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Cynthia Damon

University of Pennsylvania, cdamon@sas.upenn.edu

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Abstract

This chapter examines Tacitus' representation of the legacy of civil war in his history of the Julio-Claudian period, the *Annals*, arguing that civil war persists during the *pax Augusta* as a kind of banalization of state violence against citizens, a political system that consumes its own. It studies Tacitus' multi-episode account of Nero's paranoid, possibly cynical, and ultimately self-defeating appropriation of civil war *exempla* to motivate the suppression of potential dissent.

Keywords

Tacitus, Annals, Nero, civil war

Disciplines

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Cynthia Damon

1. Introduction

Servius Galba was an unlikely contender for imperial power in 68 CE. Governor of Hispania Tarraconensis since 61, he had been keeping a low profile for years; there are no achievements of note for him after Claudius' principate.¹ By 68 he was a septuagenarian survivor who had seen five emperors come and four go. True, he was tied to the interests of the *res publica* by birth, wealth, and a traditional career, but it was not public interest that moved him to challenge Nero. What tipped the balance? Ancient explanations focus not on Nero's misrule (often used to explain the Pisonian conspiracy and Vindex's revolt), but on something more basic: Galba feared for his life. According to Suetonius, for example, "he had gotten hold of Nero's orders about his own execution, which had been sent secretly to provincial agents" (Suet. *Galba* 9.2: *mandata Neronis de nece sua ad procuratores clam missa deprenderat*).² Whether or not such orders had been given in Galba's case—Gwyn Morgan (2006: 21) thinks not—Galba could (and apparently did) point to the executions of numerous other men with a record like his (e.g., Suet. *Galba* 10.1: *propositis ante se damnatorum occisorumque a Nerone... imaginibus*; "setting up in front of himself... images of those condemned and killed by Nero"; Plut. *Galba* 5.2: τῶν ἀνηρημένων ἀνδρῶν ὑπ' αὐτοῦ τοῖς ἐπιφανεστάτους ὀλοφυράμενος; "uttering lament for the most eminent of the men slain by [Nero]").

For preemptive execution had long been Nero's policy; the emperor learned more from his mother than from his tutor.³ Preemptive execution

is also a recurrent feature in Tacitus' analysis of imperial paranoia, which, in an era of "peace and an emperor" (*Ann.* 3.28.2: *pace et principe*), nevertheless saw civil war everywhere and reacted accordingly, often appropriating civil war *exempla* to motivate the suppression of (what was figured as) dissent. Or at least the attempted suppression; in fact, as Tacitus shows, the paranoid reaction, when it sounded the "civil war alarm," risked rousing real civil war and thereby perpetuating Rome's cycle of self-inflicted suffering.⁴

The specter of civil war haunts Tacitus' Julio-Claudians, and each of the emperors for whom his narrative survives is shown coping with it and with those of his circle who try to exploit the "lessons" of past civil wars: Sejanus, Messalina, Poppaea, and Tigellinus, to name just a few, are among the powerful figures who evoke the horrors of civil war for their own self-serving and short-sighted ends. The year of civil war that erupted with Galba and nearly destroyed the *res publica* (*Hist.* 1.11.3) was, in Tacitus' view, long in preparation.

The present essay traces the intertwined themes of civil war (alleged or attempted) and preemptive execution (accomplished or feared) in the *Annals*. It is a story of many episodes, with the Tiberian scenes serving as foil to the Claudian and both to the Neronian. Lacking Tacitus' narrative of Nero's end we cannot see whether the trajectory sketched here culminates there, of course. But in his earlier work our author did create a direct connection between fear of preemptive execution and real civil war. Two episodes from the *Histories*, then, will serve as an introduction to the dynamics of the arbitrary exercise of power.

I begin with Otho's coup. Tacitus' narrative of the conspiracy that overthrew Galba is, in its events, very close to the parallel tradition. What Tacitus adds is Otho's internal deliberations, fear foremost: "he also contemplated what he feared" (*H.* 1.21.1: *fingebat et metum*). Otho's chief fear was in fact execution, which he felt he risked not for anything he had done but simply for who he was (1.21.1). He reasons thus: "Otho can be killed! Accordingly, now is the time for action and daring" (1.21.2: *occidi Othonem posse. proinde agendum audendumque*). Otho is afraid that his temporary eminence as a potential adoption candidate will expose him to the hostility of the successful heir, Piso, for "suspicion and hatred from those in power attend the man forecast as next in succession" (1.21.1: *suspectum semper invisumque dominantibus qui proximus destinaretur*). And his fear prompts action—the killing of Galba and Piso—that brings in its train the next phase of the year's wars, Otho versus Vitellius. In effect, Tacitus makes his Otho act on the assumption that the men presently in power will respond to their fears as the real Nero did.

One further passage from the *Histories* will finish setting the stage. Through Otho in the scene just discussed Tacitus shows us the rebel's motivation; he offers the ruler's side in an episode from Vitellius' reign later in the year. Trivial in its consequences (except to the victim), the episode is nevertheless narrated in

considerable detail over two chapters and introduced with the attention-getting comment "Junius Blaesus' death was common knowledge at the time and an object of talk" (*Hist.* 3.38.1: *nota per eos dies Iunii Blaesi mors et famosa fuit*).

Out of *prava aemulatio*, "perverted rivalry," says Tacitus, Lucius Vitellius, the emperor's brother, accused Blaesus of constituting a greater threat to Vitellius than his challenger Vespasian (3.38.2). The latter was far away; Blaesus, here in Rome: "[Vitellius] should beware an enemy in the city, within his embrace . . . , who with his imperial stock was parading affable and splendid before the soldiers" (3.38.3: *in urbe ac sinu cavendum hostem . . . , qui se stirpe imperatoria comem ac magnificum militibus ostentet*). The intimate setting of the accusation is stressed—"he opens the emperor's bedroom door, clasping [Vitellius'] son to his chest and falling at his knees" (3.38.2: *cubiculum imperatoris reserat, filium eius sinu complexus et genibus accidens*)—and the execution of Blaesus follows forthwith (3.39.1). According to Tacitus, however, Blaesus had done nothing more than attend a party when the emperor was indisposed (3.38.1). The allegation of mounting a military challenge to Vitellius—that is, of restarting the civil wars of 69—came in the first instance from the sort of men "who spy out rulers' affronts" (3.38.2: *qui principum offensas . . . speculantur*); in their perverted rivalry for influence at court, such men were prompt with "services" like warning a paranoid ruler against nonexistent dangers, like Blaesus. In Tacitus' analysis, however, as we will see, the real danger to Blaesus and his like is an *intestinum scelus*, an "inward crime," that the *res publica* needs to be warned against.

2. Tiberius

Tacitus' Tiberius, like his real-world model, does not want to hear about civil war.⁵ But the subject was unavoidable. In the Tiberian books civil war is most often evoked in attacks on people who have associated themselves with civil war *exempla* in one way or another. Cremutius Cordus, for example, with his *annales* publishing praise of Brutus and declaring Cassius last of the Romans (*Ann.* 4.34.1). The charges against Cordus, while clearly malicious in intent (4.34.1), are not, in Tacitus' view, without merit: Cordus' writings were dangerous.⁶ Another civil war threat in the Tiberian books was Gnaeus Piso (2.76.3, 2.81.1). Though ultimately abortive, the civil war he started in Syria had precedent in his father's partisan attachment—mentioned by Tacitus when Piso is first appointed to Syria (2.43.2)—to Pompey against Caesar and later to Brutus and Cassius against Caesar's heir. The civil wars of the 50s and 40s were followed by the conflict between Antony and Octavian in the 30s, duly evoked in Tacitus' report of Germanicus' visit to the Actium camp of his grandfather Antony (2.53.2). Cordus, Piso, Germanicus: each man in his way constituted a real threat to Tiberius and the *pax Augusta*.

However, alongside these substantive evocations of civil war, the Tiberian books contain one character who reads a future civil war, gratuitously and self-servingly, into the behavior of his enemies in order to poison Tiberius' mind against them. I refer, of course, to Sejanus, who in 23 CE encouraged Livia and Livilla to accuse the elder Agrippina of being hungry for power and counting on popular support (4.12.3), and who himself argues that a New Year's Day demonstration of support for Agrippina's older sons is tantamount to civil war (4.17.3: *ut civili bello*). Sejanus had been making similar arguments since 17 CE, when he insisted that Agrippina's attentions to her husband's troops were dangerous: "those attentions were not straightforward, nor was the soldiers' favor sought for facing external foes" (1.69.3–4: *non . . . simplices eas curas, nec adversus externos <studia> militum quaeri*). In 23, Sejanus prescribed in general terms the treatment so often applied by Nero later, namely, preemptive execution: "and the sole remedy for growing discord was if one or another of the most forward be brought down" (4.17.3: *neque aliud gliscentis discordiae remedium quam si unus alterve maxime prompti subverterentur*). Attacks against two of the "most forward" duly follow (4.18.1). With respect to Sejanus' principal targets, however, Agrippina and her older sons (on whom Sejanus keeps up the attack after he gets Tiberius sequestered on Capri in 4.67.4), Tiberius is his usual evasive self.⁷ Though presumably worried about the possibility of civil war between those loyal to him and those loyal to (the memory of) Germanicus, he attacks young Nero and Agrippina on different grounds entirely (5.3.2):

non arma, non rerum novarum studium, amores iuvenum et
impudicitiam nepoti obieciabat. in nurum ne id quidem confingere
ausus, adrogantiam oris et contumacem animum incusavit.

Not arms, not revolutionary zeal, but youthful love affairs and lack of chastity were his criticisms of his grandson. Against his daughter-in-law—courage failing him to fabricate even this—his complaint was of arrogant demeanor and defiant spirit.

If there was any truth to Sejanus' "civil war" alarm, Tiberius did not acknowledge it here or later when Germanicus' second son, Drusus, was eliminated (6.23–24).⁸ Instead of the quick-acting and savage blade wielded by Nero, Otho, and Vitellius, Tiberius' weapon of choice is mud (cf. 5.5: *repetitis adversum nepotem et nurum probris*; "with a reiteration of the shameful charges against grandson and daughter-in-law"; 6.24.1: *invectus in defunctum probra corporis*; "railing at the dead man for his shameful acts").

Under Tiberius, then, according to Tacitus, the threat of civil war was still real, but Tiberius managed it successfully and no serious conflicts arose. Preemptive

execution was called for by Sejanus, without justification but also without immediate effect, Tiberius being wilyer than his wily minister. However, the workings of a dangerous mechanism have been exposed.⁹

3. Claudius

Sejanus' attack via an analogy for a state with divided loyalties—*ut civili bello*, "as in civil war"—becomes a more direct charge of *res novae*, "revolution," in Tacitus' surviving Claudian books.¹⁰ In *Annals* 11 and 12 there are two relevant episodes, one connected with each of Claudius' imperial consorts, plus a cautionary tale from Parthia.¹¹

Book 11 as we have it opens with Messalina's attack on Valerius Asiaticus for reasons entirely (according to Tacitus) personal: sexual jealousy and greed (11.1.1). She is abetted by her son's tutor, Sosibius, who suggests to Claudius, "with a show of goodwill" (11.1.1: *per speciem benevolentiae*), that Asiaticus is a political threat: he boasted publicly, says Sosibius, of involvement in the murder of Caligula and is famous in the city on that account, while in the provinces he is rumored to be planning to approach the armies of Germany, where the Vienne-born two-time consul will find it easy to rouse the locals (11.1.2). Claudius responds "as if to quash a war" (*tamquam opprimendo bello*).

As in Sejanus' machinations under Tiberius, charging Asiaticus with planning for armed rebellion seems gratuitous; there is no warrant for it in anything Tacitus says about the man (11.1–2, 13.43.2). Even the charge's historicity is suspect, since Sosibius' "well-intentioned" and presumably private conversation with Claudius is unlikely to have been transmitted in the historical record. Self-serving motives, intimate setting, gratuitous charge, paranoid ruler, preemptive violence: the pattern will repeat.

Agrippina's evocation of civil discord has equally bloody consequences, if less distinguished victims, at least in the first instance. Her private complaint to Claudius about the disrespect shown by Britannicus to his older "brother" Nero—"discord's beginning," she says (12.41.3: *discordiae initium*)—leads Claudius to remove by exile or death men Tacitus labels the best of Britannicus' teachers, whose *pravitas*, "perversity" (her word), Agrippina describes (12.41.3) as "about to burst forth into public ruin" (*ereptura in publicam perniciem*).

Public ruin is precisely what erupts from fraternal discord in a Parthian episode sketched earlier, where Gotarzes' murder of his brother and his brother's family causes others who feel threatened to back a rival ruler. In the resulting strife, according to the report that reached Rome, Parthia's empire is tottering (11.8.2–4, esp.: *summa... imperii ambigua*).

Even in their fragmentary state, Tacitus' Claudian books suggest a contrast between Tiberius and Claudius in their response to unfounded evocations of civil war, the former translating a military alarm (*ut civili bello*) into a matter of personal morality, the latter giving to a matter of personal pique a military response (*tamquam opprimendo bello*). The Claudian books also prepare the way for the Neronian by foregrounding discord between Britannicus and Nero.

In the event, however, the brotherly rivalry warned against by Agrippina plays out in surprisingly muted tones: no state insecurity, no public ruin. When Claudius dies, for example, some of his soldiers, wondering whether they might have to choose between Nero and Britannicus, find no alternative to Nero on offer (12.69.1). Similarly, public reaction to Britannicus' murder seems to be acceptance of the inevitable: "discord between brothers was an ancient matter, and rule was not to be shared" (13.17.1: *antiquas fratrum discordias et insociabile regnum*; cf. 4.60.3: *solita fratribus odia*; "the customary enmity between brothers"). In fact, the brother versus brother pattern of civil war so dominant in Roman history heretofore seems to peter out at this point. It is perhaps no coincidence that Tacitus closes book 13 with the death of the *ficus Ruminalis*, the tree that 830 years earlier sheltered the infancy of Romulus and Remus (13.58). This, he says, was considered a prodigy until it revived with new shoots. But the new shoots of civil war in the remaining books of the *Annals* are distinctly unfraternal.

4. Nero

The first Neronian instance of civil war charges used to remove a rival backfires. In 55 CE, Junia Silana, who was angry at the younger Agrippina for interfering with a prospective marriage, gets two of her dependents to whisper to a freedman of Nero's aunt Domitia—also anti-Agrippina—that Agrippina was planning to marry Rubellius Plautus and to instigate him to revolt (13.19.3; *ad res novas*). Domitia's freedman transmits the accusations to the actor Paris, who passes them on late at night to a Nero far gone in wine. The praetorian prefect Afranius Burrus, however, persuades the panic-stricken emperor to investigate before killing anyone (13.20.3), and his mother makes a stirring and successful rebuttal to the charges against her, among other arguments challenging her accusers to produce evidence of her having suborned troops (13.21.4). Accordingly, instead of revenging herself, Silana ends up exiled (13.22.2). But the pattern set earlier is again visible: personal vendetta and whispers, empty charges, paranoid ruler; the only difference is that violence is averted here by recourse to reality.

The wisdom of investigating such charges is eventually forgotten. Rubellius Plautus remained a source of anxiety, as did Cornelius Sulla, who also had been

named in 55 CE in connection with a nonexistent conspiracy that identified him as a possible replacement for Nero (13.23). In his account of 62 CE, Tacitus gives a three-chapter episode on the preemptive executions of Plautus and Sulla, which are engineered by the new praetorian prefect Ofonius Tigellinus. Tacitus prefaces the panel with a statement of Tigellinus' strategy: "he was ferreting out Nero's fears" (14.57.1: *metus eius rimatur*).¹² Specifically, fears of men with famous names and proximity to powerful armies. Tigellinus' whispering goes on for most of a paragraph (14.57.1–3). As a piece of political analysis it is nonsense: Sulla and Plautus are off in Marseilles and Asia Minor, respectively (14.57.2, 14.23.2), hardly in contact with the armies of Germany or Syria, and Sulla is said to be a threat because he is poor and makes a show of *segnitia*, "indolence"; Plautus, because he is rich and openly arrogant. The weakness of the case against them highlights the injustice of their murders and the affront of Nero's announcement of the murders in the senate in order to receive *supplicationes*, "votes of thanksgiving." By eliminating them, Tacitus' Nero claims, he has demonstrated his concern for keeping the state whole (14.59.4: *sibi incolumitatem rei publicae magna cura haberi*). But has he?

Tacitus includes in the narrative here two allusions to the idea that the preemptive killing of eminent men on the grounds that they might start a civil war may be a self-fulfilling prophecy, even though it does not play out as such in the immediate situation. First, the rumor that Rubellius Plautus (who was in fact lying low, at Nero's request: 14.23.2) had joined forces with Corbulo, the commander of a large army in Syria, who would himself be at risk "if eminent and innocent men were being killed" (14.58.2: *clari atque insontes si interficerentur*). Second, and more direct: Plautus' father-in-law, Antistius Vetus, dispatched a freedman to Plautus with the news of the coming execution order and a lengthy exhortation to fight back: if Plautus can just overcome the sixty soldiers that Nero has sent to kill him, advises Vetus, he will gain time, and many things can happen, things "that might strengthen even into war" (14.58.4: *quae adusque bellum evalescerent*).¹³ Plautus, perhaps thinking of his family (14.59.1), does not resist, nor does Sulla, and no civil war ensues.

In insisting that he has the *incolumitas* of the *res publica* as a great concern (see above), Nero draws upon the familiar metaphor of Rome as a "body politic," a metaphor that brings with it a consciousness of the state's vulnerability.¹⁴ And the kinds of consequences that are hinted at or alluded to figuratively in the Plautus/Sulla episode will become increasingly real as the narrative proceeds.

The next victim of spurious civil war charges is Nero's wife, Octavia, who is eliminated later in 62, when Poppaea—like Tigellinus trying to secure her claim to Nero's affection by acting on his fears and stimulating his wrath¹⁵—connects her with *res novae*. On her knees in front of Nero, Poppaea insists that she is not there to argue about who is to be Nero's wife, but to plead for her life, threatened as it is by Octavia's supporters, who have shown themselves bolder than one might expect even if they

were engaged in a seditious war (14.61.2). Which is precisely, she continues, what they are preparing: "Those weapons were lifted against the emperor! Only a leader was lacking, easily found once things were in motion" (14.61.3: *arma illa adversus principem sumpta; ducem tantum defuisse, qui motis rebus facile reperiretur*). Nero promptly adopts Poppaea's *res novae* line in plotting Octavia's removal: he looks for an "associate" for her who can plausibly confess to aiming at "revolution" (14.62.1: *rerum... novarum*). And finds one: she seduced the fleet commander Anicetus, Nero says in an edict announcing her exile, "to aspire to an alliance for the fleet" (14.63.1: *in spem sociandae classis*). Octavia's death follows her exile in short order.

Book 14 ends a few chapters further on with an explicit assertion on Tacitus' part of the connection between an aristocrat's fear of Nero and an undertaking to overthrow him: an unsuccessful accusation against Seneca brings one Gaius Piso into uncomfortable prominence, "whence fear for Piso, and the origin of a plot against Nero, vast in size and unavailing (14.65.2: *unde Pisoni timor, et orta insidiarum in Neronem magna moles et improspere*). This is the first occasion in Tacitus' narrative on which the dangerous consequences of the threat of arbitrary execution become real—Tacitus insists on the historicity of the Pisonian conspiracy (15.73.2). The conspiracy itself was, as Tacitus says in introducing it, "unavailing"; investigation was thorough, retribution bloody, Tacitus' narrative full (15.48–74). But the now evident danger of real *res novae* did not prevent Nero's "friends" or indeed Nero himself from using false civil war charges for their own ends.

Annals 16, which contains a particularly graphic episode of violent resistance on the part of a victim of preemptive execution, brings us nearly to the end of the story. Charges of incipient civil war once again prepare the way: Nero bars one Gaius Cassius from attending Poppaea's funeral in 65 and soon connects one Lucius Silanus to the disgraced Cassius. There follows a speech to the senate accusing Cassius of having an *imago* of the tyrannicide Cassius among his ancestral busts, evidence of seditious intent: "seeds of civil war and defection from the house of the Caesars were obviously his aim!" (16.7.2: *quippe semina belli civilis et defectionem a domo Caesarum quaesitam*). As for Silanus, he boasts noble birth and a haughty character and is thus a suitable adjutant for *novae res*, says Nero (16.7.2). Exiled thereupon by their senatorial peers, Cassius awaits death on an island, but Silanus fights back. Literally. When a centurion arrives with the invitation to open his veins, Silanus says he won't deny his assassin the glory of his task and resists, bare hands against drawn blade, until he succumbs to frontal wounds, "as in battle" (16.9.2: *tamquam in pugna*).¹⁶ War was being forced upon him as it would eventually be forced upon the entire Roman world.¹⁷

The most famous victim of an unwarranted civil war charge is of course Thrasea Paetus, a victim of Cossutianus Capito, worthy son-in-law to Tigellinus. The real problem, as Tacitus' account makes abundantly clear, is that Thrasea has

opted out of his senatorial responsibilities. As Capito puts it in a stunningly clever, if hateful, conversation with Nero, "the report of state business is now read with unusual care...to know what Thrasea has not done" (16.22.3: *diurna populi Romani...curatius leguntur, ut noscatur, quid Thrasea non fecerit*). And this is tantamount to secession, to faction, and, indeed, if followers be found, to war (16.22.2: *secessionem id et partes et, si idem multi audeant, bellum esse*). Thrasea, says Capito, is Cato to Nero's Caesar in the talk of the town. The recent removal of a Cassius (see above) will have accomplished nothing, he argues, if Nero permits men emulous of Brutuses to flourish (16.22.5).¹⁸ Capito, like Poppaea and Tigellinus before him, knows how to play on the Tacitean Nero's fears. The order to die follows this little chat, and another man *clarus et insons*, "eminent and innocent," meets his end.

My last Tacitean example of civil war charges used preemptively to eliminate nonexistent threats is brief but supplies my title. Barea Soranus is joined to Thrasea Paetus in Tacitus' memorable formulation "Nero aspired to excise virtue itself with the murder of Thrasea Paetus and Barea Soranus" (16.21.1: *Nero virtutem ipsam excindere concupivit interfecit Thrasea Paeto et Barea Sorano*). Against Soranus, who was governor of Syria in 66, as against Paetus, civil war charges are advanced: friendship with Rubellius Plautus and "seeking to recruit his province for revolutionary hopes" (16.23.1: *ambitio conciliandae provinciae ad spes novas*). But Plautus was now four years dead, and "recruiting the province" is the accusers' negative spin on the judicious and energetic provincial administration sketched by Tacitus at 16.23.1.¹⁹ The guilty verdict was carefully timed, says Tacitus, to coincide with the arrival of Tiridates of Armenia for his coronation. For one of two reasons, both bad (16.23.2). Second reason first: perhaps Nero wanted to demonstrate a regal action (*regio facinore*) to his royal visitor. Or, first reason second, so that public attention to external affairs might overshadow this *intestinum scelus*, "inward crime."

In the surviving books of Tacitus' account of Nero's reign, then, which cover the years 54–66 CE, the execution mechanism functions increasingly smoothly. Not all executions are motivated by the threat of civil war, of course (Agrippina's execution, for example, which introduces book 14, is ascribed to Nero's impatience with her controlling hand), but those that are so motivated derive an ironic edge from the events of 69. The threat, however remote, of civil war was fearful, but (as Livy says in a not unrelated context) the treatment was as intolerable as the disease (*praef.* 9).

5. Conclusion

The question I cannot quite answer for myself is whether the *scelus* alluded to at 16.23.2 is the crime of *res novae* falsely imputed to Soranus or the crime of murder actually committed by the emperor. Parallels for both usages abound, since *scelus* is

everywhere in Tacitus (nearly two hundred times).²⁰ But *intestinum* is used by him only here, and it brings with it the notion of self-inflicted harm discussed earlier. Whichever meaning Tacitus intended—or perhaps he intended both²¹—*intestinum scelus* neatly captures the idea that a ruler who appropriates the community's harvest of civil war woe to eliminate his rivals does not really care about the wholeness of the *res publica* but rather is tearing at Rome's vitals again. The Romulus / Remus paradigm, our two-headed state, needs to give place to something grimmer. Erysichthon, perhaps, as pictured by Ovid: "tearing at his own limbs, he began to rip them apart with his teeth; the unhappy man by diminishing his body gave it nourishment" (*Met.* 8.877–78: *ipse suos artus lacerans divellere morsu / coepit, et infelix minuendo corpus alebat*).²² The consumption metaphor comes easily to mind for Nero, anyway. Indeed one might say that Tacitus' Nero performs a twisted improvisation on the role offered him by Seneca in the *de Clementia* when he substitutes "emperor" for "belly" in Menenius Agrippa's parable of the body politic and describes the emperor as "he who nourishes every part of the *res publica* as a part of himself" (*Clem.* 1.13.4: *is... qui... nullam non rei publicae partem tamquam sui nutrit*; cf. 1.3.5, 2.2.1).²³ The long year of civil war is just offstage.²⁴

NOTES

1. Galba was consul under Tiberius, governor of upper Germany under Gaius, governor of Africa under Claudius. For his policy of inaction, see Suet. *Galba* 7.1: *quietem*, "quietude"; 8.1: *secessu*, "retirement"; 9: *desidiam segnitiamque*, "sloth and indolence"; and Plut. *Galba* 6.4: τὴν συνήθη καὶ σύντροφον ἀπραγμοσύνην; "his customary and innate disengagement." Tacitus deemed it real indolence under a pretense of policy (*H.* 1.49.3).

2. In Plutarch's version this is less explicit: Nero is simply Galba's "enemy" (*Galba* 4.4: ἐχθροῦ).

3. For Agrippina's preemptive removal of threats see, e.g., *Ann.* 12.64–65 (Domitia Lepida), 12.67–68 (Claudius), 13.1.1 (Marcus Junius Silanus). For Seneca's advice on the merciful treatment of those who threaten an emperor's security see, e.g., *Clem.* 1.9–10. But see also section 5 below.

4. See Keitel 1984 for an important discussion of Tacitus' presentation of the principate as waging war on the *res publica*. Keitel focuses on outcomes, which are depicted in accordance with the *urbs capta* trope; I focus on causes.

5. See Gowing in this volume.

6. See Martin and Woodman 1989 ad loc.

7. Conversely, apropos of the charges of *res novae* brought against Vibius Senenus by his son (4.28.2–3), where Tiberius is not worried about the political situation but is hostile to the defendant owing to an unrelated incident, he let the charges stand (4.29.2–3).

8. See Gowing p. 256 in this volume for the credit given to (and claimed by) Tiberius for keeping the Roman world free of civil war, a virtue monumentalized in the Temple of Concord.

9. In addition to the passages discussed above, where civil war is explicitly evoked by *exempla* of past wars or by the term *bellum civile*, Tacitus also gives notice of revolutionary threats that are suppressed before they result in war: at 5.8.1, where Publius Vitellius is on trial for having used the military treasury to finance *res novae*; at 5.10.2, where a false Drusus is believed to be planning an approach to his father's (Germanicus') troops or an invasion of Italy; at 6.6.3, where Gallio is accused of sowing sedition and discord by his flattering attentions to the soldiers.

10. In the passages considered below, *res novae*, "revolution," always brings with it the threat of civil war, since part of the charge is always tampering with the loyalty of military units. The (false) charge of *res novae* advanced earlier against Libo Drusus (2.29.1: *defertur moliri res novas*; "he was denounced for attempting revolution"), by contrast, was supported only by "evidence" of his desire for well-nigh limitless wealth and by possible death threats against members of the imperial family and some senators (2.30.2).

11. There may have been another such incident in the lost books. At 13.43.2, where the victims of the *delator* Publius Suillius are listed on the occasion of Suillius' own trial in 58 CE, Tacitus mentions that "by the intensity of [Suillius'] accusation Quintus Pomponius was pushed toward the inevitability of civil war (*acerbitate accusationis Q. Pomponium ad necessitatem belli civilis detrusum*), the relevant "civil war" probably being the conspiracy of Annus Vinicianus in 42 CE, in which, according to Dio, Vinicianus too was motivated by fear for his own safety (60.15.2).

12. Others before him had exploited Nero's anxieties about these men (see on Sulla 13.47, on Plautus 14.23.2) but without raising the specter of civil strife.

13. Antistius Vetus was himself a future victim of Nero (*Ann.* 16.10–11).

14. The metaphor is used most memorably, perhaps, in the allegory that Livy puts in the mouth of Menenius Agrippa on the occasion of the plebeian secession of 494, where the body's (plebeian) limbs protest against the freeloading (senatorial) "belly" (2.32.8–12). Under the empire, this "body" was increasingly figured with vital organs (*viscera, intestina*) that proved particularly vulnerable to *self*-inflicted harm. Anchises' shade, for example, exhorts the (as yet unborn) Pompey and Caesar to refrain from "turning their powerful forces against their country's vitals" (*Virg. A.* 6.833: *neu patriae validas in viscera vertite vires*). The causes of such harm differ, but the metaphor persists: *intestina seditio* for the above-mentioned secession (*Liv.* 2.32.12), *intestina bella* for the civil wars of Catiline's youth (*Sal. Cat.* 5.2), *intestinum malum* for the practice of delation (*Plin. Pan.* 34), and so on. Applied to civil war, the conceit gains color from the conjunction of metaphorical and actual carnage; for Lucan's *viscera*, for example, see Fantham p. 207–8 in this volume. Tacitus uses this image in the opening scenes of the *Annals*: "the body of the *res publica* is single and requires rule by one man's mind (1.12.3: *unum esse rei publicae corpus atque unius animo regendum*). The words are attributed to a troublemaker, Asinius Gallio (cf. 1.12.3: *civilia agitaret*), deemed greedy for rule himself (1.13.2).

15. Cf. what Tacitus says about Poppaea's conversations with Nero: "words mixed to suit fear and anger simultaneously terrified her listener and incited him" (14.62.1: *varius sermo et ad metum atque iram adcommodatus terruit simul audientem et accendit*).

16. The violence of Lucius Silanus' death stands out the more vividly against the background of the suicide of his uncle Decimus Junius Silanus Torquatus, against whom Nero unleashed accusers in 64 CE. A lavish spender, they said, he had no future except in *res*

novae (15.35.2). Torquatus opened his veins without rejoinder, practical or verbal (15.35.3). In a rather obscure passage at 16.16 Tacitus seems to criticize such spineless deaths.

17. At 15.68–69, for example, Tacitus describes Nero's unprovoked attack on the consul Vestinus as a military campaign: "Nero's orders were to anticipate the consul's moves, to seize his citadel, so to speak, and to crush his band of picked men." The "citadel" in question is Vestinus' house in Rome; the "picked men," his household slaves.

18. Capito also mentions Marcus Favonius, a would-be Cato and die-hard Pompeian in the 40s BCE.

19. According to Dio, by contrast, Soranus was charged with magic, not rebellion (62.26.3 ὡς καὶ μαγεύματι τινι διὰ τῆς θυγατρὸς κεχρημένος). Dio also omits the connection between Tiridates' visit and the attack on Soranus.

20. *Scelus* is used of revolutionary coups at *Hist.* 1.5.1, 1.23.1, 1.42 and at *Ann.* 14.10.3, etc., and is used of emperor-ordered murder at *Ann.* 14.1.1, 15.35.1, 15.61.4, etc.

21. On the possibility of *scelus* having more than one referent, cf. *Ann.* 11.34.1, where Vitellius (father of the future emperor) keeps saying *o facinus, o scelus*, but his hearers cannot tell whether he is blaming Messalina (for marrying Silius) or Narcissus (for killing Messalina).

22. Credit for this apt paradigm goes to R. J. Tarrant. The title of the conference from which this volume arose—"See How I Rip Myself"—came from Dante's picture of the pocket of hell reserved for "sowers of scandal and schism": *Or vedi com' io mi dilacco!* (*Inf.* 28.30).

23. Dio in fact labels Seneca a "tyrant trainer" (61.10.2: τυραννοδιδάσκαλος).

24. The famous description of 69 as "that long and single year under Galba and Otho and Vitellius" (*Tac. Dial.* 17.2: *illum Galbae et Othonis et Vitellii longum et unum annum*) comes from Marcus Aper's discussion of Rome's "ancient orators," which opens with a reference to Menenius Agrippa (*Dial.* 17.1).