infliction. Only after exhausting all other options does a good ruler pick up the scalpel. And only then can he earn the *maxima gloria* that comes from the restraint of his power (*vim suam continet*, Sen. *Clem.* 1.17.3). Seneca thereby establishes a standard of

[40] Braund 2009: *ad loc.*

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judgment for the legitimate use of violence that is grounded in Nero's desire for public validation. That Rome will be left with scars, however, is a reality he does not try to deny.

The less than honorable scars inflicted by Nero's predecessors lurk throughout *De Clementia*. Seneca reports that even Augustus, the prototypical healer of the body politic, achieved and maintained his power through bloodshed. Only after he reached his fortieth birthday did he heed the advice of his wife, who asserted the inefficacy of executions in preventing conspiracies: *fac quod medici solent, qui ubi usitata remedia non procedunt temptant contraria. severitate nihil adhuc profecisti* ("Do what the physicians do: when the typical remedies are not successful, they try the opposite. You have not accomplished anything up to this point through severity," Sen. *Clem.* 1.9.6). Livia cites five men put to death on charges of conspiring against the *princeps*. The same five men recur in a passage from *De Brevitate Vitae* that adds Augustus' daughter to the list of his scalpel's targets: *haec ulcera cum ipsis membris absciderat: alia subnascebantur; velut grave multo sanguine corpus parte semper aliqua rumpebatur* ("He had excised these ulcers with the limbs themselves, but others kept springing up; like a body burdened with too much blood, there was always a rupture in some part," Sen. *Brev.* 4.6).[41] Augustus' amputation of his daughter from the body politic contradicts Seneca's vision of the ideal *princeps*, who is figured as a father who sees his children as parts of himself and would therefore hesitate to inflict cruel punishments upon them: *tarde sibi pater membra sua abscidat* ("A father would be slow to cut off his own limbs," Sen. *Clem.* 1.14.3).[42] Likely composed within a few years of *De Clementia*, the treatise complicates Augustus' ability to serve as a straightforward model for Nero.[43] Searching for a model of civic healing in the Julio-Claudian family tree, Seneca seems unable to find any *princeps* who resisted the temptations of surgery. The prospects for Neronian medicine seem inescapably bleak.

This problem only becomes more acute in relation to Claudius, the man from whom Nero has inherited his role as a civic healer. Seneca uses Claudius' proclivity for putting parricides in the sack to illustrate the

[41] Williams 2003: *ad loc.* notes "the slow but relentless growth" conveyed by *subnascor*.

[42] Although Seneca suggests that Augustus illustrated his clemency by exiling rather than executing his daughter (Sen. *Clem.* 1.10.3), as noted by Roller 2001: 244, the surgical imagery of *De Brevitate Vitae* complicates this idea.

[43] The date of the work hinges on the identity of Seneca's addressee, Pompeius Paulinus, who is generally believed to have been Seneca's father-in-law and *praefectus annonae* from around 49–55 CE. Williams 2003: 19–20 assigns the treatise to this period, while Griffin 1962 argues for the more specific date of 55 CE.

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inefficacy of bloody surgeries on the body politic. The more men Claudius punished, he reports, the less authority he had. His misguided approach to moral reform is used to illustrate the following precept: *non minus principi turpia sunt multa supplicia quam medico multa funera; remissius imperanti melius paretur* ("Many punishments are no less shameful for a *princeps* than many deaths are for a physician; the more leniently he rules, the more easily he is obeyed," Sen. *Clem.* 1.24.1). This version of the bloodthirsty Claudius serves as a corrective to the *Consolatio ad Polybium*, where he was praised for healing a body politic that had grown ill under Caligula. The devolution of his character between the two treatises underscores the ease with which Rome's healer can become its harmer instead. Cruelty drives the shift; just as it infected the mind of Caligula, so too did it descend upon Claudius.[44] In this way, the Caesars that preceded Nero undermine rather than support the organic analogies in which Seneca's readers are urged to put their faith.

Claudius' failure to live up to the role of the civic healer complicates Seneca's return to the mind–body duality in Book 2 of *De Clementia*. It opens with a reminder that the state of Nero's mind determines the condition of Rome's body: *tradetur ista animi tui mansuetudo diffundeturque paulatim per omne imperii corpus, et cuncta in similitudinem tuam formabuntur* ("That gentleness of your mind will be transmitted and dispersed bit by bit through the whole body of the empire, and everything will be shaped in your likeness," Sen. *Clem.* 2.2.1). The central conceit of the text holds that Nero already possesses the merciful disposition required for a healthy empire. This top-down model of civic vitality can therefore be cast as an unqualified good. Yet the disordered *animi* of his predecessors reveal how high the stakes of Neronian virtue are. If the *princeps* should succumb to cruelty, the *res publica* would suffer the consequences. Seneca offers the following precept in proof of this point: *a capite bona valetudo: inde omnia vegeta sunt atque erecta aut languore demissa prout animus eorum viget aut marcet* ("Good health comes from the head: everything then is lively and erect or sunken with feebleness to the same extent that their mind thrives or withers," Sen. *Clem.* 2.2.1).[45] Although Roman moralizers had been articulating versions of this idea for two centuries, Seneca is the first to distill its implications for a body

[44] See Dowling 2006: 200 on cruelty as the corruptor of the emperor's mind. "Catastrophic consequences await the political body if its ruler's psyche becomes emotionally disordered," Stacey 2014: 147 notes.

[45] Braund 2009: *ad loc*. notes the proverbial resonance of *a capite bona valetudo*, though it is not attested elsewhere.

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politic topped by a head of state. He perceives the Principate as an institution that is inseparable from its Caesar as an ethical subject. The longevity of Rome therefore depends on the success of the philosophical project laid out in *De Clementia*.

By the time Seneca retreated from public life in 62 CE, there could be little doubt of his failure to persuade Nero to follow the path of the wise king.[46] Rather than confront this problem directly, his later works largely avoid mentioning the *princeps* or the governing system over which he presided.[47] Their reticence on the House of the Caesars, however, does not indicate the absence of political thought within them. The *Epistulae Morales*, in particular, is preoccupied with the same hierarchies of command and obedience operative in *De Clementia*.[48] This section concludes with a consideration of *Ep.* 114.23–5, where Seneca constructs a mind–body duality in conscious dialogue with the earlier treatise.[49] He makes the connection explicit by citing the same lines from Vergil's *Georgics* discussed earlier. In *De Clementia*, these lines are used to model the dependence of the *res publica* on its *princeps*. Their recurrence in *Ep.* 114 suggests that Nero lurks just outside of view. As Seneca goes on to explore the impact of a disordered mind on the body it governs, he prompts readers to consider the political stakes of his analysis.

Ep. 114 introduces Vergil's apian analogy to persuade readers who aspire to eloquence to care for their minds, which dictate everything from word choices to facial expressions.[50] If the *animus* is sound, so is one's speech. If it falters, however, everything comes crashing down (*si ille procubuit, et cetera ruinam sequuntur*, Sen. *Ep.* 114.22). Using Vergil's lines to create a sense of impending catastrophe (*'rege incolumi mens omnibus una est: | amisso rupere fidem'*), Seneca draws out their relevance to the topic at hand: *Rex noster est animus; hoc incolumi cetera manent in officio, parent, optemperant* ("Our king is the mind. Provided that he is safe, other functions remain on duty, obeying and complying," Sen. *Ep.* 114.23). Seneca reverses the direction of the comparison in *De Clementia*, positioning monarchy as

[46] On Seneca's failure to effectively merge philosophical learning with political influence, see Schafer 2011: 51.

[47] Graver and Long 2015: 7 note that Seneca's reticence towards the activities of the Caesars is paired with enthusiasm for the ancestral Republic. Edwards 2019: 289 calls Nero a "gaping absence" in the letters.

[48] The *Epistuale Morales* were composed between 62 and 64 CE (see Griffin 1976: 400 on dating issues).

[49] See Edwards 2019: 179 on the parallels between the political analogies of *De Clementia* and *Epistulae Morales*.

[50] Seneca uses Maecenas, Augustus' righthand man, to exemplify bad style, which only reinforces the political resonance of the passage (Edwards 2019: 285–7; Sklenář 2017: 14).

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the lens through which bodily mechanisms become legible. The consequences for both self and community, as Robert Sklenář notes in his reading of the passage, are troubling.[51] Seneca's citation of Vergil puts two types of kings in the minds of readers: the Oriental despots with whom the bees of the *Georgics* are associated and the *principes* with whom the bees of *De Clementia* are. Neither serves as a regal ideal worthy of replication in the body. It is therefore far from certain that the cultivation of the *animus* will yield the rewards Seneca promises.[52]

The pessimism implicit in Seneca's allusive language becomes explicit as he turns his attention to the consequences of an *animus* that descends from a *rex* – an already problematic term in the context of the passage – to a *tyrannus*.[53] Pleasure serves as the pivot point from good to bad governance: *cum vero cessit voluptati, artes quoque eius actusque marcent* ("But when it [the *animus*] has yielded to pleasure, its skills and functions also wither away," Sen. *Ep.* 114.23). Astute readers might recall that Seneca began *De Clementia* by promising to help Nero attain *voluptas*, a word choice that commentators have long puzzled over. He now restores its traditionally negative Stoic connotations and illustrates the destructive consequences of a mind that falls under its sway. One way of reading the lines that follow, then, is as an elaboration of *De Clementia*'s warning that the body politic will languish if its mind withers (*animus . . . marcet*, Sen. *Clem.* 2.2.1). Such linguistic echoes merge the *animus* under discussion with the *princeps* back in Rome. Because the letter is oriented towards moral rather than political philosophy, however, Seneca retains plausible deniability in his subsequent discussion of a mind that becomes a tyrant.

Seneca urges readers to pay even closer attention to his figures of speech by flagging their sustained operation in the next section: *quoniam hac similitudine usus sum, perseverabo. Animus noster modo rex est, modo tyrannus* ("Since I have employed this comparison, I will persist: our mind is sometimes a king, sometimes a tyrant," Sen. *Ep.* 114.24). Like the good king, the regal *animus* is defined by its concern for the body under its care (*salutem commissi sibi corporis curat*, Sen. *Ep.* 114.24). The tyrannical *animus*, in contrast, is not the commander of the body but rather a slave

[51] See Sklenář 2017: 14–5.

[52] As Sklenář 2017: 15 argues, "if monarchy is the only political metaphor suitable to describe the human constitution, and monarchy is an inherently unsound form of government, then it follows that the human constitution is itself inherently unsound. To cultivate the *animus* is simply to make the best of a bad job . . . "

[53] "Given the extensive use of the contrast in *De clementia*," Edwards 2019: *ad loc.* 114.24 writes, "it may not be far-fetched to detect here an allusion to Nero's own notoriously uncontrolled and pleasure-oriented behavior . . . "

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to its appetites. It is consequently more like a crowd that can never be satisfied (*ut solet populus . . . frustra plenus*, Sen. *Ep.* 114.24). The simile inverts the expected dichotomies of *rex–populus* and *animus–corpus*, underscoring the perversion of the natural and political order. As the disease of moral corruption makes its way through the body, the *animus* loses control over what it once ruled: *cum vero magis ac magis vires morbus exedit et in medullas nervosque descendere deliciae, conspectu eorum quibus se nimia aviditate inutilem reddidit, laetus* ("And when the disease has consumed more and more strength and indulgences have descended into the marrow and sinews, it [the *animus*] delights at the sight of those to which it has rendered itself useless due to excessive greed," Sen. *Ep.* 114.25). Having already primed readers to interpret his analysis in relation to the Principate, Seneca now reveals the impact of a tyrannical mind on the body politic.[54] The more that the Caesars succumb to vice, the sicker the *res publica* will grow. And while philosophical study might restore a disordered mind to health, it requires a patient willing to be treated. Faced with a *princeps* who has rejected the tutelage of the philosopher, Rome has little choice but to wait for what comes next.

The *Epistulae Morales* gave Seneca the opportunity to explore a topic that would have been inappropriate in the panegyrizing *De Clementia*: the precarity of a body politic topped by a bad head of state. The linguistic and thematic echoes between the two works suggest that the dangers of a tyrannical *princeps* were at the forefront of his mind in the early 60s CE. Even as he confronted the limitations of a political form that was so dependent on personal virtue, however, he left little room for an alternative. The organic metaphors that structure his philosophy repeatedly equate the loss of the *princeps* with the collapse of the *res publica*. In doing so, they present a contingent governing arrangement as inevitable and unchangeable. Whatever Seneca's own reservations about sole rule, then, his works facilitated its conceptual entrenchment in Roman discourse. In the next section, we will approach the corporeal imagery of Lucan's *Bellum Civile* as a response to Seneca's political thought. Insofar as Lucan depicted the *res publica* over which Caesar and Pompey fought as a relic of the past rather than point of connection to the present, he joined his uncle in setting aside the fiction of Republican continuity. Using Roman history to interrogate the models of political authority operative

[54] Edwards 2019: 289 notes that "the analogy, underlining the dreadful consequences of disordered autocratic rule, recalls S's earlier treatise on clemency, whose addressee is the young emperor."

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under Nero, he too portrayed a body politic that suffered under but could not survive without its Caesars.

The Fate of the Body Politic

In many ways, Seneca's *De Clementia* and Lucan's *Bellum Civile* are a study in contrasts. While the former engages with the circumstances of the present, the latter looks back to the conflicts of the past. One stresses the benefits of the *pax Augusta* for the Roman world, the other revels in the violence that brought the Julian *gens* to power. Despite, or perhaps because of, the differences between them, there is much to be gained by putting them in conversation. In the final section of this chapter, I consider how the *Bellum Civile* responds to the imagery of *De Clementia*.[55] I argue that Lucan uses the models of both the healer and the head of state to subvert key tenets of Julio-Claudian political language. In Book 2, the porous boundary between harming and healing emerges through the figure of Sulla, whose bloody surgeries on the body politic allude to more recent punishments prescribed by the Caesars. In Book 8, the death of Pompey reveals the catastrophic consequences of a body politic that rebels against an ineffectual head of state. Retrojecting Imperial figurations of political authority back onto Republican history, Lucan uses the statesmen of the past to think about the Principate in the present. His methodology recalls that of Livy but yields starkly different results. Rather than validate the necessity of sole rule, it traps the *res publica* in a civil war traversing time and space.

Lucan's engagement with the metaphor of the body politic takes place within a broader framework of self-destruction.[56] The opening lines of the poem introduce the theme: *bella per Emathios plus quam civilia campos | iusque datum sceleri canimus, populumque potentem | in sua victrici conversum viscera dextra* ("I sing of wars more than civil through Emathian fields and legality conferred on crime and a powerful population turned against its own innards by its conquering right hand," Luc. 1.2–3).[57] The image of a personified Rome turning her hand against herself recurs twice

[55] This section draws on, and in some cases reworks, material published as Mebane 2020 and Mebane 2016.

[56] See McClellan 2019: 115–69 on the poem's abused bodies; Gardner 2019: 189–206 on its engagement with the theme of pestilence; Dinter 2012 on its usage of the body as a textual and thematic metaphor; Bartsch 1997: 10–47 on its insistent violation of the body's boundaries.

[57] Text of Lucan follows Housman 1926.

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in the next thirty lines and pervades the epic as a whole.[58] Its self-mutilation reaches a fever pitch at the Battle of Pharsalus, where the poet surveys the impending devastation of Roman forces and remarks, *odiis solus civilibus ensis | sufficit, et dextras Romana in viscera ducit* ("Only the sword satisfies civil hatred and draws right hands into Roman innards," Luc. 7.490–91). This symbolism is compounded by imagery of a body under attack, as when Caesar orders his troops (*manus*) against the senate, where the *cruor imperii* and *viscera rerum* can be found (Luc. 7.578–9).[59] Further examples could be drawn from nearly every scene of the epic, prompting David Quint to call "the divided body politic" the master image of the poem.[60]

Lucan's imagery of corporeal collapse is one of the most memorable features of his epic, so much so that it tends to obscure his more systematic engagement with the models of the civic healer and head of state, which had become closely associated with the Caesars by the 60s CE. This section begins by considering how Lucan undermines the first of these models in his depiction of Sullan Rome in Book 2.[61] Assuming the voice of an old man who witnessed the horrors perpetrated under Sulla, he compares the enactment of proscriptions to an act of collective bloodletting: *Sulla quoque inmensis accessit cladibus ultor. | ille quod exiguum restabat sanguinis urbi | hausit* ("Then Sulla the avenger approached with endless slaughter. He drained what little remained of the city's blood," Luc. 2.139–41).[62] Already brutalized under the tyranny of Cinna and Marius, however, the body politic has hardly any blood left to shed.[63] Sulla must therefore make recourse to the harsher treatment of amputation: *dumque nimis iam putria*

[58] *si tantus amor belli tibi, Roma, nefandi . . . in te verte manus* ("If you love unspeakable war so much, Rome, turn your hand against yourself," Luc. 1.21–23); *alta sedent civilis volnera dextrae* ("the deep wounds of the civic hand," Luc. 1.32). Martindale 1993: 48 calls the *Bellum Civile* "a poem which might well be read under the sign of self-slaughter, both individual and collective."

[59] While Caesar often takes the lead in attacks on the body politic (e.g. *qui duro membra senatus | calcarat voltu*, "He [Caesar] tramples the senate's limbs with his harsh face," Luc. 9.1043–4), even the gods participate: *Latium sic scindere corpus | dis placitum* ("So it is pleasing to the gods to sever Latium's body," Luc. 10.416–7).

[60] Quint 1993: 141.

[61] "Under figures such as 'Sulla', ruin of the Republic, Romans had been exchanging models for political thought," Henderson 1995: 125 writes. For historical memory of Sullan trauma under the Principate, see Eckert 2016: 139–73.

[62] Joseph 2022: 57 argues that the old man "is a textual doublet of the poet himself." Lowrie and Vinken 2023: 138 suggest that his speech "provides a didactic introduction to a host of civil war's tropes" in the poem.

[63] The collective bloodletting prescribed by Sulla echoes a punishment exacted ten lines prior upon Scaevola, who is sacrificed at the shrine of Vesta: *parvom sed fessa senectus | sanguinis effudit iugulo flammisque pepercit* ("But tired old age poured out a scanty amount of blood from the neck and spared the flames," Luc. 2.128–9). Fantham 1992: *ad loc.* 140 suggests that the echo "assimilates the destruction of the community to that of the individual."

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membra recidit | excessit medicina modum, nimiumque secuta est, | qua morbi duxere, manus ("And while he cut away the now too putrid limbs, the medicine exceeded its limit, and his hand pursued too far where the diseases drew it, " Luc. 2.141–3). The trope of a cure worse than the disease went back to Sulla himself, who justified his dictatorship as a curative remedy.[64] Those less enamored with his rule responded by declaring his treatments worse than the ills that preceded them.[65] Lucan's reception of and elaboration upon this theme confirms his own interest in blurring the boundary between harming and healing in the context of civil war.

The torture of Marius Gratidianus, which had long served an exemplary function in Latin literature, gives concrete expression to the horrors of Sullan medicine in the tale of the old man.[66] A witness to the crime, he reports that no part of his body escaped his executioners' touch: *laceros artus aequataque volnera membris | vidimus* ("We saw his severed joints and the wounds made equal to his limbs," Luc. 2.177–8). He describes how Marius' arms were wrenched from his shoulders (*avolsae cecidere manus*), his tongue cut out (*exsectaque lingua*), ears and nose chopped off (*hic aures, alius spiramina naris aduncae | amputat*), and eyes plucked from their sockets (*ille cavis evoluit sedibus orbes*, Luc. 2.181–4). The methodical precision with which his body is dismantled is suggestive of a surgical procedure. Lucan encourages this reading through his use of the verb *amputare*, which Cicero used to justify the removal of Caesar and Antony from the body politic.[67] Martin Dinter argues that Cicero, a relative of the ill-fated man by adoption, lurks throughout the scene; he interprets the removal of Marius' tongue as a prefiguration of the silencing of Cicero, so that both men participate in a "'family tradition' of (self)sacrifice."[68] Through his assimilation of Cicero's body to Marius', Lucan suggests that the famed orator has become the victim of the same surgeries that he prescribed for his own enemies.[69]

[64] See Walters 2019: 961–5, who approaches Sulla's rumored death by phthiriasis in relation to the body politic tradition. Plutarch suggests that Sulla used the rhetoric of civic cleansing in his *Memoirs* (καθήρας, Plut. *Mor.* 786e).

[65] e.g. κακῷ τὸ κακὸν ἰώμενος ("He healed evil with evil," App. *B Civ.* 1.3). The application of the same rhetoric to Pompey, widely figured as Sulla's pupil, is likewise suggestive.

[66] See Walters 2013: 116–8 and Marshall 1985 on the literary tradition. Quint 1993: 143 argues that Marius Gratidianus' death "announces and anticipates a whole series of bodily mutilations in the *Pharsalia*."

[67] *ut membra quaedam amputantur* (Cic. *Off.* 3.32); *in rei publicae corpore . . . quicquid est pestiferum amputetur* (Cic. *Phil.* 8.15). See *OLD* s.v. 1a for *amputare* in relation to the severing of a limb.

[68] Dinter 2012: 47.

[69] This reading accords with Baraz 2021: 731, who argues that Lucan constructs Cicero's character to critique his use of violence against Catiline.

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As the distinction between the physician and patient fades away, so does that between the surgeon's scalpel and butcher's knife, which have the same effect on the body of Marius Gratidianus. Amid the paradoxes of civil war, such neat dualities lose their conceptual coherence.

Lucan's depiction of Sulla as a "mad surgeon," as Andrew McClellan calls him, takes on contemporary significance when viewed in relation to Senecan philosophy.[70] Scholars have long noted the compatibility between the Sulla of the *Bellum Civile* and that of *De Beneficiis*, where Seneca refers to *ingratus L. Sulla, qui patriam durioribus remediis quam pericula erant sanavit* ("Ungrateful Lucius Sulla, who cured the country by remedies harsher than the dangers were," Sen. *Ben.* 5.16.3).[71] Equally relevant is Seneca's portrayal of Marius Gratidianus' torture in *De Ira*, which is used to signify an attack on the body politic in microcosm.[72] Seneca describes how Marius' legs were broken (*praefingi crura*), eyes ripped out (*erui oculos*), tongue amputated (*amputari linguam*), and limbs lacerated (*per singulos artus laceravit*, Sen. *Ira* 3.18.1–2).[73] He then clarifies the symbolic import of the violence, explaining that while it was fitting for Marius to suffer these things, Sulla to order them, and Catiline to do them, *indigna res publica quae in corpus suum pariter et hostium et vindicum gladios reciperet* ("The *res publica* did not deserve to receive the swords of both enemies and protectors equally into its body," *Ira* 3.18.2). Seneca collapses the distinction between the body of a single citizen and that of the *res publica*, so that an attack on the former conveys the demise of the latter. Taking inspiration from his uncle, Lucan transforms this theme into a structuring principle of not just Book 2, but the whole epic.

Lucan's intertexts with Seneca construct a parallel between the civic violence perpetrated by Sulla and the tortures more recently prescribed by the Caesars. For Seneca breaks off his discussion of Marius Gratidianus by asking, *quid antiqua perscrutor?* ("Why do I investigate ancient examples?" Sen. *Ira* 3.18.3). He then turns his attention to Caligula, who easily exceeded Sullan cruelty in the number of men he tortured and the pleasure he took in their deaths (Sen. *Ira* 3.18.3). The comparison confirms that the bloodshed of the 80s BCE was not a relic of the past, but was rather in

[70] McClellan 2020: 233. [71] See Fantham 1992: *ad loc.*

[72] For the influence of *De Ira* on Lucan's portrait of not only Sulla, but also Caesar, see Leigh 1997: 289–90.

[73] Seneca's description closely follows that of Sallust (Sall. *Hist.* Fr. 36 Ramsey), a likely source for Lucan as well (see Rawson 1987).

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perpetual threat of renewal.[74] Seneca tries to forestall the troubling consequences of this idea in *De Clementia*, where he portrays Neronian clemency as the antithesis of Sullan cruelty.[75] Figuring Sulla as a bloodthirsty tyrant (*quis tamen umquam tyrannus tam avide humanum sanguinem bibit quam ille*, "Yet what tyrant has ever drunk human blood as greedily as he?" Sen. *Clem.* 1.12.2), Seneca sets him up as a negative *exemplum* for the young *princeps*. With every act of mercy that Nero is imagined performing, his distance from the Republican dictator grows. Seneca uses their asserted divergence to reassure readers that the current *princeps* has expelled the specter of Sulla from the House of the Caesars.

Lucan subverts the boundary that Seneca constructs between Sulla and Nero by drawing attention to their shared capacity to do harm. He portrays the Republican dictator systematically performing the same treatments from which Seneca tries to dissuade Nero in *De Clementia*. Nero is urged to avoid bloodletting at all costs (*sustinenda est <acies> ne ultra quam necesse sit incidat*, Sen. *Clem.* 1.5.1); Sulla drains every last drop (*ille quod exiguum restabat sanguinis urbi | hausit*, Luc. 2.140–1). Nero is reminded not to cut off his own limbs (*tarde sibi pater membra sua abscidat*, Sen. *Clem.* 1.14.3); Sulla does so with glee (*nimis iam putria membra recidit*, Luc. 2.141). Nero holds back his hand (*ostendens quam invitus aspero remedio manus admoveat*, Sen. *Clem.* 1.13.4); Sulla plunges his too far (*nimiumque secuta est, | qua morbi duxere, manus*, Luc. 2.141–2). These verbal echoes remind readers that Sulla will not be the last to exercise the power of life and death over his fellow citizens; the Caesars too will assess how much bloodletting benefits their rule. What matters is not the regimen that Nero chooses, but the fact that he alone gets to decide. His unchallenged possession of the prerogative to punish renders him the inheritor of Sulla's problematic legacy.

Lucan makes this reading explicit in the concluding lines of Book 4, where he suggests that Curio's susceptibility to bribery prompted him to auction off the *res publica*. Preceding this claim is a startling assertion of Sulla's presence within the House of the Caesars: *ius licet in iugulos nostros sibi fecerit ensis | Sulla potens Mariusque ferox et Cinna cruentus | Caesareaeque domus series, cui tanta potestas | concessa est? emere omnes, hic*

[74] Seneca makes the same point by linking Sulla to the saying *oderint, dum metuant,* which Suetonius reports was a favorite of Tiberius and Caligula (Suet. *Tib.* 59.2; *Calig.* 30.1). Associations between the Caesars and Sulla went back to the triumviral era, when Octavian and his fellow triumvirs earned the nickname *Sullae discipuli tres* (Juv. 2.28).

[75] Of course, Sulla had tried to lay claim to the language of clemency himself, complicating the neat opposition Seneca constructs. On this topic, see Dowling 2000 and Thein 2014.

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vendidit urbem ("Although powerful Sulla and fierce Marius and bloodthirsty Cinna and the line of the Caesarian house earned the right to use the sword against our throats, to whom was such a great privilege granted? For they all bought the city, while he [Curio] sold it," Luc. 4.821–4). Lucan constructs a historical trajectory of violence that begins with the generals of the 80s BCE and culminates in the Principate. Although he implicates Cinna, Marius, and Sulla in his reference to the *ius ensis*, he reverses the chronology of the era so that Sulla comes first in the line of those who wield the sword.[76] He thereby foregrounds the legacy of the dictator as that which lives on under the Caesars. Prompting readers to think back to his portrayal of Sulla in Book 2, he suggests that Nero is equally ready to apply his scalpel to the body politic. He exposes not only Nero's failure to adhere to the lessons contained within *De Clementia*, but also Seneca's failure to regulate the operation of autocracy through philosophical inquiry.

The parallel Lucan constructs between Sulla and Nero confirms the contemporary import of the warning issued by the old man in Book 2. As he concludes his ruminations on past strife, he says, *haec rursus patienda manent, hoc ordine belli | ibitur, hic stabit civilibus exitus armis* ("These things remain to be suffered again, through this sequence of war we will pass, this will be the outcome of civil war," Luc. 2.223–4).[77] His words apply not only to those who will experience the conflict between Caesar and Pompey, but also to those who will read Lucan under Nero.[78] As long as the *princeps* has the power to excise malignant limbs from the *res publica*, Rome will remain susceptible to the self-slaughter thematized in the epic. Lucan's intertexts with Seneca consequently reinforce Timothy Joseph's argument that "the principate itself emerges from the poem as a sort of repetition or perpetuation of civil war."[79] Exposing violence as the true foundation of Julio-Claudian concord and consensus, Lucan illustrates how medical imagery could be used in opposition to rather than in service of autocracy. As he turns his attention to the symbol of the *caput* in Book 8, his divergence from the panegyrizing norms of Julio-Claudian discourse comes into even sharper view. With the beheading of Pompey comes an opportunity to undermine the ideal of Imperial interdependence that structures Seneca's *De Clementia*.

[76] Asso 2010: *ad loc.* 4.822.
[77] On this passage, Henderson 1987: 130 remarks, "More Lucanian 'Deathstiny'. But the permanent 'Sullution' will be: No solution, permanently."
[78] As Lowrie and Vinken 2023: 138 write, "The old man's speech in book 2 spells out civil war's eternal return."
[79] Joseph 2012b: 8.

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The importance of capital symbolism to the interpretation of the *Bellum Civile* is established in Book 1, which sets up the conflict between Caesar and Pompey as a competition between rival heads of the body politic.[80] When the Etruscan seer Arruns examines the entrails of a bull in Book 1, he discovers not only diseased and putrid organs, but also a liver that has sprouted two heads: *ecce, videt capiti fibrarum increscere molem | alterius capitis. pars aegra et marcida pendet | pars micat et celeri venas movet inproba pulsu* ("Look, he sees another head's mass of fibers growing on its head. One part hangs sick and withered, the other quivers and stirs the veins with a quick, immoderate pulse," Luc. 1.627–9).[81] As Paul Roche notes, the ominous nature of the two-headed liver is put into explicitly political terms in Seneca's *Oedipus*: *ac (semper omen unico imperio grave) | en capita paribus bina consurgunt toris* ("And see there! Two heads rise with equal bulges (always a grievous omen for undivided power)," Sen. *Oed.* 359–60).[82] The two heads, one characterized by its decaying vitality and the other by its hurried speed, recall the programmatic similes that Lucan uses to introduce Pompey and Caesar, the former a nearly rootless oak tree and the latter a flashing lightning bolt (Luc. 1.135–57).[83] In this way, Arruns' discovery invites readers to link the symbol of the *caput* with the political fortunes of the epic's protagonists.[84]

This theme is rearticulated at key points in the narrative. When the two armies converge at Dyrrachium, Caesar describes their struggle as a game of chance played between two heads: *placet alea fati | alterutrum mersura caput* ("He yearns for a game of chance that will sink one head or the other," Luc. 6.7–8). Partisans on both sides invoke the imagery when their leaders face mortal peril. As Caesar embarks on his risky sea voyage in Book 5, his soldiers remind him, *tantus caput hoc sibi fecerit orbis* ("Such a great world has made you its head," Luc. 5.686).[85] Inquiring about the fate of his father, Pompey's son asks, *stat summa caputque | orbis, an occidimus* ("Is the peak and head of the world standing, or have we fallen?" Luc. 9.123–4). Lucan reinforces this contest of heads by favoring words etymologically derived

[80] For Caesar and Pompey as rival heads, see Dinter 2012: 19–21 and Masters 1992: 133–4.

[81] Rambaud 1985: 292–3 suggests that Lucan transposes the ill-omened liver preceding Caesar's assassination (*caesumque caput reperitur in extis*, Ov. *Met.* 15.795) to this scene.

[82] Roche 2009: *ad loc.*

[83] See Narducci 2002: 56–8. On the oak tree and lightning bolt, see Rosner-Siegel 1983; Masters 1992: 9–10; Feeney 1986; Leigh 2010.

[84] Easton 2011: 360 draws attention to Arruns' refusal to narrate the discovery of civil war lurking in the liver, which leaves the task to the poet.

[85] On the equation of Caesar's life and those of his soldiers, see Matthews 2008: *ad loc.*

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from *caput*.[86] *Anceps*, literally "doubleheadedness," recurs throughout the epic to characterize the conflict.[87] At the start of the epic, both Rome (Luc. 1.266) and the towns of Latium (Luc. 2.448) are called *anceps*, split in their loyalties to Caesar and Pompey. Their two-headed cities mirror the malformation of the larger body politic, which also sees the doubling of the Roman senate at Epirus.[88] After the victory of Caesarian forces at the Battle of Massilia, the narrator characterizes the shift in political fortunes in the same terms: *inclinant iam fata ducum, nec iam amplius anceps | belli casus erat* ("Now the fates of the generals were turning, and the outcome of war was no longer two-headed," Luc. 3.752–3). Caesar's frequent epithet *praeceps* (*prae-caput*) emphasizes the point further.[89] The consistent applicability of head imagery to his character throws Pompey's slipping grasp on power into sharp relief. The struggle for the title of *caput rei publicae* is thereby replicated on a linguistic level.

Pompey's and Caesar's competing claims to fulfill the role of Rome's head are decisively settled in Book 8, when the former is savagely decapitated. Rather than simply marking the conclusion of the contest described in earlier books, however, Lucan stages this scene as a mutiny of the body politic against its head of state. The book begins after Pompey has been defeated at Pharsalus and become a man whose life has outlived his power (*vita superstes | imperio*, Luc. 8.28–9). As his generals meet in Cilicia to decide on the best course of action, Lucan raises the question of Pompey's physical integrity. The general defends his continued right to lead by arguing for his physical resilience. Denying that defeat has affected his head or body, he asserts, *non omnis in arvis | Emathiis cecidi, nec sic mea fata premuntur | ut nequeam relevare caput cladesque receptas | excutere* ("I did not fall completely on Emathian fields and my fates are not so downtrodden that I am unable to raise my head and shake off the misfortunes I received," Luc. 8.266–9). Roland Mayer points out the parallel between this metaphor and one used earlier to describe an attack on a Libyan elephant: *sic Libycus densis elephans oppressus ab armis | omne repercussum squalenti missile tergo | frangit et haerentis mota cute discutit hastas: | viscera tuta latent penitus* ("So a Libyan elephant, overwhelmed by dense troops,

[86] For the ancient etymologies of *anceps* and *praeceps*, see Maltby 1991: 33, 490.

[87] Masters 1992: 133–4 notes the suitability of *anceps* in a contest between two heads that will end with a *princeps*.

[88] Lentulus describes the formation of a second senate in bodily terms: *omnia rursus| membra loco redeunt* (Luc. 5.36–7).

[89] Lucan famously calls Caesar *in omnia praeceps* (Luc. 2.656), which Fantham 1992: *ad loc*. describes as the keynote of his introductory portrait as a lightning bolt. See also Dinter 2012: 19 and Braund 1992: xlvi, who interprets this word in relation to the panic that pervades the poem.

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breaks every spear rebounding off its rough back and by twitching its skin shakes off the clinging spears: its organs are concealed safely within," Luc. 6.208–11).[90] Like the elephant, Pompey implies that his own skin has not been penetrated and is still able to protect the Republic's vitals. Even more importantly, his head remains intact and capable. By defending his body in this way, however, he also acknowledges that it has come under attack.

The response of the Pompeian commander Lentulus operates within the rhetorical parameters set by the general. He criticizes the suggestion of sailing to Parthia by questioning Pompey's physical integrity, asking, *sicine Thessalicae mentem fregere ruinae? | . . . iacet omne cruenti | volneris auxilium?* ("So have the ruins of Thessaly shattered your mind? . . . Is the bleeding wound beyond all help?" Luc. 8.331–4). Lentulus uses imagery of physical deterioration to challenge Pompey's legitimacy as a leader, suggesting that he might rather be a slave: *si servire potes?* (Luc. 8.341). Drawing out the physical implications of his effort, Frederick Ahl remarks, "Lentulus dismembers his arguments point by point."[91] By rhetorically rendering Pompey subordinate to those supposed to be under his rule, Lentulus convinces the other commanders to supersede his judgment. In doing so, Pompey's own commanders inadvertently send him to his death in Egypt. Lucan's purposefulness in representing the Cilician assembly as a mutiny is suggested by his divergence from Appian's account. While the historian confirms disagreement about where to sail, he writes that Pompey resolved the conflict by promoting Egypt as a second option (ἐς δὲ τὴν Αἴγυπτον αὐτῷ συνεφρόνουν, App. *B Civ.* 2.83). In Lucan's hands, this minor disagreement serves to stage an internal split in the general's forces.

Lucan magnifies such division by mirroring it in the court of King Ptolemy. Although Ptolemy's treachery might be interpreted as an act of foreign hostility, the poet instead insists on treating it within the paradigm of civil war.[92] He emphasizes not only Egypt's status as a friendly client kingdom and part of the *orbis Romanus*, but also Ptolemy's personal dependence on Pompey: *sceptra puer Ptolemaeus habet tibi debita, Magne* ("The boy Ptolemy holds his scepter thanks to you, Magnus," Luc. 8.448).[93] The image invests the Roman general with authority and

[90] Mayer 1981: *ad loc.* 8.268–9. [91] Ahl 1976: 172.

[92] Like his Augustan predecessors, Lucan takes up the trope of "the Egyptian within," on which see Lowrie 2015a. Spencer 2005: 60–4 shows how Pompey's grave transforms Egypt into a Roman landscape, while Tracy 2014: 10 foregrounds continuity between the Ptolemies and the Caesars in his study of Egypt's role in the epic.

[93] The narrator makes a similar point as he directly addresses Ptolemy: *cecidit civilibus armis | qui tibi regna dedit* ("The one who gave the kingdom to you has fallen by civil arms," Luc. 8.559–60).

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privileges his agency; yet when he arrives in Egypt, his army worries about the reversal of their power relations: *metuens non arma nefasque | sed ne summissis precibus Pompeius adoret | sceptra sua donata manu* ("Fearing not arms and treachery, but that with submissive prayers Pompey would beseech the scepter given by his own hand," Luc. 8.593–5). Ptolemy's advisor Pothinus puts this vulnerability into explicitly bodily terms: *feriam tua viscera, Magne* ("I will attack your innards, Magnus," Luc. 8.521).[94] In framing *viscera* with *tua* and *Magne*, he suggests that these are not the collective organs of Rome, just those of a single man. His rejection of Pompey's bodily authority signals that the mutiny will progress onto Egyptian land.

The faithlessness of Egypt and its role as a civil war landscape is underlined through the presence of the Roman military tribune Septimius, who fought alongside Pompey against the pirates before joining Ptolemy's retinue. The narrator laments that Fortune has extended civil crimes even to this land: *disponis gladios, nequo non fiat in orbe, | heu, facinus civile tibi* ("You scatter swords so that – alas! – a civil crime might happen anywhere in the world for you," Luc. 8.603–4). The key term *facinus civile* confirms the stakes of the action at hand. He then reveals the depths of Septimius' impending treachery: *Romanus regi sic paruit ensis, | Pellaeusque puer gladio tibi colla recidit, | Magne, tuo* ("And so a Roman sword obeyed a king, and the Pellaean boy cut your neck with your own sword, Magnus," Luc. 8.606–8). The traitorous soldier not only enacts Ptolemy's perfidy but also reproduces it, so that Pompey is betrayed by both his client king and his own soldier. The mutiny of the body politic is thereby made explicit in the narrative. *Tuo gladio* takes the meaning even further: Pompey's neck is figuratively attacked by his own sword. His decapitation proves to be an act of metaphoric self-mutilation.

The execution of Pompey should be conclusive – if not the end of the Republic's civil wars, at least the expiration of the general's life. Instead, the scene renders closure impossible by portraying increasingly brutal yet ineffective violence against a head that appears incapable of dying. For when Septimius uncovers Pompey's face, he is revealed to be half-alive: *ac retegit sacros scisso velamine voltus | semianimis Magni spirantiaque occupat ora | collaque in obliquo ponit languentia transtro* ("And after the toga is cut away, he uncovers the sacred visage of half-alive Magnus and seizes his still breathing face, and puts the languishing neck on a slanted crossbeam,"

[94] Tracy 2014: 71–4 draws suggestive parallels between Pothinus and Caesar, which only reinforce the civil war context of the passage.

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Luc. 8.669–71). The liminal state of his head is reinforced by his still breathing face and languishing neck. Septimius then begins to chop away, seeking a final separation of head and body: *tunc nervos venasque secat nodosaque frangit | ossa diu* ("Then he hacks at the sinews and veins, and fractures the knotty bones for a long time," Luc. 8.672–3). Lucan emphasizes the excruciating length of the endeavor with an emphatic *diu*. Even after the trunk falls away from the neck, his face lives, with his mouth pulsating, breath gasping, and eyes stiffening: *Pharioque veruto | dum vivunt voltus atque os in murmura pulsant | singultus animae, dum lumina nuda rigescunt | suffixum caput est* ("On a Pharian spear, while his face is still living and sobs of breath pulse his mouth in murmurs, while his uncovered eyes stiffen, the head is fixed," Luc. 8.681–4).[95] Pompey appears bizarrely incapable of dying, and while he must stop breathing at some point, the narrator privileges his semi-animate state by never specifying a moment of expiration. This is one of many places in the epic that Lucan, through rhetorical delay, refuses to narrate significant events.[96] This refusal cannot change the course of Roman history, but it can deny a satisfying resolution to the mutiny of the body politic.

The absence of finality in Pompey's beheading suggests that Rome's self-destruction can never be complete, necessitating an inevitable escalation of violence in pursuit of an unrealizable goal. This theme is further elaborated through the embalming of his head, which Lucan describes in gory detail: *tunc arte nefanda | summota est capiti tabes, raptoque cerebro | adsiccata cutis, putrisque effluxit ab alto | umor* ("Then decay was drained from the head by their heinous practice, and after the brain has been taken out, the skin was dried, and a putrid fluid poured out from the deep," Luc. 8.688–91).[97] The body part that has been the subject of so much attention in the poem is finally disassembled. The once vital head is little more than a decaying mess of fluids, putting the corrosive effects of civil war on stark display. Yet the real horror of the embalming is not the revelation of Pompey's internal deterioration but rather the implication of permanence. The head, distorted and disturbed, is fixed for eternity through the insertion of poison: *et*

[95] McClellan 2019: 70 notes how the syntactical separation of the spear from its function mirrors the division and dissolution of Pompey's body. Baraz 2021: 735 suggests that Lucan's description of Pompey's *spirantia ora* is an allusion to Cornelius Severus' eulogy for the similarly decapitated Cicero.

[96] Henderson 1987: 133–4 stresses Lucan's refusal to narrate his story of Caesarian triumph, which casts Pompey as "the resisting, delaying, yielding, *deferring* object of the narrative quest for satisfaction," (149). See also Roche 2019: 3 and Masters 1992: 1–10.

[97] Malamud 2003: 36–7 interprets the embalming of Pompey's head in relation to the Medusa episode in Book 9, which serves as yet another repetitious doubling.

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infuso facies solidata veneno est ("And his face was hardened by the infusion of a poison," Luc. 8.691). Doomed to exist in a state of strife forever, the general is denied any possibility for either death or regeneration. A similar fate, Lucan suggests, awaits Rome.

While Pompey's severed head does much of the work in conveying the consequences of civil war to Lucan's audience, the fate of his trunk – unceremoniously thrown into the sea midway through Book 8 – works to similar effect.[98] His battered *truncus* looks back to the oak simile of Book 1, suggesting that the tottering tree has finally completed its fall.[99] Now at the mercy of forces beyond its control, it is defined by its lack of agency: *litora Pompeium feriunt, truncusque vadosis | huc illuc iactatur aquis . . . pulsatur harenis, | carpitur in scopulis hausto per volnera fluctu* ("The shores batter Pompey, and his trunk is tossed about here and there in the shallow waters . . . He is beaten on the sands, torn on the rocks while the sea is sucked in through his wounds," Luc. 8.698–709).[100] Lucan's passive language – *iactatur, pulsatur, carpitur* – culminates in the designation of Pompey's body as a *ludibrium pelagi* (Luc. 8.710), a plaything at the whim of the water.[101] By cutting off its own head, the body politic has lost the reasoning faculties that enabled its functioning. Trapped in an inescapable cycle of violence made literal through the pounding waves, it offers disturbing confirmation of the warnings issued by Seneca.

Lucan's refusal to invest Pompey's murder with a sense of closure is only further magnified in the failed cremation of the general.[102] The quaestor Cordus eventually rescues his commander from the sea and manages to light his remains after stealing wood from a nearby pyre. A gruesome image of decay follows: *carpitur et lentum Magnus destillat in ignem | tabe fovens bustum* ("Magnus is grabbed and drips into the slow fire, warming the pyre with his waste," 8.777–8). Echoing the mummification of the head (*tabe*) and the drowning of the body (*carpitur*), the corpse reminds readers of the means through which it died. Dawn interrupts the proceedings shortly after Cordus lights the pyre, forcing him to remove Pompey's singed body,

[98] Lucan foreshadows this scene in Book 1, where a Roman matron prophesies, *hunc ego, fluminea deformis truncus harena | qui iacet, agnosco* ("I recognize that man, the misshapen trunk that lies on river sands," Luc. 1.685–6). Narducci 1973 illustrates the intertext with Vergil's Priam, which was already taken to be an allusion to Pompey. Hinds 1998: 8–10 elaborates this theme further.

[99] As Ahl 1976: 185 writes, "The rotting oak is now no more than a piece of battered driftwood; in the dim light it almost merges with the water in which it floats, unable even to cast a shadow."

[100] Bartsch 1997: 46 correlates civil war to the collapse of agency in the epic.

[101] Martin 2005: 153 identifies this imagery as a product of Lucan's imagination rather than the historical tradition.

[102] Galtier 2010: 193 suggests that Pompey's remains are evoked as a leitmotif throughout the epic.

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its bones still coated with muscle and smoldering marrow, and shallowly bury it. His half-burnt corpse, a common motif denoting an ambiguous status between life and death, parallels his half-alive state during the beheading.[103] In this way, the burial further develops the themes of irresolution and repetition already established during the murder.

The inadequacy of Pompey's burial as a device for conclusion is made clear at the start of Book 9, when his spirit abandons its grave.[104] The narrator reports, *nec cinis exiguus tantam conpescuit umbram; | prosiluit busto semustaque membra relinquens | degeneremque rogum* ("The paltry ash did not contain such a great shade; it leaped from its grave, leaving behind its half-burnt limbs and contemptible pyre," Luc. 9.2–4). It then soars to Jupiter's kingdom and watches the world, including its own trunk, from above. For the narrator, this startling scene of deification marks the culmination of Pompey's transformation into an exemplary figure.[105] But it ends on an ominous note, for the vengeful shade enters both Brutus and Cato: *et scelerum vindex in sancto pectore Bruti | sedit et invicti posuit se mente Catonis* ("The avenger of crimes settled in the pious breast of Brutus and put itself in the unconquerable mind of Cato," Luc. 9.17–8).[106] By splitting into two, Pompey's spirit reestablishes the internal division that doomed his body. Its first target, Brutus, propels Rome into another round of civil war through his murder of Caesar and ultimately commits suicide. Its second target, Cato, continues the Republican fight until he, too, dies by his own hand.[107] Lucan might celebrate their struggle for *libertas*, but he also exposes its devastating consequences for the soundness of the body politic. Like a virus, the self-destructive impulse within Pompey does not expire, but spreads to everyone it touches.

Lucan's insistence on representing Pompey's murder within the paradigm of self-destruction allows him to address the consequences of a body politic that rebels against its head of state. His portrayal of the famed

[103] See Noy 2000: 192–4 on the symbolic import of incomplete cremations.

[104] Gowing 2005: 87–8 proposes that Pompey's actual tomb is replaced with a "virtual" one that will transcend time.

[105] On the "wild partisanship" that emerges in this scene, see Bartsch 1997: 91. For the narrator's "extremes of pro-Pompeian partisanship" more broadly, see Masters 1992: 81. Behr 2007: 76–112 represents an alternative scholarly tradition that views the narrator's sympathy for Pompey through a Stoic lens.

[106] Insofar Cato and Brutus represent defenders of *libertas*, their inheritance of Pompey's shade can be read positively (e.g. Ahl 1976: 188–9; Esposito 1996: 116–7). But the underbelly of continuity is endlessness.

[107] Narducci 2002: 335–49 proposes that Pompey's ascent to the heavens reinspires his commitment to civil war, which is then passed along to Brutus and Cato. Easton 2012: 221 argues for Pompey's insinuation of himself into the still unfolding history of Roman civil war.

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general's physical dissolution can be read as a fulfillment of the political vision laid out in *De Clementia*; without a *caput rei publicae*, the Roman people are nothing more than *onus et praeda*. While Seneca makes this point to encourage acquiescence to the Principate, Lucan uses it to convey the futility of politics in a society fated to civil war. Overeager surgeons and ineffectual heads of state might cause harm, but so does their removal. The *res publica* appears doomed to self-destruction either way. Lucan's critique of the Principate should therefore not be interpreted as evidence of his Republican sympathies or revolutionary designs. In its portrayal of the ancestral Republic as an irrecoverable relic, his epic conveys the same foreclosure of institutional alternatives that pervades Seneca's political philosophy. In different ways, both writers stripped away the fiction of ancestral refoundation and prompted readers to confront the reality of autocracy. Their efforts catalyzed a new era of political thought.

Seneca's *De Clementia* and Lucan's *Bellum Civile* represent the culmination of the conceptual project that we have traced over the span of more than a century. Our investigation began in the Late Republic, when a *res publica* topped by a *caput* seemed like a contradiction in terms. The balance of power in the Roman Republic precluded such a simple dichotomy of command and obedience. By the time that Nero became *princeps*, however, a *res publica* without a *caput* had become largely unimaginable. The Principate was now so normative that it no longer demanded sustained justification. Roman writers were therefore able to turn their attention to the long-term consequences of sole rule. Yet even as Seneca and Lucan became increasingly willing to point out the flaws in the governing form under which they lived, they also remained deeply skeptical that it could be changed without catastrophic consequences. In the end, both fell victim to Neronian "medicine" before they could see the fulfillment of their fears. As they predicted, the overthrow of the Julio-Claudian dynasty precipitated a return to civil war while doing little to change the system that gave rise to such discontent in the first place. Paradoxically, then, the contest for power that followed Nero's demise did not weaken the Principate so much as confirm its viability as an institution independent of its Augustan origins. With the rise of the Flavians came the formalization of both sole rule and the Imperial model of the body politic for the foreseeable future.[108]

[108] The formalization of the Principate is typically tied to the *Lex de imperio Vespasiani*, on which see Brunt 1977 and Hurlet 1993 alongside the more recent work compiled in Capogrossi Colognesi and Scandone 2009.

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