

WHILE ROME BURNED:
FIRE, LEADERSHIP, AND URBAN DISASTER
IN THE ROMAN CULTURAL IMAGINATION

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James Ker

Images of urban conflagration had a powerful hold on the ancient Roman literary imagination. This phenomenon represents a unique confluence between literary tradition and urban reality: Greco-Roman literature offers a wide array of poetic, philosophical and historiographic reflections of cities destroyed by fire, yet daily life in ancient Rome was haunted by the very real fear of conflagration. The major investigative goal of this project is the exploration of the ways in which Romans authors used powerful images of fiery destruction, often drawn from the broader literary tradition, to address contemporary moments of political crisis in the early imperial period. In three chapters, I follow the intersection of urban fires and claims to power, as expressed both in urban space and in the literary city of Rome, during three critical periods from early imperial history: Augustan, Neronian, and post-Neronian Rome. In each period, a distinct set of fire-related problems arose for the current leader: in the aftermath of disaster, each leader in different ways, attempted to configure himself as protector of and provider for the urban population, with varying outcomes. Augustus faced the task of renewing Rome after the defining rupture of the triumviral conflicts and the fall of the republic; Nero came to power after generations of jeopardized successions and often-violent transitions had produced significant civic anxiety and suspicion of new leadership, a precarious dynamic

even before the unprecedented destruction of 64 CE; and Vespasian, founder of the v
Flavian dynasty, came to power in 69 CE, after Rome had been ravaged by the violent
(and incendiary) Year of Four Emperors. Each ruler, in his own way, worked to equate
his restoration of Rome after disaster, which included efforts to prevent future fires, with
his larger claims to political control and even mastery of the cosmos. Likewise, authors
working in an increasingly repressive environment found in images of urban destruction a
productive set of metaphors and figures for addressing the fears and tensions attached to
contemporary ideology.

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Let every house be placed, if the person pleases, in the middle of its platt, as to the breadth way of it so that there may be ground on each side for gardens, orchards or fields, that it may be a greene country towne which will never be burnt, and always be whol'some.

- William Penn: instructions to the founders of Philadelphia (September 30, 1681)
(after John Edgar Wideman: *Philadelphia Fire*, 1990)

INTRODUCTION

Nero fiddled while Rome burned. The tenacity of this image as a cultural touchstone – regardless of its tenuous grounding in history – lies in the enduring appeal of its evocative nexus of urban disaster, failed leadership, and creative expression. From the myth of Prometheus to the legend of Empedocles, the element of fire was an archetypal image of both creative and destructive power, holding a prominent, if ambivalent place in the cultural imagination of Greco-Roman antiquity. This dissertation investigates the broader tradition that gives meaning to such images. The image of Nero, suggestive as it is, forms only a touchstone for a more extensive exploration of the way in which Romans used powerful images and literary tropes to express deep anxieties about leadership and about Rome’s political future in the early imperial era. The major investigative goal of this project is the exploration of the ways in which Roman authors used powerful images of fiery destruction, often drawn from a the broader literary tradition, to address contemporary moments of political crisis.

In this dissertation’s three chapters, I follow the intersection of urban fires and claims to power, as expressed both in urban space and in the literary city of Rome, during three critical periods from early imperial history: Augustan, Neronian, and post-Neronian Rome. Each historical moment presented a distinct set of problems for its current leader: in the aftermath of disaster, each leader in different ways, and with varying degrees of success, configured himself as protector of and provider for the urban population. Augustus faced the task of renewing Rome after the defining rupture of the triumviral conflicts and the fall of the republic; Nero came to power after generations of jeopardized

successions and often-violent transitions had produced significant civic anxiety and 2
suspicion of new leadership, a precarious dynamic even before the unprecedented
destruction of 64 CE; and Vespasian, founder of the Flavian dynasty, came to power in
69 CE, after Rome had been ravaged by the violent (and incendiary) Year of Four
Emperors. Each ruler, in his own way, worked to equate his restoration of Rome after
disaster, which included efforts to prevent future fires, with his larger claims to political
control and even mastery of the cosmos. Likewise, authors working in an increasingly
repressive political environment found in images of urban destruction a productive set of
metaphors and figures for addressing moments of political crisis.

Fire as an artistic image is obviously extremely common and extraordinarily
multivalent in its associations. In early 20th century, the symbolism and poetics of fire
invited extended study from Gaston Bachelard a founding figure in the modern study of
poetics and epistemology, while in the later 20th century George Lakoff made fire (along
with women) the central illustration of his influential thesis that human consciousness, as
well as our everyday experiences, are powerfully shaped by the central metaphors used to
explain complex phenomena.¹ In the field Latin literary studies, readings of fire imagery
in, e.g. New Comedy, or the pairing of fire and water imagery in love elegy alone have
formed productive avenues of inquiry for distinguished scholars.² Likewise, the classic
study by Bernard Knox on recurrent imagery in *Aeneid* Book 2, “The Serpent and the
Flame,” has been so profoundly influential that it can be hard for 21st century students

¹ Bachelard (1938) and (1988); Lakoff (1987).

² For an overview of fire in New Comedy and Roman elegy see Fantham (1972) 86ff.; for fire and water in Ovid, see Henderson (1979) 55.

and scholars to imagine a point at which its insights did not seem obvious.³ In some 3 cases it may not be possible, or even desirable, to separate these categories out from each other entirely.⁴ My work obviously can encompass only a limited and specific grouping of this vast network of images. I focus primarily on those which have clear political and civic ramifications during the formation and “long” first century of the Roman principate.

Devastation by fire was a frequent occurrence in ancient cities: the greater the city, the greater the threat.⁵ In the evidence I present, the terror of urban fire looms large not only as a constant accidental hazard, but also “weaponized:” real or alleged, arson was primarily understood as a political act. Nero’s storied performance during Rome’s conflagration is rendered all the more piquant by the details – that Nero sang of the destruction of Troy, while he watched the fire’s progress from the panoptic vantage point of a tower on the imperial properties: well out of harm’s way, but with (as it were) ringside seats for the spectacle unfolding before him. These details do not bear much examination as historical fact, but the concerns and values they evoke – of the failure of leadership to respond appropriately to an emergent situation, of Nero’s retreat into artistic fantasy during his city’s hour of need, of his implied aestheticization of the catastrophic, and of the pervasive Roman tendency to reach for parallels out of myth and legend to shape their current reality, nevertheless offer a powerful window into the fears and fantasies that occupied the Roman imagination.

³ Knox, B. (1950) “The Serpent and the Flame: the Imagery of the Second Book of the *Aeneid*,” *AJP* 71. Gaisser, J. H. (1993): *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* (04.05.20) of A.J. Boyle (ed.), *Roman Epic*. London and New York: Routledge, (1993).

⁴ As I argue in as in the case of Vergil’s *Dido*, whose proliferation of fire-related imagery at first appears drawn from the stock vocabulary of drama and elegy relating to lovelorn women, but is revealed to have profound political and historical consequences. See Chapter 1: 67-72.

⁵ So Rankov (2000) 357.

Even today these anxieties remain potent, and the condemnation of Nero 4 implied in the tale of his performance can be, and often is, extended to modern leaders – a legion of cartoons is readily available on the internet depicting each of the two most recent United States presidents in Nero-esque attitudes: toga-clad, bedecked in leafy chaplets, and brandishing stringed instruments. The figures are surrounded by, for example, the wreckage New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina (in the case of images featuring George W. Bush) or the violence of the Libyan revolution (in the case of Barack Obama). Endless variations include the immolation of various landmarks around Washington, D.C., the original manuscript of the United States Constitution, and maps and flags representing various political “hot spots” around the globe. Likewise, in Rome itself the memory of the Great Fire appears closely linked to the popular conception of Rome’s history, and seems to inform and inspire a number of 21st-century public art projects that have garnered a great deal of media attention. The focus of this dissertation is on Latin literature of the first centuries BCE and CE, but many of the points of inspiration in this literature remain profoundly influential.

Chapter Outline and Parameters of Research.

An essential of daily existence (even more so in ancient cultures) and the basis for many of ancient society’s most significant technological developments, fire nevertheless constantly threatens to leap beyond the bounds of the structures we create around it. Moreover, fire is easily weaponized: for those wishing to wreak destruction upon their enemies on a grand scale in an environment lacking modern safety precautions and firefighting services, fire was and is a reliable resource. To a greater degree than any of

the other classic elements (earth, water, air) and the catastrophes associated with them⁵ (earthquake, flood, storm), fire suggests a disquieting blurring between human and divine agency. This slippage creates a certain anxiety, and generates a productive tension between the notions of creation and destruction. For inhabitants of Rome, destruction by fire was much more than an evocative image or a philosophical abstraction: it was a lived reality. The cultural phenomenon I am exploring evolved out of Rome's uniquely charged nexus of urban transformation, contested ideology, collective memory, and literary production.⁶ Yet it gained its power from a very real, constant, and visceral fear.

A great deal of the historical and cultural background for my study is provided in Stephen Johnstone's brief but informative article "On the Uses of Arson in Classical Rome." As Johnstone argues, accusations of arson (or the intent thereof) do not stand alone, but are embedded in a larger system of invective that mirrors, on a material level, the socio-political devastation that the privileged holders of power claimed a change in political structure would bring about.⁷ Repeatedly, as Johnstone shows, fires were ascribed to political motives, while political disputes, in turn, all but inevitably provoked

⁶ Assmann usefully defines cultural memory as the "outer dimension" of human memory (1992: 19), embracing two different concepts: "memory culture" (*Erinnerungskultur*) and "reference to the past" (*Vergangenheitsbezug*). Cultural memory is an important aspect of this study, in that my narrative is grounded in the physical space of Rome. It is therefore predicated on a number of collective understandings, or constructions, of the distant past, as they are held by people in that given social and historical context (see Assmann 1988a; 1988b; 1992). This form of commemoration manifests itself in various forms, and can involve written texts and performances representing events from the past; rituals and ceremonies at special occasions such as commemoration days; and special places such as ancient monuments, which function as time markers and sites of memory (cf. Connerton 1989; Nora 1989, 1992; Bell 1992).

⁷ Johnstone (1992) 41. On the problems of urban fires more generally, see Canter (1932); Ramage (1983); Rubin (2004); Sablayrolles (1996) includes a useful final appendix presenting a descriptive list of eighty-eight major conflagrations in the city of Rome. Eighty-four of them are recorded between 275 BCE and 410 CE, a number that surely belies a far greater incidence of unrecorded blazes of smaller scale or significance.

charges of intent to commit arson.⁸ As he further recognizes, the charge drew its 6
strength from the assimilation between the state and its architectural expression: the city
itself.

Furthermore, as dynasts invested more in the rhetoric of cosmic control of the
elements from the early 1st century BC into the Augustan period, city improvements such
as aqueducts and efficient urban planning seem to have fallen by the wayside, which both
exacerbated the problem of fire and suggested the importance of such semidivine self-
figurations in the late republic and early principate. Crassus, in the later decades of the
republican period, seems to have realized the potential of exploiting the situation with his
notorious private brigades, which he only deployed after desperate sellers had deeded
their property to him at a fraction of its value. As the discussion of this practice in
Plutarch makes clear, this strategy was instrumental in the future triumvir's consolidation
of power at Rome in the mid-first century BCE.⁹ In my first chapter, I examine the
ways this feeds into Augustan expressions of concern over urban fires at Rome, which
included the institution of state fire brigades, the conversion of local cults of *Stata Mater*,
a goddess with fire-repelling properties, into that of *Stata Mater Augusta*, and the
relocation of the cult of *Vesta* to within the imperial *domus*.

⁸ Johnstone (1992) 42.

⁹ Plut. *Crass.* 2.3-5 (tr. Bernadotte Perrin, LCL 1916): "The greatest part of [his wealth], if one must tell the scandalous truth, he got together out of fire and war, making the public calamities his greatest source of revenue...observing how natural and familiar at Rome were such fatalities as the conflagration and collapse of buildings, owing to their being too massive and close together, he proceeded to buy slaves who were architects and builders. Then, when he had over five hundred of these, he would buy houses that were afire, and houses which adjoined those that were afire, and these their owners would let go at a trifling price owing to their fear and uncertainty. In this way the largest part of Rome came into his possession." See also Favro (1992) 68; Canter (1932) 278 n. 2; Newbold (1974) 862.

As Rome attained symbolic status as the center of the Roman *imperium*, and 7
by extension of the cosmos,¹⁰ threats to its physical fabric took on the character of threats
to the stability of the Empire as a whole, and even of elemental cosmic disturbance.
Equally, Latin literature of the early imperial period shifted to accommodate a new focus
on the unique role of the *princeps* in bringing order to city and society. Fire at Rome, as
much an expression of human error and inevitable destruction as it was a weapon of
uncontrolled political opposition, became a trope with second-order signification, which
early imperial authors used to express anxieties about the role of one-man leadership in a
society still recovering from the civil strife wrought by a series of determined individuals
with competing claims to power. This very phenomenon resulted in a shift in the value of
a range of metaphorical and literary associations of fire: they took on a fresh ideological
charge, which authors across genres seem to have exploited in order to comment on the
nature of imperial rule.

My specific focus here is on the representation of fire as an urban disaster in the
Roman cultural imagination. In this process, I look at Rome's own history of conflict,
conflagration, and recovery, while the "unmaking" of Rome is considered from a specific
literary perspective concerned with the way Roman authors could use literary allusion as
an ideological weapon. Invective in the late republic had established arson as a prominent
topos, and blame for fires (or at least insufficient effort in preventing or combatting them)
seems to have formed a powerful indictment of "bad" or inadequate emperors: most
notably Nero, but similar accusations seem to have been leveled at Tiberius in the
aftermath of the Caelian fire of 27 CE, while Titus is reported to have uttered only a

¹⁰ Most influentially argued by Hardie (2006); see now also, e.g. Hine (2006) on the implications
in Seneca and Rehak (2006) on a related reading of Augustan topography and monuments.

single word in response to the news of the devastating fire of 80: “I am ruined.”¹¹ At 8 the same time, the developing sense of the emperor’s absolute authority made conflagration an inviting metaphor for a ruler’s capacity to transform or destroy a society. This dynamic enlivened and complicated old literary, mythological, and philosophical *topoi* like the fall of Troy, Stoic *ekpyrosis*, and the story of Phaethon, the unworthy son whose inept attempt to take control of his father’s solar chariot leads to a fiery catastrophe that endangers the whole world. The recurring themes of this project are discussed in detail later in my introduction, but first I shall provide an account of the dissertation’s structure.

My project, like recent works on arena spectacle, death ritual, dining and banquets, or memory and erasure, explores the potential of following a single idea diachronically through a sequence of authors, emperors, and events at Rome.¹² In each of my three chapters, I present historical and topographical overviews of significant fires at Rome and imperial responses to them, creating a framework for explorations of selected literary texts. My first chapter traces the development of the cultural discourse figuring fire and leaders as forces in constantly shifting states of affinity and opposition in the Augustan period. As I argue, Augustus’ spectacular investment in Rome’s built environment, no less than his awareness of the ideological metaphor at play in the gesture of stamping out fires (by now deeply associated with the political upheaval of the late

¹¹ Suet. *Titus* 8.4. Flavian-era propaganda had already done much to fashion the 64 fire as a condemnation of Nero’s character, so this fire cannot have looked good for Titus.

¹² On spectacle see e.g. Futrell (1997); Kyle (1998); Bergmann and Kondoleon (1999); Bomgardner (2000); on death, Edwards (2007); Erasmo (2008); on dining, Donahue (2004); Stein-Hölkeskamp (2005); Vössing (2004); on memory, Varner (2004); Flower (2006); and the “*Memoria Romana: Memory in Roman Civilization*” project (2009-13).

republic) led to the institution of Rome's first publicly financed fire brigade (the cohorts of the *vigiles*) in 6 CE. 9

Authors with a vested interest in commenting on leadership seem to have taken note of the Augustan rhetoric around conflagration, frequently playing up the role of charismatic leaders in suppressing fires, as well as in instigating them. The simile at *Georgics* 1.466-514, for example, likens the turmoil of civil war to an out-of-control chariot, evoking the myth of Phaethon, and a destruction of universal proportions as the near-inevitable outcome of the race for hegemony. The *Aeneid's* pervasive motifs of urban conflagration, in turn, emphasize both the need for effective leadership and the ultimate limitations of human power. With fire and the civil unrest it metonymically suggests already established as a central theme in Vergil's work, Ovid and Manilius further develop the theme in their poetry in ways that reflect the changing political and aesthetic values of the later period of Augustus' rule.

After establishing a range of different capacities in which fire appears to function as a metaphor for political power in Chapter 1, my second chapter suggests some of the ways that allusions to Rome's foundational period under Augustus, as well as to classic literary narratives of conflagration, operate to form responses to and comments on the situation under the later Julio-Claudians, especially Nero. I argue that the 64 fire, though of exceptional scale, gained amplified significance from the Romans' already pronounced cultural tendency to interpret fiery destructions as the ultimate expression of inadequate leadership. Close readings of Lucan, Seneca, and Petronius reveal the ways in which the 64 fire could be read as confirmation of, and further provocation to, the already-prevalent rhetorical strains linking urban disaster and flawed leadership. Lucan's epic poem on the

war between Caesar and Pompey, the *Bellum Civile*, is shot through with fire 10
imagery, much of it designed to portray Lucan's anti-hero, the relentless conqueror
Caesar, as an almost cosmic force of destruction. Since Lucan's *de Incendio Urbis* is lost,
Seneca's Letter 91, ostensibly dealing with a fire in Lugdunum (modern Lyon) which
most probably occurred scarcely a month after Rome's conflagration, may form our
earliest surviving response to the Great Fire. My readings reveal that Seneca, who
generally avoids Nero and Rome in his letters, strongly implicates both in Letter 91 with
multiple allusions to Nero's city-building model, Augustus, to Rome's position in the
world, and to the inevitable fall of all great cities. Thus, Augustan rhetoric of fire control
may have done as much as post-Neronian condemnation of the last Julio-Claudian's
memory to contribute to the literary construction of the fire, effectively "framing" Nero
as the responsible party.

In the third chapter, I concentrate on post-Neronian alterations to the discourse on
leadership and fire. The Colosseum and rebuilt Capitolium have long been read as
expressions of Flavian redemption of Neronian chaos. I offer the relatively under-studied
Domitianic monuments known as the *Arae Incendii Neroniani* as a pointed manipulation
of Nero's memory in the realm of ritual and religion, which gained power from the
wealth of fire-related rhetoric which had preceded it, as well as from Rome's powerful
history of religious responses designed to avert and address the catastrophic. Though later
propaganda undeniably did much to frame Nero as a ruinous ruler, emphasis on the
Flavian assassination of Nero's character can obscure the important point that Romans
were perhaps essentially programmed to read the disaster as a condemnation of his rule.
A striking example of this dynamic occurs in the anti-Neronian drama *Octavia*, in which

I read the pervasive metaphorical use of fire imagery as a newly charged response to 11
a long literary tradition linking leaders proleptically and metonymically with the
destruction of their cities. In this respect, *Octavia* both looks back to literary precedents
from the Augustan era, even as it prefigures the way in which Tacitus' historical account
of Nero and the fire subtly characterizes Nero with incendiary language and imagery
even before 64. These readings clarify and expand the debate surrounding Nero and his
legacy, offering a greater sense of what was at stake for subsequent rulers in their
vituperation of Nero's memory.

Within this overall structure, there is some variation in the amount of historical
detail that I offer, and this is largely a product of the very different quantities and
qualities of information available for each of the three eras I discuss. I acknowledge that
basing a historical narrative on later authors who may themselves be responding to
literary traditions has a number of pitfalls. Extreme caution in accepting the causes
assigned and interpretations offered by the historical sources for a specific incident is
always necessary, but reviewing the bare bones of the events addressed by our sources
can nevertheless help us imagine the constellation of specific events and associated
political gestures that may have attracted attention from authors of different eras.

Augustus was arguably the most influential figure in all of Roman history. A
comparative wealth of sources dealing with his rise to power and decades-long reign
makes possible a fairly "thick" style of description. Later accounts such as those of
Suetonius and Dio can be read against Augustus' own account of his reign, the *Res
Gestae*. His influence on visual media, and especially on the city of Rome has been
extensively researched in the decades since the publication of Paul Zanker's seminal

study *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*. Likewise, the “instant classic” 12 status of the era’s most influential authors has ensured their survival up to the present day, as well as provoking a vast body of scholarship detailing every knowable aspect of their production, state of completion, and contemporary reception. Thus, the work of (e.g.) Horace, Vergil, Ovid, and Livy can be read with a high level of specificity concerning their possible allusions to Augustan Rome, or their reflections of contemporary circumstances. The overarching scholarly problem in dealing with these sources is the extent to which imperial control did or did not already stifle debate and criticism in various forms. Our historical authors were certainly dealing with a wider array sources (and thus, of opinions), but may still have been working under the influence of the overwhelming campaign of positive representations promoted by Augustus and his supporters.

Thus, although literary authors are often seen as the main shapers of these characterizations, which blur the line between literary and historical memory, this view under-weights the creative agency of Roman leaders themselves. Charismatic rulers had always been comfortable with a high level of fictionality in the public presentation of their exploits; the performative nature of leadership at Rome imbued the emperor’s every gesture with mythic significance. This ambiguity also works other way around: a live question is the extent to which representations of myth produced in the early decades of the principate, most of which had at least some precedent in the pre-Augustan era, can now be read as positive or negative figurations of the *princeps*, or of the new system of government more generally.

Authors writing in later periods about Augustus' reign may also, for their own 13 reasons, choose to suppress or downplay negative characterizations of Rome's first emperor, perhaps to construct him as a foil for their negative characterizations of subsequent rulers. In dealing with accounts of the Neronian era, we have the opposite problem: the emperors subsequent to Nero, especially the Flavians, were so energetic in their vituperation of his memory that it becomes notoriously difficult to separate appalling fact from slanderous fiction, never more than in the question of his supposedly deliberate torching of the city in 64 CE. This issue is further complicated by Nero's own apparently quite real penchant for mythopoetic self-fashioning, which pushed beyond the boundaries pioneered by Augustus. His quest for the paradoxical and the novel may even have led him to exhibit threatening behaviors and to assume personae deliberately modeled on specific texts, a point to which we shall return in our discussion of the narrative of the 64 fire. Finally, our ability to reconstruct any confident image of Neronian Rome is hampered by fact of the fire itself, which reduced the greater part of Rome to a thick layer of ash still clearly visible in much of its archaeological stratigraphy. The Rome that emerged under the Flavians was all, in some sense, a monument to Nero and the catastrophe of 64.

Post-Neronian literature is haunted by Rome's first dynasty, reshaping the memory of Nero and the Julian clan, and reinterpreting its literary monuments for a new age. In this chapter, I dispense with a lengthy accounting of the fires and disasters from the Flavians through the Hadrianic era. This is mainly due to the focus in this chapter, which is on the Neronian literary and cultural legacy rather than on the post-Neronian literary renaissance. It is also true, however, that our information concerning events at

Rome becomes markedly less rich at the end of the first century.¹³ While much 14
Flavian literature is demonstrably concerned with reworking the Augustan poetic legacy
in ways that allude to Nero and the civil conflict following his death in 68 CE, I confine
myself to texts that specifically mention Nero and the fire. Likewise, while there may
well be scope for reading Tacitus and Suetonius' comments on, say, Nero's grandiose
architectural mania against the contemporary leaders under whom they worked, a
comprehensive accounting of the political climate of the late first and early second
centuries CE is at present beyond the scope of this study.

Recurring Motifs: A Thematic Tour.

Events such as the 64 conflagration evoke the profound unease produced by the sensation
of "traversing the fantasy."¹⁴ That is, the imagined catastrophe which structures our daily
reality, infusing mundane experience with a sense of urgency, instantly becomes, as the
event transpires, a fully realized scenario – one which, perversely, again retreats into
fantasy as it is assimilated into memory. The memory echoes and is shaped by the very
fantasy that had once dominated our collective imagination well before the catastrophic
real-life occurrence. As Slavoj Žižek argues in the case of the footage filmed of the
September 11, 2001 attacks: for imaginations already shaped by Hollywood spectacles of

¹³ Tacitus and Suetonius, who provide much of the material used for the Julio-Claudians on
through to the end of the Flavian era, did not chronicle period of the adoptive emperors under
whom they wrote. The younger Pliny's letters do offer a good deal of valuable commentary on
contemporary events, but do not constitute a continuous narrative. The history of Cassius Dio on
these years is epitomated.

¹⁴ *La traversée du fantasme*: Lacan introduced this phrase in the fourth section of his *Seminar VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (1959-60). I use the phrase here without its entire associated
Lacanian narrative on the relationship between traversing the fantasy and avowing subjective
responsibility, but rather in the broader sense of realizing a narrative previously imagined only in
fantasy form; after Žižek (1992) and (2002).

disaster, “the landscape and the shots of the falling towers could not but be 15
reminiscent of the most breathtaking scenes in big catastrophe productions.”¹⁵ Likewise,
this project traces the shift from literary representation and to lived reality, and *vice*
versa. In so doing, I explore several related fantasies of destruction and myths of
regeneration that seem to have occupied a great deal of space in the Roman imagination.

As is to be expected in a project dealing with literary allusion and cultural
memory, a number of thematic elements recur in the works I examine here. These themes
form leitmotifs that move in and out of sequence with each other, sometimes combining
in surprising ways, throughout my sequence of texts. A major outcome of my research as
I present it is a demonstration of the ways in which the poetics of catastrophe play a part
in historiographic accounts of disaster: for example, the proleptically incendiary
characterizations of figures like Vergil’s Dido and Ovid’s Phaethon form precedents for
the portrait of Nero handed down in our literary sources. Likewise, treating each text as a
unified whole makes it abundantly clear that much of their power comes not from the
specific reference to any one theme, but from a collocation of several such items. This
benefit, though substantial, can at times obscure the rich profile of characteristics and
historical associations that each of these motifs develops over time.

These motifs, although not necessarily sharing an easily categorized or
standardized vocabulary, nevertheless fall under a few recognizable headings. Many of
them became ubiquitous in Roman narratives of civil war from the late republic through
the early empire, underscoring the connection in the Roman imagination between urban
conflagration and political conflict. To provide some of this background, I provide here a

¹⁵ Žižek (2002) 19.

brief sketch of some of the most important of the thematic components that recur in 16
each chapter. Such elements array themselves in shifting configurations, and cannot
always be separated into a strict continuum, but the broad spectrum below nevertheless
sets out of the more salient features.

a: The *Urbs Capta* and the Fall of Troy.

One important figuration is the motif of the *urbs capta*, or captured city. The trope was well-known enough to be explicitly catalogued by Quintilian. G.M. Paul, citing Quintilian, usefully lists the standard elements, which include the wholesale slaughter of men; the destruction of city by fire; the carrying-off of women and children; the plunder of temples; the murder of children; the separation of child from parent; rape; and the sounds of wailing and lamentation. The trope is widely exploited by poets and historians alike, sometimes even with comic effect.¹⁶ Vergil describes the confusion in the city after Dido's suicide with elements of the motif, in a passage discussed in detail in Chapter 1.¹⁷ As Paul further points out: "its influence may be suspected even where there is no explicit mention of a captured city, as for example in Lucan 1.466 ff...where the atmosphere in Rome before Caesar's arrival is described."¹⁸ Scenes of horror at actual

¹⁶ As Paul (1982: 151-2) points out, we see the trope at work in Plautus' use of the capture of Troy as a comic metaphor (*Bacch.* 925 ff.) or Propertius' description of a romantic quarrel (4.8.55-56: *fulminat illa oculis et quantum femina saevit, / spectaclum capta nec minus urbe fuit*).

¹⁷ See below, 31-2.

¹⁸ Paul (1982) 154. Paul (*ibid.*) especially notes the profusion of images at *BC* 1.486 ff., as well as in a corresponding passage of Petronius (*Petronius Sat.* 123) describing the onset of civil war. Nor were representations of the captures of cities confined to literature: as Paul (*ibid.*) points out, they also appeared in triumphal processions and on triumphal arches and columns, making the destructions wrought abroad in Rome's name vividly real at the capital itself. Claudius (e.g.) staged the storming and plunder of a city in a show on the Campus Martius (*Suet. Claud.* 21.6). See also Ziolkowski (1993) and Purcell (1995) on the very real benefits Rome accrued from its own prodigious sacking capabilities. As Purcell (1995:137) concludes, "the thaumatology of

captures of cities, as narrated by historians, include many of the same hallmarks.¹⁹

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Nor were representations of the captures of cities confined to literature: they also appeared in triumphal processions and on triumphal arches and columns, making the destructions wrought abroad in Rome's name vividly real at the capital itself.²⁰

During the collapse of the republic, figurations of political entities vying for control of Rome as besiegers of their own cities became ubiquitous, and these representations then worked their way into subsequent depictions of civil conflict.²¹ More generally, the narrative of Troy's capture, thought to be the ultimate source of the popularity of the *urbs capta* motif, found newly charged significance as an analogue for Rome's own catastrophic shift from republic to principate. The memory of Troy's fall was deeply imprinted on the collective imagination of the ancient world, crossing temporal, cultural, and geographical boundaries alike. As Brigitte Libby sums up, its "interpretive flexibility made it an ideal tool for introducing and exploring complexities in the cultural narratives of Rome, which traced its origin to Troy."²² The sack of Troy could therefore be characterized, Libby continues, either as the "first step in the teleological advance of Roman Empire or as the first phase in a cycle of destruction that

siege war-fare is parasitical on the rhetoric of praising cities." See (e.g.) Ash (1999) 65-8 and Joseph (2012) 98-106, 113-144 on the literary use of this motif in Tacitus' *Histories*.

¹⁹ On this point: as Paul argues, "it will perhaps be enough to mention Appian's report of Scipio's storming of Byrsa (*Pun.* 128.610 ff.), Dio's of Boudicca's sack of two cities in Britain (62.7), or Josephus' of Titus' capture of Jerusalem (*BJ* 6.8.5.400 ff.)."

²⁰ Claudius (e.g.) staged the storming and plunder of a city in a show on the Campus Martius (Suet. *Claud.* 21.6). See also (e.g.) Woodman (1998) 142-55; Rossi (2002).

²¹ For examinations of the motif specifically in civil war contexts, see Roche (2009) *ad Luc. BC* 1.486-504; Pollmann (2004) *ad Stat. Theb.* 12.107; Baines (2003) on Juvenal; Keitel (1984) and Damon (2010b) will be discussed in more detail at the end of the chapter in connection between Nero's reign and the *urbs capta* narrative.

²² Libby (2011) iv.

claimed Rome's mother-city and threatened Rome as well."²³ Like his adoptive 18
father, Julius Caesar, Octavian (later Augustus), the ultimate survivor of the first century
BCE's contest for sole control of the Roman world, took pains to portray himself as a
descendant of Trojan Aeneas.

The design of Augustus' monumental Forum emphasized that the origin of both
Rome and its leading citizen lay in Troy, the sacked city from which Aeneas escaped.²⁴
Yet reading the story of Rome's rise out of Troy's fall as a parallel to the rise of
Augustus' new golden age, which emerged out of the ruins of the civil wars, held its own
set of risks, some of them directly implicating the "Trojan" Augustus himself. As
Octavian and Antony waged the last of the civil wars that marked the end of the Roman
republic, authors consistently connected Rome's recurring need to start over after civil
war with the city's original rebirth after the sack of Troy, but could vary greatly in the
ethical and poetic values they invested in this figuration, and could in fact shift in their
treatment of the episode over time.²⁵

b: Phaethon, Ekpyrosis, and the Roman Saeculum.

²³ Libby (2011) iv.

²⁴ Cf. Zanker (1988) 193-5, who cites descriptions of Augustus' forum such as Ovid's (*Fast.* 5.545-78); Pliny's (*HN* 22.13); and Suetonius' (*Aug.* 19.1-2, 31.5). As Weinstock (1971, plate 6.10-12) shows, Julian coinage as early as the 40's BCE highlights the link through Venus to Troy: coins bearing a bust of Venus on the obverse feature an image of Aeneas carrying Anchises out of Troy on the reverse. Erskine (2001: 17-23) offers a survey of evidence for the Julian emphasis on their family's link to Troy.

²⁵ On Vergil, especially *Aeneid* 2's role as an analogue for the fall of Troy: see Moles (1982), Morgan (2000), Hinds (1998) 8-10 and Narducci (1973). On Priam as a Pompey figure: Ahl (1989); Austin (1964) 164; Dyson (2001) 88-9; Horsfall (2008) 384-5; O'Hara (2007) 86. Quint (1993: ch. 1) argues, e.g., for the Vergil's struggle with the *Aeneid* to break through a circular narrative that endlessly reprises Troy, and instead to build a teleological structure befitting an epic poem. Kraus' (1994) work on Livy shows, however, that this need to escape repetition of the past is not unique to epic form. Cf. Libby (2011) 139-40.

According to the hypothesis of Euripides' *Phaethon*, Clymene tells her son after he 19 has grown up and is about to be married that he is not the son of her husband Merops, but of Helios.²⁶ Euripides' protagonist borrows Helios' chariot to allay his own doubts about his true identity ("whether or not my father begot me," he says, in fragment 52), with disastrous results. The horses will not obey him, and the flaming solar chariot careens across the earth, causing great destruction. In Plato's *Timaeus* (22b-c), we hear a different version: Critias retails an explanation of the myth, which an Egyptian priest once offered Solon. According to Critias, Solon brought up the subject of Deucalion's flood, and the priest cut him off to explain that the tales of Phaethon's fall and the flood-known in Egypt as well as in Greece - actually encode real historical catastrophes caused by "a shifting of the bodies in the heavens which move around the earth." Only the Nile's unique environment sustained life, and thus accurate memory of events, during these catastrophes.

In privileging an explanation grounded in inevitable, if frightening, natural phenomena, Plato's Critias obscures the ideological significance of Phaethon as a cautionary tale with societal resonance: overweening personal ambition is the potential downfall of would-be managers of the cosmic chariot. For Roman audiences, however, the clear link in Greek science between Phaethon and eschatological doctrine, in which the world is periodically remade after a series of cosmic disasters, only reinforces its ideological import.²⁷ In Stoic cosmology, the cycle of conflagration held an important, if

²⁶ About Aeschylus' *Heliades* we know almost nothing, but we can reconstruct a great deal of Euripides' *Phaethon*, thanks to the survival of fragments beautifully treated by James Diggle (1970).

²⁷ Arist. *Met.* 1.8.345a; Diod. Sic. 5.23.2; Philostratus the Elder 1.11. On the Hellenistic interest in the location of the Po: see Diggle (1970) 6-7; cf. Apollonius 4.597ff, Aratus *Phaenomena* 360. See also Feeney (2007) 94-95. On Stoic *ekpyrosis* in Roman poetry: Lapidge (1979); Roche

controversial place in in the doctrine of *ekpyrosis*. In the Roman context, the 20
cosmological and the political merged to form an important line of rhetoric around the
collapse of the republic. As John Miller has recently argued, the political disturbances of
the 40's BCE often connected with the end of the Roman *saeculum*. The fears voiced in
the triumviral period of an end to Rome's cosmic cycle and of impending apocalypse
became central to Augustus' rhetoric of cosmic renewal and the initiation of a new
Golden Age.

We have some evidence that the story of Phaethon was popular, as Diodorus
informs us (5.23.2), with "many of the poets and historians" of his day, who looked to
Italy's Po River as the site of his final crash. As Diggle shows, the tradition of Phaethon's
fall into the river Eridanus was largely Alexandrian. The Hellenistic obsession with
mapping and chronology sparked a flurry of interest in pinpointing the actual location of
the river, a matter quite beside the point for Plato and the tragedians. Authors focused on
the Western Mediterranean began to identify the mysterious western river with the Po,
and it is clear that in Latin poetry, the identification of the Eridanus with the Italian Po
held great appeal, despite the dubious tradition.²⁸ In addition to Phaethon's key role in
expanding the Greek mythic map to Italy and the Western Mediterranean, the tragic and

(2005). On conflagration, Stoicism, and Apollo/Augustus: Miller (2009) 255-7. On theatricality
in imperial culture: Boyle (2008) xxii. Intimations of Phaethon in *Georgics* 1: see Gale (2000) 34-
8; Nelis (2008) 507-8; Lyne (1987) 140 n. 63.

²⁸ Notably, the late 4th/early 3rd century BCE Sicilian historian Timaeus of Tauromenium.
Timaeus gave pride of place to legends of wandering heroes such as Heracles, the Argonauts,
Odysseus, and other survivors from Troy with Italy and Sicily in his attempt to create a distinct
western Greek mythology. Polybius singles out his treatment of the Phaethon and the Eridanus
for special indignation on this count. As Feeney observes (2007: 86ff) Timaeus' work seems to
have provided a challenging test case of the dialectic between myth and history, setting up a
double focus between mythic precursors and historical followers.

spectacular aspects of Phaethon's tale would also have held considerable ideological appeal. 21

The tension identified by Mark Griffith between Athenian drama's brilliant but self-destructive dynasts and the civic orientation of the 5th-century polis seems to have been mirrored, inversely, in the transition from the Roman republic to the principate. As Tony Boyle has observed, in early imperial Rome, the shift from a senatorial oligarchy to a single ruling family had generated not simply an autocracy but an inherently theatrical one. Replicating and magnifying the dynamics of the tragic stage, the concerns of an unstable dynastic family again took on a potentially earth-shattering significance. The Phaethon story, with its focus on a hero whose obsession with proving his worth leads to a massive catastrophe, seems to have provided plentiful inspiration along these lines. Imagery involving Phaethon recurs in the work of different authors from all three chapters of this dissertation, and seems to have become a powerful metaphor for unstable heirs and contested succession.

c: Incendiary Leaders and Externalized Fires.

A third device that recurs in a number of texts is the proleptic figuration of a leader as metaphorically incendiary, signaling the imminent conflagration that he or she is about to unleash on the world. A range of texts link overly ambitious or unstable leaders with the fiery destruction of their homes, from Vergil's Dido to Livy's Hannibal. The latter, as James Clauss has shown, is itself constructed as an allusive echo of Sallust's Catiline,²⁹ suggesting the ways in which the authors of the period enliven and complicate well-worn

²⁹ Clauss (1997).

mythic and historical narratives by calling to mind more recent events and protagonists. Seneca too links internal passion and destructive behavior with fire-inflected vocabulary.³⁰ Ovid's Phaethon, and Tacitus' Nero too display these characteristics, as I demonstrate in Chapters 1 and 3, respectively.

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This phenomenon is explored largely on the level of individual characters, but touches on the imagined "externalization" of internal flaws that can extend over an entire society, leaving a population not just vulnerable to disaster, but in some sense culpable for it. This is an argument previously made for different types of literary disasters: for example, the plague that besets the population of Thebes at the start of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* is the result of their unwitting complicity the Oedipus' accidental crimes of parricide and incest. Likewise, the plague of Athens at the end of Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura* reads, in accordance with his philosophical principles, as an outer representation of the city's societal ills.³¹

Closer to the territory I examine here, Horace describes a flood descending on Rome (*Carm.*1.2.1-20) as if the dire portents of natural world are the natural companion to the evils of Rome's political collapse in the mid-first century BCE.³² A related point is the way in which leaders could precipitate disasters by stirring up crowds to riots and arson, much as poets could evoke emotion with a stirring performance: this type of "psychagogic" activity, common to poetry and oratory, unites the two endeavors in this

³⁰ e.g. in *de Ira*, as recently argued by Riggsby (2012).

³¹ So Commager (1957).

³² The precise date of the flood Horace mentions is an issue of some debate, but matters little for my purposes here. For a discussion of the date, see Aldrete (2007) 21-2.

study.³³ In ancient Rome's "economy of violence," the threat of incendiary action was a mighty currency, as were claims to the power to eradicate the threat of fire.³⁴ 23

d: Miraculous Survivals and Phoenix-Like Recoveries.

Augustus' efforts to rebuild a city diminished by years of neglected infrastructure and civil conflict took on the character of a cosmic reorganization, introducing an age of civic and spiritual renewal, of which his gestures towards fire control were part and parcel. Vergil and Manilius provide especially strong evidence for the rhetorical link between fire suppression and successful leadership. In the aftermath of the civil wars of the first century BCE, preventing further fires and making good on the damage done in the conflict are obvious metaphors for legitimizing the new order imposed by Augustus. The motif of post-catastrophic urban renewal and spiritual revival is prominent in Livy's famous image of the city of Rome after the Gallic Sack: (Livy 6.1.3) *clariora deinceps certioraque ab secunda origine, velut ab stirpibus laetius feraciusque renatae urbis, gesta domi militiaeque exponentur*, "From this point there will be a clearer and more accurate accounting of the exploits, both military and domestic, of a city reborn from a second origin, as if from the old roots, with a more fertile and fruitful growth." Rome, as

³³ Griffith (1995: 96 n. 110) uses the term to describe the kommos of the over the king's tomb in the *Choephoroi*; Brink (1994: 258) uses it to describe public speech fired by emotion, as discussed in Tacitus' *Dialogus*.

³⁴ The term coined by Derrida (1978: 117) has gained new currency in scholarship on modern cities with urban violence problems: cf. Arias and Goldstein (2010). Equally important is the performative or spectacular advantage of the threat: the near-liturgical repetition of features in the narrative give them force of ritual, with instigating figures as their virtual "high priests." On the performance aspect of political violence, see Goldstein (2004).

well as its history, grows back with renewed vigor, like a plant that flourishes all the 24
more for having been cut back.³⁵

In Stoic cosmology, the destruction of *ekpyrosis* was to be followed by the regenerative process of *palingenesis*. Ovid's depiction of the Phaethon episode has been described as depicting a "universal disorder" which plays upon familiar cosmological themes.³⁶ Phaethon's failure to control the raging horses of the solar chariot leads to an assertion of control on the part of Jupiter, who must strike him down with a lightning bolt to check his frantic progress. The king of the gods then goes on to restore the landscape to its former beauty. In Ovid's description, we might see Jupiter's role as analogous to that of Augustus following the civil wars; this restorative moment forms part of a larger pattern in the *Metamorphoses* imagining various scenes universal chaos transformed into order.³⁷ The destruction and renewal of the landscape furthermore draws on Stoic and Pythagorean doctrines that conceptualize the flight of Phaethon as a symbol of cyclical *ekpyrosis* and *palingenesis*, a process that Seneca too describes at length.³⁸

The literature of the period also reveals a fascination with the notion of a uniquely blessed person or object that miraculously survives a devastating fire unscathed. The legend of Aeneas' escape from Troy touches on this fantasy, as does the portent of Servius Tullius' royal destiny: a nimbus of fire seemed to surround his head as he slept.³⁹ This concept seems also to have transferred to objects, with much importance attached to

³⁵ See introduction, "Miraculous Survivals and Phoenix-Like Recoveries," and 52-3, 59.

³⁶ Myers (1994) 4.

³⁷ See e.g. Otis (1970) 91. Yet this is not an entirely unproblematic reading, given both Jupiter's reactionary role in precipitating the poem's first catastrophe, the great flood, as well as his behavior in the two episodes which bookend the Phaethon narrative, in which his sexual pursuit of two female characters result in lasting harm; see Evans (2008) 48-9, 91; Richlin (1992) 158-179.

³⁸ Colish (1985) 24-5; cf. Sen. *NQ* 3.29.5-30.8.

³⁹ Plutarch, *Moralia*, "On the fortune of the Romans" 10. 64.

the survival or destruction of sacred items (the Sibylline Books, e.g., which were 25
destroyed during Sulla's assault on Rome in 83 CE), and later, to images of the emperor
himself. In a mediating position between these two categories, we find the story of
Claudia Quinta.⁴⁰ During the most dire moment of the Hannibalic Wars, a Sibylline
oracle promised that a foe on Italian soil could be driven out if the Romans brought the
"Idaeian Great Mother," to their homeland. The stone signifying the Magna Mater's
divinity was duly fetched and transported from Asia Minor to Italy, but the ship carrying
it foundered in the Tiber river at the journey's very end. Claudia Quinta was said to have
pulled it into the center of Rome and thus proved her chastity as a proper Roman matron.
When the temple built for the goddess on the Palatine Hill caught later fire, as Ovid tells
us, on not one but two occasions, a statue of Claudia Quinta housed there miraculously
survived.

e: Book Burning, Destroyed Histories, and the "Unmaking" of Roman Heritage.

In one of the most famous early reflections on the political turbulence of the triumviral
conflicts in the mid-first century BCE, Asinius Pollio's choice to write a history of the
civil wars provokes the following comment from Horace:⁴¹

*motum ex Metello consule civicum
bellique causas et vitia et modos
ludumque fortunae gravesque
principium amicitias et arma
nondum expiatis uncta cruoribus,
periculosae plenum opus aleae,
tractas et incedis per ignes*

⁴⁰ Livy 29.10.5; Ov. *Fast.* 4.293-328. See also Bremmer (2004); Gruen (1992) 229 and (1996) ch. 1; Wiseman (1985) 174-7.

⁴¹ Morgan (2000) provides a good overview of Asinius Pollio and his significance to the literary and historical tradition of the late republic. See also Nisbet and Hubbard (1978) *ad Carm.*2.1.

[You] deal with the civil disturbance starting with Metellus' consulship, the causes of the war, its sins, its spans of time, the game of fortune and the oppressive alliances of the leaders, the arms coated in still-unexpiated gore, a work full of dangerous diciness, and you proceed through fires laid beneath deceptive ash.

Horace, whose treatment of civil wars is a recurring theme of his work, explicitly equates them here with a conflagration that has just (and in fact not quite) died down. In fact, the appearance of having been quenched only makes this fire more dangerous, as it encourages us to step onto an apparently cooled surface that in fact can still burn.⁴²

Rome's recent political history is here equated with the smoking rubble of a fiery destruction. Pollio, in turn, appears as a "fire-walker," an image with deep cultic associations in the Roman world. Every year at the Festival of Apollo Soranus, at the base of Mount Soracte, an area sacred to underworld gods, priests known as the "Wolves of Soranus" walked barefoot over hot ashes.⁴³ This gesture, like the similar ceremony of leaping over bonfires performed annually at the Parilia, seems to have dual cathartic and apotropaic purposes. Similarly, Pollio's willingness to undergo the risk of writing Rome's recent history of conflict is hoped to function as a method of dispelling the specters of past violence, offering better hope for the future even as it forges links with the past. This image also, however, equates writing history with the risk of getting "burned," an early suggestion of the threat of reprisal that would in fact jeopardize the production of recording Rome's recent history in the years to come.

⁴² Henderson (1998: 117-20) likens the metaphor in this passage to walking through a minefield ("...this poem is *loaded*"), and further observes that there may be in it an implicit comparison with the goal Vergil's *Aeneid*, which also seeks to retrace Rome's history from a period of destruction.

⁴³ Pliny, *NH* 7.19; Servius *ad Aen.* 11.784-785; Sil. *Pun.* 5.175-181; Strabo 5.2.9; Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *AR* 3.32. For a full discussion of this rite see Taylor (1923) 83-91.

Timagenes of Alexandria, one of the earliest examples of imperial suppression²⁷ of historical voices deemed unflattering to the *princeps*, is reported to have burned his own history of the *acta Caesaris Augusti* after a disagreement with Augustus resulted in an interdiction from the imperial residence. *Interdictio domo et ingenio*, as Trevor Fear argues, was a form social exclusion in Rome that had profound political consequences for its targets.⁴⁴ Coming from the emperor, it is effectively tantamount to an act of censorship. Timagenes' subsequent burning of his own works, whether done as an attempt at conciliation (like the exiled Ovid's wish at the conclusion of *Tristia* 5.13 that his *Ars Amatoria* had burned before it could cause offense to the *princeps*), or, as Seneca the Elder has it, as a reprisal for the imperial interdiction, already reflects a distortion of the historical record under the overwhelming influence of the emperor's supreme authority.⁴⁵

Timagenes' relationship with fire, with Rome, and with book-burning are all explored at greater length in the pages of this dissertation, as is the better-known case of Cremutius Cordus, whose works were burned under Tiberius and who was the first author to be formally charged with treason for writing history. I discuss the case of Cordus in my second chapter, along with the younger Seneca's famous consolation to Cordus' daughter Marcia. This piece creates a suggestive linkage between the burning of Cordus' histories and the eradication of Rome's cultural and political memory in the fire that consumed much of the Theater of Pompey. The consolation includes a lengthy description of the ultimate consumption of all existence in *ekpyrosis*, imagined in Seneca as a cleansing and renewing force.

⁴⁴ Fear (2010).

⁴⁵ Sen. *Contr.*10.5.22.

Livy, in the passage quoted above (6.1.3) similarly equates the eradication of 28 history with urban conflagration at Rome, lamenting the loss of many important early sources in the Gallic destruction. The city's condition after its sacking is reflected in the poverty of accurate accounts of the period prior to the invasion: the city's history burned along with its houses, temples, and monuments. Yet Livy moves to recuperate this event, noting that from the destruction may spring a more definite and confident form of historical writing that seems to parallel the city's own renewed in the wake of the devastation. Livy, Horace, and Seneca alike seem to have found in the image of urban conflagration a productive set of metaphors with applications both political and literary: indeed, when dealing with Rome the categories can rarely be separated.

In the period I examine here, book burning, the ultimate expression of control over Rome and its civic identity, shifts from the collateral damage of foreign invasion to the willed intervention of its own rulers. Seen in this light, the incineration of Cordus' works, a major episode in the Tiberian books of Tacitus' *Annals*, becomes the narrative harbinger of the "Great Fire" of 64 in his Neronian section, a sequence discussed further in my third chapter. The assault on Roman heritage and individual freedom implied in the burning of Cordus' histories, in other words, is the ideological analogue for the destruction of Rome's monumental landscape a few decades later. Book burning, no less than urban conflagration, represents the "unmaking" of Rome and its identity.

Conclusion:

We take great pride, at least in theory, in the monuments of antiquity and the cultural legacy they represent. Yet we are also fascinated with the notion of self-reinvention, a

“clean slate” upon which we can chart our own course. Destruction, in the form of a 29
clean break with the past, can be collective as well as personal. The essence of Roman
culture is still linked to the city that gave rise to such tremendous innovations in its
literature, art, and political institutions, and yet the modern city of Rome preserves the
physical remains of this culture in a ruined state that surely would have shocked its
ancient inhabitants. The Forum of 2013 is the very image of a sacked city: a wasted zone
of toppled columns, palatial halls slumping into rubble, and half-legible inscriptions.
Even with the armor of guidebooks and specialist training, we are condemned to wander
around it much as Lucan imagines Caesar touring the destroyed site of Troy, often unable
to recognize in these damaged remainders any trace of former glory (*BC* 9.966-80).

The leading citizens of classical Rome were relentless restorers of damage and
decay: they saw nothing picturesque about a ruin in their midst. The Augustan approach
to *urbs Roma* as the architectural expression civic well-being seems to anticipate the
“broken windows” theory developed in modern sociology, which suggests that
maintaining and monitoring urban environments, preserving the outward appearance of
order, may prevent further vandalism and stop escalation into more serious crime.⁴⁶ After
a period of conflict, as after a flood or fire, a message of progress was powerfully
communicated in the transformational re-making of Rome’s urban façade, banishing the
dilapidation and destruction of the previous era to memory. To the Romans of the early
imperial period, however, the traces of societal catastrophe were still fresh. The risks of
approaching this past too directly were considerable. Political conflict and ambitious
leadership were then twin forces that guided much of Rome’s history of progress. Yet

⁴⁶ “Broken Windows: The police and neighborhood safety,” George L. Kelling and James Q. Wilson: *The Atlantic Monthly*, March 1, 1982.

these political contests, like fires, sometimes got out of control. Within such 30
moments, Rome's identity and its values were in danger not just of being remade, but of
being erased.

Likewise, culture and cultural production too bear an element of destruction. For
the authors working in Rome's agonistic cultural context, the very richness of their
cultural inheritance, and their intimate knowledge of the vast scope of previous literature,
threatened to overwhelm their own attempts at expression. In attempting to exceed their
models and update traditional images and narratives to suit their own needs, Roman
writers inevitably had to create ruptures with the past. Thus, in literature as well as in
Rome's cityscape, the consistently grouped and highly combustible themes of
charismatic leadership, a population vulnerable to disaster yet capable of violent dissent,
and the devastating effects of urban conflagration suggest a programmatic awareness of
fire's rhetorical value as both a threat to be managed and a catalyst for change.

CHAPTER ONE. The Vigilant *Princeps*: Augustan Responses to Fire at Rome.

Introduction:

The connection between a city's well-being and the stability of its *imperium* is a prominent theme in the Greco-Roman literary tradition. The Romans' obsession with the lifespan of their *imperium* and their apparent penchant for anticipating their own ultimate destruction may be partly due to their culture's belated position in this lineage: the great texts of Greek literature imparted, along with their literary lessons, the reminder of the ultimate fate of great literary cities like Athens and Alexandria, now firmly under Roman control. More generally, Rome's own imperial expansion provided a constant reminder of Fortune's wheel, in the form of the growing collection of cities that fell to its might.

Polybius, writing in the mid-second century BCE, describes how Scipio, gazing upon the smoldering ruin his army has made of Carthage, reflects on the inevitable fall of all cities.⁴⁷ Vergil allusively returns us to this moment with a famous simile: in writing the scene of Dido's suicide, he creates in his heroine's last moments a vision in simile of the fiery destruction of her home cities:⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Polybius 38.22.

⁴⁸ In this study I will generally use the term "referent" to refer to the corresponding features in either the figurative image or the narrative item being described. Many efforts to assign specific terms to the different portions of similes have admirable qualities, as Schell (2000: 3 n. 11) notes: Fränkel labels the sections of a simile *Wiesatz* and *Sosatz* the "wie"-clause and the "so"-clause (reflecting the terms employed in classically structured similes in German). Lee (1964, 3), followed by Ingalls (1979, 92 n. 24), employs the terms "protasis" and "apodosis," but this terminology, borrowed from grammar, suggests that the "figurative" part of the simile is subordinate to, and reliant on the "real" portion. Newton (1953, 21) calls the non-narrative portion the "simile" and the content the "literal." Coffey (1957, 113 and 117) and Williams (1983, 166) generally refer to "simile" and "context." These terms are all reasonably clear, and when necessary I will employ them fairly interchangeably, but I do so without the implications of relative scale or importance, which (as Schell, *loc. cit.*, rightly points out) the terms perhaps convey.

*...concussam bacchatur Fama per urbem.
 lamentis gemitu et femineo ululatu
 tecta fremunt, resonat magnis plangoribus aether
 non aliter quam si immissis ruat hostibus omnis
 Karthago aut antiqua Tyros, flammaeque furentes
 culmina perque hominum volvantur perque deum.*

Report goes in Bacchic frenzy through the stricken city. Homes are roaring with the moaning of grief and women's ululation, the stratosphere resounds with great wailing: no differently than if, when the enemy is loosed, all Carthage or ancient Tyre were to fall, and flames to go raging, rolling across rooftops, men's and gods' alike.⁴⁹

While the shock of suddenly losing a city's leader and founder might well result in an outpouring of grief comparable to that associated with an incendiary attack, the literary image Vergil offers of the flames that will actually one day obliterate Carthage gives the simile an uncannily prophetic character. Dido dies on a pyre built from mementos of her doomed affair with Aeneas, but her death activates historical memory of Rome's eventual conquest of Carthage. Dido's own end is closely associated here with the disaster that ultimately awaits her city at the hands of invading Romans in 149 BCE, much as Hector's death in the *Iliad* presages the destruction of Troy.⁵⁰ Both events lie beyond the temporal span narrated in the epic: these passages rely on the audience's broader knowledge of these cities and their fates.

This sequence elevates the stock-repertoire imagery of Dido's romantic conflagration, developed since her first contact with Aeneas, into a proleptic illustration

⁴⁹ *Aeneid* 4.667-671.

⁵⁰ Disaster for Troy is closely bound up with Hector's death, as he acknowledges in his conversation with Andromache in Book 6 (*Il.* 6.407-65). The simile at *Aeneid* 4.667-671, likewise, owes a debt to *Il.* 22.405-11, in which the mourning for Hector is compared to city's hypothetical (but soon to be realized) distress over the fall of Troy: τῷ δὲ μάλιστ' ἄρ' ἔην ἐναλίγκιον ὡς εἰ ἅπασα Ἴλιος ὀφρυόεσσα φυρὶ σμύχοιτο κατ' ἄκρης, "it was very like as if all of towering Troy were utterly smoldering with fire." On the narratological aspects of this simile see Bremer (1986) 371.

of the ultimate consequences for her city and its global ambitions.⁵¹ Vergil's *Aeneid* 33 shapes the legendary Roman past, rooted ultimately in the destruction of Troy, as the foundation for its Augustan present.⁵² In this formative process, however, the Trojan hero Aeneas leaves an extensive trail of damage, death, and misfortune: in abandoning Dido after their affair, Aeneas initiates a lasting enmity between their two states, which ultimately results in the obliteration of Carthage and its empire. During the fall of the republic and the early principate, the fall of Troy, the Gallic Sack and the Carthaginian conflict all took on new resonance for authors reaching for parallels with the current situation; literary and cultural memory fused around this defining rupture.

Accordingly, the rhetoric promoted by Augustus and his supporters aimed at the other side of the coin, emphasizing the recovery that the Trojan-descended Romans had made after such destructions, a point underscored by the program of urban renewal the *princeps* was carrying out at the capital. To begin forming an impression of what was at stake for Augustus in preventing (or at least attempting to prevent) fires at Rome, we need only think of the *princeps*' spectacular investment in the built environment of the city. Suetonius, in his summation of Augustus' urban achievements, expresses it in iconic terms:

⁵¹ Having thoroughly aired out the image of a city literally in flames in Book 2 (e.g. 2.327, 2.352-3), Vergil further develops the proleptic metaphor of *urbs incensa* to great effect at 4.300 [Dido] *saevit inops animi totamque incensa per urbem* (dividing the fire from its expected referent of the city and instead applying it to Dido) and at 11.146-7, when the women of the Pallanteum grieve for the slain prince Pallas, metaphorically "inflaming" the city: *matres succedere tectis/ viderunt, maestam incendunt clamoribus urbem*.

⁵² See, e.g. Barchiesi 1994 and 1998. Both these items are concerned specifically with the integration of Trojan narrative into works of art in Vergil's Carthage, but deal more generally with the themes of *translatio imperii* and the reworking of Trojan narrative in the Augustan period. See also Libby 2011, 177-8. Momigliani (1987) discusses *translatio imperii* as a constitutive *topos* of universal history, a theme also inherent to Ovid's project in the *Metamorphoses* (so Habinek in Hardie, ed. 2002, 53-4).

Urbem neque pro maiestate imperii ornatam et inundationibus incendiisque 34
obnoxiam excoluit adeo, ut iure sit gloriatus marmoream se relinquere, quam
latericiam accepisset. Tutam vero, quantum provideri humana ratione potuit,
etiam in posterum praestitit.

The city, not adorned as the sovereignty of empire demanded, and liable to flood
and fire, Augustus improved so much that he boasted quite rightly that he left
marble-clad a city he had taken on in sun-dried brick. He made it safe, too, for the
future, as much as could be provided by human calculation.⁵³

Suetonius links three concepts: power (*maiestas*, Suetonius' term, connotes additional
senses of rank relative to other comparable items, and thus implicates Rome's position in
the world it commanded), its visual expression in architectural adornment, and the social
mechanisms creating safety and stability in the urban environment. In other words, the
imperium of Rome *requires* that the city be monumentalized and secured against threats
as a demonstration of its power.⁵⁴ Dio, paraphrasing Suetonius' appraisal several
generations later, asserts that Augustus's "city of brick" had a more metaphorical or
symbolic meaning: "In saying this he was not referring literally to the state of the
buildings, but rather to the strength of the empire."⁵⁵ Both passages implicitly connect the
physical integrity of the city and its prominent place at the head of the Roman world,
suggesting the ways in which the city was "read" as an ideological text.⁵⁶

In tandem with the newly refurbished city, Augustan literature established a set of
literary motifs strongly linking leadership to fire: on the one hand, leader figures appear
as godlike suppressors and redeemers of damage done, and on the other as inadequate

⁵³ Suet. *Augustus* 28.3.

⁵⁴ Rehak (2006) 3 identifies the two concepts of power and architectural adornment; I add the
third element of social control as an essential component of the first two.

⁵⁵ Trans. Scott-Kilvert (1987).

⁵⁶ Rehak (2006) 3 ff., cf. Favro (1992) and (1996), but see the reservations towards Favro 1996
expressed, e.g. in Jaeger's 1997 review; Jaeger (2007) is instructive on Livy's readings of Rome's
topography.

opponents to, or even as instigators of conflagration. The totalizing impulse – the 35
drive towards universality, or an all-encompassing project that can explain certain truths
about Roman identity and human nature alike – is evident in the work of Vergil, Ovid,
and Manilius. This drive invites comparison between the literary output of these authors
and Augustus' comprehensive manipulation of the urban fabric of Rome. In all cases,
their drive towards the universal and the cosmic leads them to treat uncontrolled fire as
the ultimate expression of threat to the worlds constructed in their texts.⁵⁷

Vergil's work overall creates a vast and subtle network of allusive figures and
ideological cues that spans multiple genres and defies easy categorization. The *Georgics*,
an explicitly instructive project that exploits the pastoral and didactic genres to present a
new vision of poetics with a clear ideological subtext, contains several fire-related
passages which can be productively read against the work of his contemporary Vitruvius.
Likewise, close readings of passages from the *Aeneid* demonstrate Vergil's reapplication
of this set of ideas to the realm of Rome's semi-mythic foundational period, a project
arguably even more ideologically driven than the *Georgics*, and no less self-consciously
allusive. Next, Ovid's two totalizing explorations of Roman and mythic time reveal the
ways in which he borrows and amplifies ideas advanced by Vergil, projecting them back
onto Rome's cityscape in ways that problematize Augustus' claims to power and call into
question the validity of rhetoric extolling Rome's new Golden Age. The myth of
Phaethon is extensively treated in Ovid as a dramatization of anxiety over imperial
succession. This is a theme that Manilius, in his didactic astrological poem, seeks to

⁵⁷ Hardie (1993: 1-18) powerfully sums up the "maximizing" and "totalizing" aspects of early imperial Roman poets, and notes their reflection of the current political climate, as well as the amplification of these tendencies in successive authors.

access as a way of claiming the centrality of his subject to Rome's future. The authors³⁶ under examination here each present narratives and allusions under the pressure of a number of aesthetic and generic factors. Yet they also respond creatively to the visual and ideological cues of contemporary Rome, the *urbs* which dominated the *imperium*, indeed the very *cosmos* as the Romans defined it. An exploration of notable incidents involving fires in Augustan Rome will highlight important aspects of the cultural and political milieu, as well as the physical environment in which the era's authors operated, providing a historical framework for the literary explorations to follow.

Divi Filius, Master of Disaster.

While the risk of fire was no doubt a daily reality,⁵⁸ in this discussion I consider the topographic and commemorative significance of individual events, drawing attention to the memories they may have evoked of Rome's past upheavals through commonalities of site, assigned cause, or associated figures.⁵⁹ While each incident in itself suggests a wealth of associations, here three broad categories bring out the ideological impact of fire damage at Rome: restorations of damage done in the preceding era; fires which

⁵⁸ cf. Johnstone (1992). An accounting of the risk factors is provided in the introduction to this dissertation.

⁵⁹ There were nine recorded conflagrations between 31 BCE and 14 CE, in addition to a signal moment in 22 BCE when the serious threat of incendiary action seems to have prompted a number of major policy changes (to be discussed below); likewise, the damage from the dozen fires recorded between 58 and 31 BCE may have in a number of cases still been apparent, or only freshly repaired, providing potent reminders of Rome's recent past. In Augustus' time, fires occurred in 31, 29 (or 25- for ambiguity in Dio's text see Sablayrolles 1996: 782 n. 5), 23, 16, 14, 12, and 7 BCE as well as 3 and 6 CE. In last decades of the republic, Clodius is accused by Cicero of four acts of willful destruction by fire between 58-57 BCE; of the other conflagrations in this period (in 56, 52, 50, 49, 47, 44, 41, 39, 38) only those of 56, 50, 39 and 38 are not attributed to rioting or other forms of mob violence. Compilations are provided in Sablayrolles (1996) appendix 7 and Rubin (2004) Ch. 1. On Clodius and mob violence generally, Brunt (1966) remains fundamental.

strengthened the control of the *princeps* over Rome's population; and those which 37
strongly implicated the home of the ruler, activating mythic parallels. It also foregrounds
the dramatic arc of the shifting ideological climate during the first principate: from the
still-unstable post-triumviral years, through the relatively peaceful decades of urban
transformation. Finally, this brings us to Augustus' twilight years, when unease over
succession and dynastic concerns become prominent. This development of mostly well-
known accounts of Augustus' interaction with fire elucidates the symbolic impact of the
princeps' interventions in the cityscape, enriching and contextualizing our literary
readings.

The record of fires at Rome from 31 BCE to 14 CE, taken as a discrete sequence
and integrated with the major aspects of the *princeps*' program of stabilization and
renewal, reveals fire control as a significant benchmark for the new regime and its claims
to power. The effort invested by Augustus in restoring fire damage and in preventing
further calamities suggests more than a natural concern with preserving his monumental
legacy. Rather, republican invective surrounding "incendiary" figures such as Clodius
and Catiline had given additional rhetorical weight to the effort to suppress fiery
outbreaks and the mob violence they metonymically represented. Thus, protecting the
city even from the very elements amounted to an assertion of control over the cosmos
akin to the propaganda promoting the *aureum saeculum*.

Suetonius' assertion that Augustus' Rome was "safe" (*tutam*) could refer to the
state's military security, but the defense of the city against the flood, fire, and crime is no
less pertinent. The architectural transformation of Rome formed a significant part of
Augustus' legacy; fires threatened to undo decades of work in a single day. Apart from

the obvious human loss and economic impact, the ideological risk of such devastation³⁸ should be considered carefully in the case of Augustus, whose attention to symbolism and visual rhetoric was powerfully summed up by Zanker:

Never before had a new ruler implemented such a far-reaching cultural program, so effectively embodied in visual imagery; and it has seldom happened since. A completely new pictorial vocabulary was created in the next twenty years. This meant a change not only in political imagery in the narrow sense, but in the whole outward appearance of the city of Rome, in interior decoration and furniture, even in clothing. It is astonishing how every kind of visual communication came to reflect the new order, how every theme and slogan became interwoven.⁶⁰

As Zanker's reference to a "new pictorial vocabulary" suggests, Augustus' command was not just over images in isolation, but over the narrative they expressed collectively, or in relation to the series of memories a single image can evoke. Dio reads the city's makeover as a metaphor for the transformation of the Roman political system: from the weak, divided state of the late republic to the stable and dominant power established by Augustus. Likewise, the natural phenomena (*inundationibus incendiisque*) Suetonius identifies as threats to the city's physical integrity seem to invite metaphorical interpretation, as manifestations of the civil unrest and political upheaval characterizing "*Roma latericia*."

Republican Ruins in Recovering Rome.

At the same time that fires and other disasters provoked anxiety over Rome's future and threatened a return to instability, they also provided much of the scope Augustus needed to remake the city in his image. One telling example is the restoration of the Circus

⁶⁰Zanker (2003).

Maximus. The inaugural year of Augustus' (at that time, Octavian's) reign, 31 BCE, 39 was marred by a fire that devastated the city's most ancient site of public spectacle and enshrined competition. One of the principal opportunities for the display of divinity at Rome, in fact, had traditionally been the *pompa circensis*, a procession of the statues of the gods, which were brought out from temples and paraded on special litters at the opening ceremonies of games in the Circus. As Denis Feeney points out, the *pompa* was an occasion that provoked strong emotions, and as such was "necessarily adaptable to changes in ideology."⁶¹ The reactions could be strong, but could also be politically rewarding: though crowds rioted when Octavian and Antony removed the statue of Neptune, patron god of their rival Sextus Pompey, Caesar's introduction of his own statue into the *pompa* some years earlier represented the first phase of dynastic intervention in the pageant's divine symbolism.⁶² The burning of the Circus, already the site of such contested ideas about leadership and divinity, can be expected to have necessitated a strong response from the new *princeps*.

Cassius Dio assigns blame for the conflagration on a disgruntled segment of the population (freedmen angry at tax increases), yet still reports it as an ill omen for the new regime.⁶³ The Circus' restoration, however, afforded Caesar's heir the opportunity to address his relationship both with the public and with the gods. In his monumentalization of the structure, the new *princeps* created a powerful conduit for advertising his stature to

⁶¹ Feeney (1998) 96.

⁶² Dio 48.31.5 (Neptune) and 43.45.2 (Caesar); see Feeney (1998) 96 and n. 76-8 for additional bibliography.

⁶³ Dio 50.10.3-6. The double determination, common as it may be in historiography, still illustrates the close association between popular and divine favor underpinning Roman leaders' claims to power, and it highlights the importance of claiming symbolic "victory" over any infelicitous event.

the masses, adding a *pulvinar* from which the imperial family could view events amid 40 statues of the gods, quite as if they were themselves heavenly rulers.⁶⁴ Equally suggestive of divine majesty was the crowning touch added in 10 BCE, an ancient Egyptian obelisk from Heliopolis, placed on the focal *spina* of the racetrack. This feature linked the site conceptually with his extraordinary solar complex on the Campus Martius, which had another obelisk dedicated as its *gnomon* in the same year.⁶⁵ Within their settings of cosmic grandeur, Augustus' two obelisks were part of regular demonstrations of time measurement and cyclical spectacle, reinforcing the new regime's promotion of

⁶⁴ The extent and permanence of the Circus' structures prior to this point cannot be verified, and Augustus' repairs perhaps only finalized improvements planned by Julius Caesar; see "Circus Maximus" in Haselberger et. al (2003). Nevertheless, fire appears most proximate factor in precipitating the overhaul, and Augustus makes a point of his addition of the *pulvinar* in his *Res Gestae* (RG 19). On the religious and symbolic significance of the *pulvinar* see Humphrey (1986) 78-83.

⁶⁵ 10 BCE; see Rehak (2006) xxi and Takács (1995) 270. The first obelisks brought to Rome, these ancient, exotic and sacred monuments stood as a suggestion of eternal strength through their association with sun worship (both obelisks were dedicated to Sol, and the temple of Sol rose from within the seating area on the Aventine side of the Circus Maximus) and their great antiquity. Feldherr (1995) makes a great number of valuable points concerning the complex of associations between the Circus, the popular image of the sun as charioteer, the cyclical movements of heavenly bodies, and the similarly circular movements of chariots on a race track. Likewise, Feldherr (1995: 249-50) offers plentiful insights into the new ideological importance with which circus spectacles became invested in the transition from republic to principate. It is unclear how much of this visual rhetoric would have been in place in time to have influenced (potentially) the composition of *Aeneid* 5, an idea treated by Feldherr (1995); his larger points about the common cultural discourses and ideological impulses that both the monument and the text seem to exhibit are nevertheless extremely valuable. Feldherr's footnote (1995: 249 n. 13) on the astral and solar symbolism of the obelisk placed on the *spina* of the Circus in 10 CE and its relationship to the obelisk used in the so-called *horologium* of Augustus are usefully situated within the era's pervasive representations of the sun and moon as bodies running elliptical courses around the earth. The same footnote later refers, however, to the Circus' possible figuration as a "solar system," a phrase too closely associated with heliocentric models for comfortable use here. To be clear, in this dissertation references to cyclical movements in association with the sun and the cosmos do not imply heliocentrism, but only the well attested ancient recognition of the circular and elliptical motion of various heavenly bodies and the cyclical movements of constellations.

the *aureum saeculum*.⁶⁶ As spoils of the victory over Antony and Cleopatra, they also served as additional reminders of the victory over the Egyptian menace. The new Circus Maximus might even be taken as an analogue, written into the urban fabric, for the struggle for control of Rome. Its destruction was implicated at least by synchronicity in the culminating moment of the year 31 and the battle of Actium, and its restoration thus symbolically suggests the subsequent transformation of the state and its attendant structures.

Within the city's limits, leaders of the late republic had done much to cement the connection between the collapsing state and fiery destruction.⁶⁷ Cicero skillfully deploys the threat of fire in the city to demonize his opponents, portraying opposition leaders like Clodius, Catiline, and Antony as incendiary figures who would willingly burn Rome to the ground to achieve their ends.⁶⁸ Clodius' apparent enthusiasm for politically motivated

⁶⁶ Takács (1995) 270. Victory over Egypt of course also symbolized a major step in securing a permanent grain supply for Rome's populace, a decisive factor in gaining and maintaining public support for any Roman *princeps*.

⁶⁷ Publius Clodius (b. Claudius) Pulcher; the standard biography is Tatum (1999). His rival Milo was scarcely less implicated: Milo's trained gangs, claimed as necessary defense against Clodius and other enemies, were equally as adept at protecting his property as at waging political violence. See Asc. p. 33.12 and Nippel (1995) 37.1. On Cicero's defense of Milo, see Dyck (1998), esp. 238-9 on the conflation of Clodius' funeral and an incendiary attack on the state. On Cicero's rhetorical targeting of Catiline, see e.g. Brunt (1957) and Batstone (1994). Dyck (2004) astutely comments on the ways in which Cicero employs flame-heavy imagery to create a rhetorical kinship between Clodius and Catiline. On the re-working of this motif in Sallust, see e.g. Waters (1970).

⁶⁸ The burning of the Capitol was a pervasive feature of ancient accounts of conspiracies in the middle and late republican periods; see Nippel (1995) 62. On Catiline and fire imagery, see Vasaly (1993) 75-80. See also Johnstone (1992) 48-49, who cites e.g. Cat. 3.9: *caedis, incendia, interitum rei publicae comparari*. For Clodius, see e.g. *Sest.* 95 and material mentioned here. On Antony: e.g. *Phil.* 2.48: *eius omnium incendiorum fax*; and *Phil.* 11.37: *comites vero Antoni, qui postquam beneficia Caesaris comederunt, consulem designatum obsident, huic urbi ferro ignique minitantur...*

arson attracts Cicero's particular ire.⁶⁹ To give only the most notorious example, 42 Cicero highlights the divine and civic outrage of Clodius' alleged arson of the Temple of the Nymphs. The date of this destruction is thought to be around 58-56 BCE, while a notice in the *fasti Fratrum Arvalium* (c. 36-21 BCE)⁷⁰ makes it fairly clear that the temple had been restored, or at least was functioning by the early Augustan era. The Nymphs were symbols of deliverance from everyday fires, making an incendiary attack on them especially perverse.⁷¹ Vergil in *Aeneid* 9 again associates the Nymphs with a miraculous escape from an improvised incendiary attack strongly reminiscent of mob warfare.⁷² Thus, the rebuilt temple, in addition to improving the cityscape, signaled a recovery from the targeted violence and politically motivated arson that had once rendered the city a virtual war zone.

Augustus' rebuilt Curia too evoked Clodian conflagration: Dio tells us that a grain shortage in 57 prompted a Clodian mob to surround the Senate in session on the Capitol, threatening to burn it down around them. Not long afterwards Clodius' supporters rescued him from a crowd of senators demanding his execution: "bringing fire, [they threatened] to burn his oppressors along with the senate house if they did him any violence." Finally, when Clodius was slain in a notorious outbreak of gang violence in 52, a grieving mob (in perhaps a fitting tribute) burned Rome's senate house with their leader's body

⁶⁹ Cicero blames Clodius for burning the Temple of the Nymphs in a letter from 58 BCE, but the event itself could have predated the letter; the exact date is further obscured by the dispute over the identification of this temple on the Campus Martius. See "Nymphae, Aedes" in Haselberger et al. (2002). Cicero also describes how Clodius, having forced Cicero into exile in 58, put Cicero's house to the torch (*de Domo Sua* 111-112); how he burned Quintus Cicero's house; and how he attempted to do the same to Milo's in November of 57 (*Att.* 4.3; *Cael.* 78; *Fr.* 2.4.2, 2.4.3, 2.8-10).

⁷⁰ Degrassi, *Insc. Ital.* 13.2, 301, 501.

⁷¹ Offered veneration on the Volcanalia along with Vulcan and his consort Maia.

⁷² See also discussion of *Aeneid* 5 below, 74-8.

inside.⁷³ Again in 44 BCE, crowds were barely restrained from setting alight the Curia⁴³ of Pompey (site of Caesar's assassination), in a riot that had started with the sudden torching of Caesar's bier in the Forum. As was the case with the riotous funeral of Clodius, Caesar's cremation within the *pomerium* violated ancient Roman law.⁷⁴ The festival of mayhem lasted for days, forcing Brutus, Cassius, and others implicated in Caesar's death to depart the city when their homes were also threatened with arson and plunder.⁷⁵ Completed only in 29 BCE, Octavian's new Curia finally redeemed the destruction wrought by Clodius' rioters, signaling the start of a new era in politics.

In 22 BCE, however, rioting broke out afresh, prompted by a grain shortage (probably itself the result of fire damage and flood spoilage in the wake of the previous year's string of natural disasters).⁷⁶ Mobs equipped with firebrands surrounded the new Curia during the Senate meeting, threatening both the building and its distinguished occupants with incineration, clearly replicating the tactics of the fiery 50's.⁷⁷ The recurring theme of confrontation between the city's governing figures and incendiary mobs emphasizes how powerful a weapon of popular reprisal fire could be in an urban "economy of violence." As John Ramsey observes in his account of one of the Clodian mob's well-timed disturbances of the Senate in 57 BCE, the incident "graphically shows

⁷³ On rebuilding: *RG* 19.1; Dio 51.11.1. On burning in 52: Cic. *Fin.* 5.2; Cic. *Mil.* 90; Dio 40.49.2-3. See "Curia Iulia" in Haselberger et al. (2002); Claridge (1998) 70. See also Nippel (1995) 75ff.

⁷⁴ Twelve Tables 10.2.

⁷⁵ Cic. *Phil.* 90; Plut. *Brutus* 20.1-8; Nic. Dam. *Caes.* 17.50; *App. BC* 2.147-614. See also Nippel (1995) 37.

⁷⁶ In 23, fire, storm, famine and a flood lasting three days were followed by a prolonged period of illness for Augustus. Garnsey (1988) 219 draws out the political impact of this incident.

⁷⁷ Dio tells us that a grain shortage in 57 prompted an incendiary mob to surround the Senate in session on the Capitol with similar threats. Not long afterwards Clodius' supporters rescued him from a crowd of angry senators: "bringing fire, [they threatened] to burn his oppressors along with the senate house if they did him any violence." (Dio 39.9.2; 39.29.3).

how rhetoric alone was by no means the only tool employed by some ruthless 44 senators to control the outcome of a debate.”⁷⁸ During the showdown of 22 BCE, Augustus may not have instigated the crowd, but like Clodius before him, he seems to have benefited mightily from its support.

With the Senate still penned up in the Curia, Augustus declined the crowd’s urging that he take up the Dictatorship and censorship for life.⁷⁹ Instead taking over the immensely influential *cura annonae* to relieve the food shortage, Augustus distributed supplies at his own expense.⁸⁰ At the end of his career he sums up the event in terms clearly demonstrative of the political capital it gained him: “In a few days I freed the entire city from the present fear and danger by my own expense and administration.”⁸¹ Overall, Augustus responded to the cluster of large-scale disasters in 23-22 BCE by extending his authority over the city and instituting lasting changes to its management. One such change was the first rational step toward addressing fire in city, a corps of 600 state slaves to serve as a fire brigade⁸² to be managed by the curule aediles.⁸³ Thus, Augustus rescued his new Curia from suffering the fate of its predecessor, and in so doing again made a number of interventions in city management, signaling a break with the late republic’s cycle of violence.

⁷⁸ Ramsey (2007) 128.

⁷⁹ The censorship was the republican post with the most responsibility for urban management. Instead he appointed two private citizens to the censorship; Dio notes, however, that “Augustus performed many of the duties belonging to their office.”

⁸⁰ Robinson (1992) 132.

⁸¹ Augustus, *RG* 5.

⁸² Dio 54.2.4. The timing of the organization and the events of the previous year have long been linked: see Baillie Reynolds (1926) 20 n. 1, Rubin (2004) 69.

⁸³ Dio’s wording suggests the extent to which Augustus himself was behind the measures, describing him as “giving” the slaves to the aediles (ἐξακοσίους σφίσι βοηθοὺς δούλους δούς). Though firefighting forces were officially still under the control of the curule aediles at this stage, the consolidation and organization of manpower under state funding nevertheless suggests that Augustus perceived the practical and political value of their work.

Firefighting and Social Control.

Disruptive incidents continued to provide the *princeps* with impetus (or pretext) for consolidation of the administrative power structure.⁸⁴ Near the end of his reign in 6 CE, following a day on which a number of serious fires broke out all at once,⁸⁵ Augustus put in place the *vigiles*, a centrally controlled firefighting force appropriate to the scale and complexity of Rome's urban environment.⁸⁶ The *vigiles*, however, were not simply a response to the events of 6 CE, but rather the culmination of protracted confrontation between Augustus, urban fires, and the people of Rome. Augustus' interventions in the material maintenance of Rome were as subtly incremental as they were comprehensive.⁸⁷ Additionally, during the early principate knowledge and expertise of various kinds (and management of Rome's complex environment was nothing if not knowledge-work) increasingly came into the hands of specialists from undistinguished families, who were promoted by Augustus at the expense of the old elite.⁸⁸ The importance of claiming

⁸⁴ Just as the continued social turmoil and still-fractious nobility of Rome in the 30's and early 20's BCE had entitled Augustus to establish the Praetorian guard in 27 and the urban cohorts in 25.

⁸⁵ Ulpian, *Digest* 1.15.2: *pluribus uno die incendiis exortis*.

⁸⁶ As with many major Augustan changes, they were to have been a temporary measure, but subsequently were instituted on a permanent basis, a testament to the value of their services as well as to Augustus' canny sense of image management.

⁸⁷ Favro concludes that in their totality, "Augustus' seemingly *ad hoc* provisions for fire fighting, water distribution, building maintenance and urban safety reflect a consistent policy of social control, amounting to a disguised centralization of the financing, expertise, and influence required to keep the city running smoothly. Favro (1992) 61; Collectively, Favro continues, the Augustan transformations reflect a disguised centralization." Favro (1992) 83.

⁸⁸ Wallace-Hadrill (2008) 259-312. See also Trimble (2007) 378 and review of Wallace-Hadrill (2008) by Newsome (2011).

authority over fire prevention may have gained a certain prominence thanks to the 46
specialized efforts of an extraordinary aedile of the 20's, Egnatius Rufus.⁸⁹

Egnatius, by Dio's account, used his aedileship to win the favor of the public by assembling and managing an unusually effective firefighting force, using his own slaves as well as hired workers. The people so appreciated Egnatius' efforts that they reimbursed him for his expenses, and the following year pushed through his election to a praetorship "contrary to law."⁹⁰ While the exact date and nature of these actions is disputed,⁹¹ it seems clear that the rhetorical value of firefighting efforts was recognized.⁹² Egnatius demonstrates the potential of a political policy that puts heavy emphasis on the ability to control random outbreaks of fire. The close connection between social unrest and incendiarism that evolved in the late republic (and, as the events of 22 BCE suggest, continued vigorously into the early principate) also seems to have strengthened firefighting's connotations of preserving the integrity of the city.

As Dio recounts the story, Egnatius's popularity made him "so contemptuous of Augustus" that he issued a bulletin stating that "he [Egnatius] had handed the city over unimpaired and intact to his successor." The "before and after" snapshot of the Rome

⁸⁹ On whom, see Raaflaub and Samons in Raaflaub and Toher (eds.) (1990) 427; Yakobson (1999) 36-37; Southern (1998) 128-129; Phillips (1997); Yavetz (1969) 95-97 and (1958) 500-715 (esp. 512).

⁹⁰ Presumably that stipulating against holding the aedileship and praetorship in successive years; Dio 53.24; Crassus, whose private fire brigades had served both as a propaganda tool and as a method of profiteering, is also an important model here.

⁹¹ There is some debate about whether Egnatius' aedileship and firefighting efforts took place in 22, as an addition to (and perhaps a pointed improvement over) Augustus' own measures, or (as Dio asserts) happened in 26 and thus possibly set the example for Augustus' own measures after the disasters of 23-22. See Sablayrolles (1996) 9, n.10.

⁹² As with the better-known case of Asinius Pollio, who stole the march on Augustus in endowing Rome's first library (Pliny, *HN* 7.30, 35.12) any gesture of public provision could easily lend itself to interpretation as a pre-emptive strike against the expanding influence of the *princeps*, or even the creation of an alternative forum of public activity and elite competition, cf. Morgan (2000).

evoked by Egnatius' bulletin seems suggestively close to Augustus' own famous 47 claim to have "found a city of brick and left it one of marble."⁹³ With Augustus and his supporters relentlessly seizing opportunities to replace damaged structures with glittering monuments to a new era, Egnatius' "mission statement" about his successful effort "keep the city the same" takes on a distinctly defiant tone. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Egnatius was charged with conspiracy and executed in 19 BCE. Augustus, however, may well have learned from Egnatius' example: subsequently he appears to have reworked not only Egnatius' major claim to fame (the fire brigade), but also his rhetoric linking Rome's physical and political aspects (trumping preservation with renovation).⁹⁴

By Dio's account, a fire which rendered the Forum unsuitable for games held in Agrippa's honor in 7 BCE (five years after his death) was actually the precipitating disaster that led directly to Augustus' massive reorganization of the city's division and management in the same year.⁹⁵ Dio assigns blame for the blaze to the "debtor class," who apparently set the area on fire in the expectation of imperial beneficence in the aftermath of the damage.⁹⁶ The notion of Dio's incendiary debtors as the proximate cause

⁹³ Though of course we cannot definitively assign a date to the either claim, or even be sure that they were not the embellishments of later historians, taken together they nevertheless suggest a rhetorical atmosphere in Rome that frequently used the city and its buildings as a metaphor for politics and events in the urban population's collective memory.

⁹⁴ Equally, the claim to "preserve" the city while actually introducing an innovative practice is again familiar from of the kinds of gestures more commonly associated with the Augustan principate.

⁹⁵ Dio 55.8.5-7 tell us that fire damage forced the relocation of Agrippa's funeral games in this year. See also Lott (2004) 168. Dio gives little indication of the exact date of this fire, but Nicholas Purcell suggests that a poorly attested devastation by fire in the latter part of 9 BCE is "a strong candidate for a catalyst" for this and other major changes in the Forum's function. See Purcell, *LTUR* "Forum Romanum" (after Coarelli, *Foro Romano* II, 224-227, based on Dio 55.8.2 and 5, and *CIL* VI.457).

⁹⁶ The possibility that this is simply damage remaining from the fires of 14 BCE seems diminished by this new cause only now assigned in Dio's narrative, as well as the evidence cited by Coarelli (*loc. cit.* and Purcell, "Roman Forum: (Imperial Period)" in *LTUR*).

of such a definitive urban reorganization may seem far-fetched,⁹⁷ but Augustus' 48
measures certainly do suggest a concern with addressing unrest among the less privileged
segments of society. There seems to be a consistent association of fire with debtors, the
poor, and the politically disaffected in much of the evidence reviewed for this period,
reflecting if not the reality of the causes for the incidents, then certainly the political light
in which incendiary events were often viewed. The re-organization of the *vici* as well
reflects Augustus' preoccupation with asserting his own control over the city more
forcefully.⁹⁸

The reforms of 7 BCE expanded Augustus' administrative reach enormously,
officially establishing the fourteen regions of the city, with a flexible number of *vici*
delineated within each region.⁹⁹ Augustus' reorganization assigned responsibility for
each of the regions to traditional state magistrates (aediles, tribunes, or praetors) but
delegated authority over fire prevention to a newly empowered class of civil servants, the
locally based *magistri vicorum*.¹⁰⁰ Borrowing a page from the book of the radical
populares, Augustus thus placed more control in the hands of selected elements of the

⁹⁷ Though it seems too strongly reminiscent of Sallust's Catiline narrative (*Cat.* 50) narrative to deny the possibility of literary allusion rather than accurate reportage, the anecdote nevertheless suggests an important aspect of the emerging dynamic between leader and population at Rome. The safety of the city increasingly was seen as contingent not upon Rome's relationship with external enemies, or even the will of the gods, but upon the relationship between the emperor and the urban population.

⁹⁸ Vividly characterized by Wallace-Hadrill as "the geographical articulation of popular sentiment," In the decades leading up to the final collapse of the republic, the *vici* had acquired a number of revolutionary associations not apparent in earlier references. Wallace-Hadrill (2008) 267; Lott (2004) 45-60.

⁹⁹ The exact number of *vici*, an organizing unit which had achieved notoriety as the basis for mob violence in the late republic, is not available in the Augustan period, but a century later there were about 265 per region. See Wallace-Hadrill's discussion of the debate surrounding discrepancies in Dio's account in Wallace-Hadrill (2008) 276 n. 47. See also Dyson (2005) 215-6 and Galinsky (1996) 300-312.

¹⁰⁰ Wallace-Hadrill (2008) 276.

urban *vici*, while still portraying himself as a restorer of traditional order.¹⁰¹ Yet rather than the fractious, loosely affiliated urban networks of the late republic, the *vici* were now uniformly managed by a set of magistrates drawn from the resident freedmen of the city's individual districts.¹⁰²

A significant, though often overlooked, pairing of Augustus' popular agenda and his gestures concerning fire control is evident in the Augustan "re-branding" of *Stata Mater*, a seldom-mentioned (though most probably very ancient) tutelary deity credited with the power to prevent conflagrations from spreading, if not from breaking out altogether.¹⁰³ Properly worshiped at the spot where the progress of a fire was checked, she seems to have had a shrine in the Forum until some time before Festus, who mentions it in the past tense. After this point, the worship shifted to individual *vici*, as a number of republican inscriptions demonstrate. The focus of these inscriptions is unequivocally local, and they seem to attest to numerous instances in which individual neighborhoods succeeded in suppressing fires. From the time of Augustus onward, however, the

¹⁰¹ The influence of the *populares* as instigating figures in the *vici*, as Laurence and others have recognized, is essential to understanding the subsequent process of Augustan reform: Laurence (1991); see also Nippel (1984) 26 ff. The connection between firefighting and geographic division of the city was also natural, as republican-era lawmakers seem to have understood in 186 BCE, when the *tresviri capitales* delegated to each of *quinqueviri uls cis Tiberim* responsibility for fire control in his respective region of the city; see Sablayrolles (1996).

¹⁰² The multitude of magistrates diminished the potential influence of any single one of them beyond their designated neighborhoods, making the likelihood of another bid for acclaim like Egnatius Rufus' all the more remote. As Favro (1992) 17 points out, the thorough diffusion of responsibility for urban affairs also ensured that the senatorial aedileship continued to decline in importance.

¹⁰³ cf. Festus 416L. *Stata Mater* is credited in multiple inscriptions with warding off fires from specific locations, e.g. *CIL* VI 761-66, 802. On *Stata Mater* in the urban *vici*, see Palmer (1990) 10 and Lott (2007) 167-168. On *Stata Mater* generally, Sablayrolles (1996: 453-468); Capdeville (1995: 419) provide good discussions. For connections between *Stata Mater* and *Lua Mater* as war goddesses, see Rose (1922) 15-18; for the importance of *Stata Mater* to the Augustan reorganization of the *vici*, see Papi, (1994) 139-166; for lustration in conjunction with *Stata Mater*, see *CIL* 6. 766. On *Stata Mater* at Veii, see Torelli (2001).

dedications are to *Stata Mater Augusta*, staking the *princeps*' claim on even these 50 local successes. The gesture appears analogous to the repurposing of worship at compital shrines, which from Augustus onward paired dedications to the imperial *genius* with the traditional veneration of localized Lares. Semantically, "Stata Mater Augusta" unpacks as, more or less, "the power to stop fires – Augustus' power," a message neatly summed up, monumentalized, and distributed throughout the city on a presumably ever-growing number of local dedications. Like the compital shrines and the new class of *magistri* themselves, *Stata Mater Augusta* elevated neighborhood safety and community cohesion from a localized level to a matter of imperial concern, in a self-replicating program of monuments dispersed around the city.

The new firefighting forces formed in 6 CE further expanded the role of the *princeps* in providing order and security to urban life. Drawn exclusively from the ranks of the freedmen, the *vigiles* could claim quasi-military honors, as well as other improvements in societal status.¹⁰⁴ Military-style uniforms, billeting provided throughout the city, and regular pay may have made service in the fire corps a relatively attractive path to financial security and social advancement in the early imperial period. Thus, Augustus used the threat of urban catastrophe to create yet another newly empowered group who owed their advancement to him.¹⁰⁵ Perhaps even more strongly than the local magistrates would have done, the *vigiles* also signaled the *princeps*' willingness to invest seriously in the protection of the city. Augustus was, in fact, enlisting a paramilitary force

¹⁰⁴ Freedmen were ineligible for regular military service. The rights afforded to *vigiles* were exception, eventually including the right to a military will and, for Junian Latins, the granting of citizenship after a given term of service. See Sablayrolles (1996).

¹⁰⁵ Just as with the *magistri vicorum*, a class of freedmen indebted to the *princeps* for their newfound standing was created.

to operate more or less permanently within the city's boundaries. Working beyond the localized boundaries of the *vici*, the *vigiles* were a totalizing force, both demonstrating and authorizing Augustus' broad reach across the city.

In a period when Rome no longer feared invasion by a hostile army, fire constituted one of the major threats that preyed on the city's collective consciousness. The *vigiles* were a tangible reminder of the ruler's commitment to protecting Rome's population, if only from itself: night watches, which had only been instituted in serious emergencies during the republic,¹⁰⁶ became standard practice. Whether or not they regularly acted as a kind of police force is a disputed point.¹⁰⁷ The question, however, is perhaps irrelevant to understanding their true efficacy as agents of the *princeps*' will. Their very presence, even as it preserved the effect of Augustus' urban achievements, deepened his administrative and organizational imprint on Rome. The *vigiles* made their rounds nightly as living monuments to the granular knowledge of the city, its risks and its needs, that underpinned much of Augustus' claim to authority.

Fire and the Imperial Residence.

The clear importance that Augustus accorded fire control in his urban agenda from the 20's BCE onward meant that continued outbreaks would be marked out as embarrassing failures, none more pointedly so than the fires which threatened his own home or other structures which could be closely associated with him. A blaze in 3 CE destroyed the

¹⁰⁶ e.g. during the Bacchanalian (Livy 39.9-19) and Catilinarian conspiracies (Cic. *Cat.* 2.26, 3.29; Sall. *Cat.* 30.7, 32.1); see Nippel (1995) 27-67.

¹⁰⁷ The seven cohorts of *vigiles*, numbering some 560 men apiece, patrolling regularly, enforcing order, and potentially providing surveillance for the *princeps* of daily life in each neighborhood of the city, could essentially be seen as a kind of occupying force. Their police function, however, is a much debated point. See Johnstone (1992).

princeps' own house on the Palatine hill.¹⁰⁸ This dire portent may have invited 52 comparison with the fire that destroyed the hut of Romulus, one of several fire-related portents reported after the death in 12 BCE of Agrippa, Augustus' most trusted advisor and the mastermind of many of Rome's most notable urban improvements. Likewise, both events evoke the legendary end of Tullus Hostilius, Rome's third king. In retribution for an imperfectly accomplished sacrifice, Tullus' house was struck by lightning; Tullus and his proto-palace were reduced to ashes.¹⁰⁹ Tullus' ghost had already perhaps been raised in 36 BCE, when lightning struck the spot on the Palatine which Octavian had designated for his new house. On the advice of *haruspices* he instead dedicated the site to Apollo for a new temple and built his home adjacent to this new site of worship. Crisis averted, Augustus strengthened his hand with an architectural complex uniting the domestic and the divine, clearly symbolizing his close conviviality with his chosen avatar among the Olympians.

Likewise, the fire of 3 CE, which would seem to portend yet another ill omen, instead provided Augustus with a major public relations coup. Both Dio and Suetonius emphasize that the *princeps*' new house was rebuilt with funds drawn entirely from public donation, and they remark upon Augustus' reluctance to receive more than a minimal sum from any single donor.¹¹⁰ Enthusiasm for the project, it is implied, was

¹⁰⁸ Likely to be the same as the one that destroyed the nearby temple of Magna Mater. Suet. *Aug.* 57 and Dio 55.12.4 mention the burning of Augustus' house; Valerius Maximus 1.8.11 and Augustus *RG* 19 mention the rebuilding of the Temple of Magna Mater, to which Ovid also alludes at *Fast.* 4.347-349. No text mentions both as casualties of the same fire, but their adjacent proximity to the *Scalae Caci* suggests a common event (Rubin 2004: 73).

¹⁰⁹ An event that Livy treats in detail (Livy 1.31). On the temple of Apollo see "Apollo, Templum (Palatium)" in Haselberger et al., 46-50. The lightning prodigy is recounted in Suet. *Aug.* 29.3. and Dio 53.1.3.

¹¹⁰ Suet. *Aug.* 57; Dio 55.12.4.

apparently such that an almost unimaginable quantity of donations poured in. Rising 53 from the ashes of potentially grave misfortune, the new *domus* bound *princeps*, *urbs*, and *imperium* into a reciprocal relationship of new and greater proportions. In sum, each destruction further cleared the urban landscape for redevelopment advancing the *princeps*' presence in the city through monuments and commemoration.

Simultaneously, the threat of further damage became the basis for imperial self-fashioning in the form of prevention efforts. Vergil's discussion of the benefits of fire in *Georgics* 1 holds out the hope that some good may come of a seemingly catastrophic destruction.¹¹¹ Livy, precisely in the context of an *urbs incensa*, famously references the possibility of regrowth after the Gallic sack with similar vegetal imagery.¹¹² Ovid likewise presents a vision of Rome risen anew from the ashes of destruction: (1.523) *victa tamen vinces eversaue, Troia, resurges*, "though conquered and overthrown, Troy, you will yet rise again and you will conquer!" Timagenes, a noted dissident of the age, bitterly inverts the rhetoric after one conflagration: "the only thing that upset him (Timagenes) when conflagrations occurred in Rome was his knowledge that better buildings would arise than those which had gone down in the flames."¹¹³ As these

¹¹¹The shepherds too may have been attempting to benefit their project through a controlled burn like the one Vergil himself suggests at *Geo.* 1.84-85: *saepe etiam sterilis incendere profuit agros/atque leuem stipulam crepitantibus urere flammis*. Vergil further suggests that a violent intervention may be the only way to bring hidden growth (*occultas uiris*, 1. 86) to the surface and root out stubborn flaws at 1. 87-88: *omne per ignem/excoquitur uitium atque exsudat inutilis umor*.

¹¹² I do not propose that Vergil is here responding directly to Livy, or *vice versa*, but rather that both authors were employing an image that (it seems reasonable to speculate) would have been popular in the rhetoric of the early principate. For discussion of the complexities of influence between Livy and the Augustan poets generally, see Vasaly in Levene and Nelis (2002). Feeney (2008,102-103) stresses that Livy here is referencing the earlier work of Claudius Quadrigarius, though this does not necessarily mean he imported the image of the regrowing trunk.

¹¹³ As quoted in Seneca, *Ep.* 91. This reference to a Phoenix-like re-emergence can be productively compared earlier representations of Rome *vis-à-vis* Troy, the Gauls, and Hannibal in

quotations compellingly demonstrate, the era's literary authors used the tropes of 54
destruction and renewal in varying configurations to create a compelling yet mediated
context for examining the risks, uncertainties, and rewards of life at Rome under the new
regime. Vergil engineered a powerful mode of expression for filtering the concerns of
contemporary Rome through the lenses of the legendary past, remote locations, or
seemingly obscure topics, which his successors in poetry and prose alike adapted to their
own purposes.

Vergil and the Augustan Literary Tradition: Foundations in Destruction.

Recovering from conflagration and preventing further outbreaks became attractive
metaphors for legitimizing the new order imposed by Augustus after decades of civil
conflict and depredations to Rome's urban facade. Vergil's work deserves attention as an
early and influential response to the rhetoric of disaster and renewal being retailed both
by supporters and detractors of the Julian faction during and after the civil conflict.
Moreover, he provides powerful reflections of the overwhelming anxiety and persistent
fear of a return to disorder that Rome suffered in the early decades of recovery. Though
many of the images and narratives employed by Vergil and his successors of course had
precedents in Greco-Roman literature, here I focus on the new charge of meaning these
selections gained in light of the city's recent history.

In this section, we shall examine how a series of fire images intersects and
develops a complex set of relations with a series of leadership images, creating a set of

Cicero, *DRP* and elsewhere. Its full implications will be teased out in my discussion of Seneca (Chapter 2).

metonyms between fire, leaders, and cities. Each of these three items encode different 55 valences of meaning, which unfold across a syntax of repeated motifs.¹¹⁴ Vergilian poetics established a range of images of fiery destruction, which could be deployed in flexible and surprising ways to convey a complex set of concerns, and to evoke powerful memories. Vitruvius' comments on urban planning and building materials will be adduced for parallels with Vergil's treatment of fire, providing further ideological subtext and demonstrating the broad applicability of the terms and concepts under examination here. In later sections, evidence from Ovid and Manilius provides further development of the conceptual contours defined by Vergil.

Incendiary Environments: Vitruvius on the City and Vergil on the Grove.

The four books of Vergil's *Georgics* purport to offer instruction on how to build a productive and thriving environment.¹¹⁵ Andrew Wallace-Hadrill has made the case for the advancement of technical expertise and various totalizing accomplishments in specialized fields as a major part of the Augustan agenda and a defining trait of the era. Fire appears as the primary exponent of violence against Vergil's pastoral landscapes,

¹¹⁴ cf. Miller (1995) 228. Miller's study focuses on fire, as does my discussion. Miller, however, views it exclusive it in relation to themes of sex and gender, responding in part to the work of Lakoff (1987) (the first work cited in Miller 1995). As Miller continues: "By metonyms, I mean a set of terms that can be substituted for one another in a series, but are not necessarily identical to one another. Thus every instance of the imagery of fire in the *Aeneid* need not be identical with that of every other, in terms of either its denotation or connotation, for the totality of those images to constitute an intelligible series of possible substitutions. Moreover, as terms that follow one another in a series of associated meanings, these metonyms together make up a system and so can be seen to exhibit a metaphoric, as well as metonymic, relation to one another."

¹¹⁵ The plague in *Georgics* Book 3 and the famous description of bee society in Book 4 have long been read as a reflection of the civil conflict which had led to the demise of the Roman republic, of the longing for urban renewal, and of the overall urban and ideological nature of Vergil's "pastoral" project. Farrell (1991) 250 ff. notes much of this subtext, while integrating it into Vergil's program on literary allusion.

suggesting an analogy between fire and civil strife.¹¹⁶ As was noted earlier, Vergil 56 highlights the potential benefits of fire in the first book of his *Georgics*, an image with clear societal analogues.¹¹⁷ The fire in *Georgics 2*, by contrast, envisions the failure of a newly established plantation, incautiously founded and carelessly endangered by the very figures purportedly responsible for its welfare.¹¹⁸

Although an ultimate goal of peaceful productivity is advanced in the *Georgics*, the risk of exposure to harmful influence is omnipresent, and much of the text is concerned with injunctions against taking the wrong course of action, or with repairing damage once it has occurred.¹¹⁹ The text of Vitruvius, which, like Vergil's purports to offer technical instruction, again reveals this preoccupation, and likewise has profound ideological implications. Vergil's diligent addressee is instructed on how to pick the best site for his vineyards to flourish (2.177-353), much as Vitruvius advises his readers, the most prominent of whom must surely be his dedicatee Augustus, on the proper strategy for siting a city.¹²⁰ Both the *Georgics* and *de Architectura* are works of instruction, oriented explicitly (in the case of the former) and implicitly (in the case of the latter)

¹¹⁶ cf. Dominik (2009).

¹¹⁷ *Geo.* 1. 85-90: fire here is described as burning out impurities and expelling useless moisture, while the heat opens up fresh ducts for growth. See below: 62-3.

¹¹⁸ Likewise, the challenge of bringing an entity "back from the dead" creates a thematic thread between the figures of Aristaeus, Orpheus, and, implicitly, those who face the aftermath the fire in *Georgics 2*.

¹¹⁹ Most famously, the *bougonia* sequence of *Georgics 4* recounts a ritual to revive a dead bee colony. For the profound anxiety and melancholy even of this positive outcome, see Perkell (1978). For parallels between the bees and Roman society, see e.g. Griffin (1979).

¹²⁰ *Vitr. De Arch.* 1.4-6. On Vergil's didactic addressee: Schiesaro (1993) rightly comments on the complex proliferation of addressees in the *Georgics*, which pushes the poem's focus outside the exclusive context of learning.

toward the *princeps*.¹²¹ Both point out again and again the role of the leader in 57
organizing and managing a productive environment.

Vitruvius further signals the ideological value of his work at various points. Book 2, for example, begins with a narrative of how the architect Dinocrates, with his skill at presenting novelty (*novitas*, 2.2.1) to the public, became an indispensable member of Alexander's campaign of conquest. Vergil likewise was engaged in the business of making worlds anew, constructing landscapes as a powerful expression of his poetic and ideological vision. One of the key lessons in both texts seems to be that these environments (and their inhabitants), in order to flourish freely, require freedom *from* any number of noxious influences.

Vitruvius is preoccupied with the siting of a town away from harmful influences such as heat, cold, and pestilential vapors (1.4); he also stresses that the fiery triad of Venus, Vulcan, and Mars must have their temples outside the city to avoid not just the physical risk of conflagration, but the psychic inflammations of love and war (1.7.2). Vitruvius likewise (2.8.20) decries the use of the so-called *opus craticium* (wattle-and-daub) technique because it was prone to collapse and caught fire easily.¹²² He grudgingly

¹²¹ Formally, in the *Georgics* Vergil asks Maecenas to assist him in an effort to instruct farmers who don't know the right way (1.40-1). Caesar (i.e. Octavian) is brought in not as an addressee *per se*, but as a deity who and *triskaidekatos theos*, addressed after the twelve rustic divinities in book 1. He first invites a series of twelve deities to come forth and be present (5-23). The proem then continues with an appeal to a person named as 'Caesar' (25; Vergil is referring to Octavian), whose godhead is said to be imminent and who is invited to preside over the work's beginning (24-42). Thus, the proem seems to acknowledge him as supreme authority in the Roman world. Thereafter Caesar/Octavian is a frequent point of reference, e.g. in the encomium of Italy (2.136-76) refer to his eastern campaign during the winter of 30/29; the proem to Book 3 (26-36) anticipates the Triple Triumph of 29. Suetonius (*Verg.* 25, 27) tells us that Vergil, under the sponsorship of Maecenas, read the poem to Caesar upon his return to Italy in the summer of 29. For further discussion, see Clausen in Kenney and Clausen (1982) 320-2. On Maecenas' patronage more generally, Horsfall (1981) remains fundamental.

¹²² Clarke (1991) 258-259.

admits, however, that the method was fast and economical, clearly suggesting that the use of such materials was common in the vernacular architecture of Rome.¹²³ as Vitruvius concedes, however, eliminating the harmful element altogether might simply be unrealistic; the best that can be done is measures to minimize the risk. Like *opus craticium*, a mob was an urban component uniquely hard to interdict or control. Yet numerous leadership figures saw it as advantageous, at various times, to cultivate favor among the urban poor, who then could be deployed as forces of intimidation or outright urban warfare when the need arose. The uncontrollable elements of Rome, be they disadvantaged inhabitants or buildings constructed on the cheap, presented a risk that was nigh-impossible to eradicate, especially since some leaders actively encouraged and exploited them.

Similarly, Vergil advocates against a number of locations for planting various crops, finally cautioning us that should the planter graft onto the wild olive, all his efforts to avoid other pitfalls will have been for nothing. Before delving more deeply into the text, it is worth noting the integration of several themes present in the opening lines of the *Georgics*, each of which features in our discussion. Vergil begins by summarizing the main topics of the work (1-5), and by inviting a series of twelve deities to come forth and be present (5-23).¹²⁴ As Damien Nelis and Jocelyne Nelis-Clément have recently argued, this progression of gods evoked as physical presences is highly suggestive of the ritual of

¹²³ “They are conducive to great calamity, acting almost like torches in case of fire. It is much better, therefore, in the first instance, to be at the expense of burnt bricks, than from cheapness to be in perpetual risk...but if expedition, or want of funds, drives us to the use of this sort of work, or as an expedient to bring work to a square form, let it be executed as follows...”

¹²⁴ The observations on the syntax of *Georgics* 1.5-23 are drawn from Nelis and Nelis-Clément (2011), 2-4. The point concerning the possible significance of the syntactic parallels created between Neptune, Aristaeus, and Caesar/Octavian, however, is my own.

the *pompa circensis*, creating an immediate sense of doubling between the pastoral 59 arts celebrated in lines 1-5 and the highly ideologically charged urban spectacle of the *pompa*. Similarities of line position and terminology suggest that these lines Neptune, the master of horses, Aristaeus, the introducer of olive cultivation, and Caesar have been singled out and syntactically aligned with one another.¹²⁵ As we will see, both olive cultivation and the management of horses, especially in the implied context of the Circus, are to be the focus of highly ideologically charged passages later in the *Georgics*, so it is worth noting now that Vergil seems to create an implicit parity between Caesar, an anticipated divinity, and the roles assigned to Neptune and Aristaeus here.

In the *Georgics* generally, the pairing of city and country as polar opposites in fact makes available certain analogies between them: a city in some sense replicates the vast density of a great wood, with an infinite number of unfamiliar and unforeseen dangers around every corner.¹²⁶ Likewise, the farmer's struggle to domesticate nature and bring it to a state of secure productivity, certainly one of the most profound themes of the *Georgics*, has clear parallels in the leader's efforts to establish a stable society. Vergil

¹²⁵ Nelis and Nelis-Clément (2011) 3. The invocation proper begins with *vos* (5), and in turn the Sun, the Moon, Liber and Ceres, the Fauns and the Dryads are asked to approach: *ferte...pedem* (11). A shift to the singular follows, (*tuque o* at 12, echoing the initial *vos, o*), introducing Neptune: ...*tuque o, cui prima frementem/ fudit equum magno tellus percussa tridenti./ Neptune; et cultor nemorum, cui pinguis Caele/ ter centum nivei tondent dumeta iuuenci...* Neptune (14) is cited here as the figure who struck the earth to create the first horse (*cui prima frementem/ fudit equum magno tellus percussa tridenti*, 12-13). A connective *et* then adds the deity Aristaeus, identified only as *cultor nemorum*. To finish out the sequence: Pan is introduced with the marker *ipse*, and Minerva, Triptolemus, and Silvanus are all added to the list in syntactically parallel manner with Pan. When the next sentence introducing Caesar begins, however, it is with *tuque adeo, quem mox quae sint habitura deorum concilia* (24-5), which recalls the *tuque o* that introduced Neptune (12-14) and by implication Aristaeus, the *cultor nemorum*. See also and Conington-Nettleship *ad loc.*

¹²⁶ On the tension between nature and urbanism more generally in Greek and Roman literature, and the dialectic between nature and culture that engenders urbanism and in particular, on the relationship between claims to power and displays of cultivated space at Rome, see Giesecke (2007) 116-125.

makes clear in a key passage of *Georgics* 2 that the greatest danger is when the two 60
 worlds blend, and the wild and the settled meet and mingle. He warns against grafting the
 domestic olive onto the (presumably abundant, naturally occurring) wild, because not
 only does the wild olive (oleaster) invite flame, but furthermore only the wild part of the
 grafted tree will survive if there is a fire:

*neve tibi ad solem vergant vineta cadentem,
 neve inter vitis corylum sere, neve flagella
 summa pete aut summa defringe ex arbore plantas 300
 (tantus amor terrae), neu ferro laede retunso
 semina, neue oleae silvestris insere truncos.
 nam saepe incautis pastoribus excidit ignis,
 qui furtim pingui primum sub cortice tectus
 robora comprehendit, frondesque elapsus in altis 305
 ingentem caelo sonitum dedit; inde secutus
 per ramos victor perque alta cacumina regnat,
 et totum involvit flammis nemus et ruit atram
 ad caelum picea crassus caligine nubem,
 praesertim si tempestas a vertice siluis 310
 incubuit, glomeratque ferens incendia ventus.
 hoc ubi, non a stirpe valent caesaeque reverti
 possunt atque ima similes revirescere terra;
 infelix superat foliis oleaster amaris. (Geo. 2.298–314)*

Also, neither let your vineyard not face west,
 and nor sow hazels among your vines, nor look
 for a cutting from the top or snap shoots
 from the treetop (such is their love for earth!),
 nor damage them with the blunted blade, nor
 make grafts onto the trunks of the wild olive.
 For often among careless shepherds a fire has started up:
 stealthily concealed at first beneath oily bark,
 it gathers strength, and once it has reached the highest boughs
 it has raised a great din to the sky. Then, having run along the branches
 it rules victorious at the tree's very top,
 and embroils the whole grove in flames, and thick
 with pitch darkness, it pours a black cloud into the sky—
 especially if a storm has been brooding over the wood
 from above, and the wind sweeps the conflagration up,
 carrying it further. When this has happened, they do not flourish
 the stock, and cannot return after being cut back
 or grow again in the same way from the earth below:

This image of a plant growing back or not after its limbs are damaged (elsewhere in literature, cut more often than burned) is often used in contexts that celebrate Rome's ability to come back time and again from disaster. As mentioned previously, it is precisely in the context of an *urbs incensa* that Livy famously embellishes on Rome's regrowth after the Gallic sack with similar vegetal imagery, a passage that also twins Rome's renewal with an increased supply of literary and historical material.¹²⁷

Timagenes' curmudgeonly quip also evokes the narrative of Rome's Phoenix-like rebirth.¹²⁸ Vergil's grove fire allusively seeks to evoke and problematize this rhetoric.

Vergil's oleaster can be read as a negative variation on the theme of post-disaster renewal. The wild olive, or oleaster, is a tree Vergil elsewhere associates closely with Italian identity, as well as with civil conflict.¹²⁹ The closely packed grove of the *Georgics* reproduces many of the risks of an urban environment, with structures "growing" up in

¹²⁷ Livy 6.1 (on which, see above at 23 and 59ff.) famously describes Rome after the Gallic sack as like a plant flourishing all the more after it is cut back. Likewise, Horace (*Odes* 4.6) figures Aeneas, wounded on Troy's battlefield, as a felled tree rescued from funeral flames by Apollo, while *Odes* 4.4 (lines 49-60) Hannibal's speech compares Rome to a holm-oak (*illex*) that draws strength from the very blade that hacks at it.

¹²⁸ The analogy between planting of crops and the tending of livestock and the successful management of the state is clear, and there is a long tradition of reading the epyllion in which the Orpheus story appears as especially tinged with Augustan political allusions (on this last point, see Nadeau in Woodman and West, 1984). The phrase [*non...possunt*] *ima similes reuirescere terra* ("they can't come back to life, in the same form, from the depths of the earth") at *Geo.* 2.313 seems particularly reminiscent of the fate of Orpheus' project. That the epyllion is speculated to have replaced and expunged section in praise of the disgraced Gallus, who "incautiously" attracted the ire of Augustus, is also suggestive of this theme.

¹²⁹ In the *Aeneid*, it is an oleaster sacred to the Italian deity Faunus, laden with votive offerings, that Aeneas strikes with his spear. The Trojans go in to clearcut the sacred grove to leave the area open for fighting (*Aen.* 12.766-71). The phrase *foliis amaris* (cf. *Geo.* 1.314) describes the oleaster at *Aen.* 12.766, which reinforces the suggestion of Weadon (1981, 70) that the *Aeneid* passage recalls the scene in *Georgics* 1. As Schell (2009: 69 n. 136) remarks of the passage in *Aeneid* 12: "As in a graft of cultured Trojans onto wild Italians, only barbarity will survive after a disaster (such as, for instance, civil war)."

risky proximity to another, where the unfortunate, if near-inevitable casual interaction⁶² of one “inflammatory” figure with an easily incited segment of the population (here, the “wild” and volatile oleaster) leads to the annihilation of the entire zone.¹³⁰ The shepherds, however, described as *incauti*, initiate destruction in their attempt to modify nature, by clearing pasture with fire (*Geo.* 2.303-14).

That the behavior of shepherds is meant to evoke military power, or perhaps violent political action more generally, is further suggested by an emblematic simile later in the poem (*Geo.* 3.339-48) comparing a nomadic herdsman to a Roman soldier.¹³¹ Vergil, then, is keenly aware of the inherent affinity of some materials for ignition, and perhaps for the tendencies of certain agents in society to reach out for the “torch” of violence as an easy, if short-sighted solution. If the careful planting and tending of vines represents a more gentle and productive model for building society, then the oleaster, described as “forestry” (*silvestris*) at 302, represents the wild and restive element in the population.

Unsurprisingly, the fire in *Georgics* 2 has attracted interest among scholars adducing it as reinforcement for a negative or ambivalent Vergilian worldview.¹³² For

¹³⁰ We might compare *tantus amor terrae* at 2.301 to the destructive nature of *amor* in *Georgics* 3.242-8, which is figured both as a fire and a storm. See Ross (1987) 157-67, 177-83 and Morgan (1999) 91-3. Morgan productively relates this passage to Gransden (1976: 39-40) on the potential of fire to create or destroy in *Aeneid* 8.

¹³¹ Chew (2002) 616.

¹³² Miles (1980) and Ross (1980) both read it as evidence of the conflict between natural and cultivated states, while Thomas reads the outbreak as an expression of an underlying elemental imbalance, symptomatic of Iron-Age sterility and the failure of labor. For Putnam, the passage expresses the tension between the stable and volatile sides of nature. Finally, the insights into the *Georgics* provided by Farrell (1991) suggest that we should consider a possible metapoetic-literary meaning (incompatible plants as two genres of poetry that cannot coexist comfortably?) alongside a political or historical reading. This is especially true since allusion appropriates language to a new use, much as grafting might transfer a plant to a new “context,” and Vergil explicitly figures the poet’s retreat into literary work (and escape from violent warfare and the

example, Christopher Nappa emphasizes the importance of *labor* to understanding 63 Vergil's models of success and failure, pinpointing the problem of the passage not so much as the failure of labor, but rather its misguided application.¹³³ Implicit in any analysis of *labor*, I would add, is the agency of the person performing it. The diligent planter and the careless shepherds, both indirectly responsible for the fire, provide divergent models for leadership: their conflicting goals and methods bring about the destruction of their microcosm. Vergil's discussion of the benefits of fire in *Georgics* 1 holds out the hope that some good may come of a seemingly catastrophic destruction.¹³⁴ The fire in *Georgics* 2, by contrast, portends the failure of a new society, injudiciously founded and carelessly endangered by the very figures purported to be responsible for its welfare.¹³⁵ The challenges faced by a young Octavian as he returned to a Rome ravaged by decades of neglect, urban warfare, and arson (a problem recently foregrounded by the fire in the Circus Maximus) were not unlike those of Vergil's planter of groves. The *cultor nemorum*, invoked as a cult epithet of Aristaeus in the prologue of Book 1, was

struggle for power) as dwelling in a grove at *Geo.* 2. 475-540. Such retreats from urban chaos are a commonplace of literary self-fashioning at the time, cf. Horace, *Epist.* 2.2.65-86. Farrell (1991, 3) characterizes the *Georgics* as possibly most allusive poem of antiquity. The focus in this section on a broader set of societal parallels and pressures is largely constructed around Farrell's (1991, 17) understanding that an agenda of literary allusion and an ideological element in this text go hand in hand: "Allusion in Vergil frequently serves ideological purposes and therefore offers useful literary-historical evidence."

¹³³ Nappa (2003) 53: "The fire does indeed show the frailty of man's accomplishments in general but more particularly when he has failed to safeguard them and failed from the start to do things correctly."

¹³⁴ The shepherds too may have been attempting to benefit their project through a controlled burn like the one Vergil himself suggests at 1.84-85 *saepe etiam sterilis incendere profuit agros/atque leuem stipulam crepitantibus urere flammis*. Vergil further suggests that a violent intervention may be the only way to bring hidden growth (*occultas viris*, 1. 86) to the surface and root out stubborn flaws at 1. 87-88: *omne per ignem/excoquitur vitium atque exsudat inutilis umor*.

¹³⁵ Likewise, the challenge of bringing an entity "back from the dead" creates a thematic thread between the figures of Aristaeus, Orpheus, and, implicitly, those who face the aftermath the fire in *Georgics* 2.

syntactically linked with Octavian. An Aristaeus-like addressee is implied as the 64
tender of the scorched grove: here, he is a leader who, though perhaps partly responsible
for the catastrophe, might learn from the cautionary example and start again with better
methods. Likewise, the proem's image of Neptune producing the first horse with the
strike of his trident activates the context of the Circus and the powerful metaphor of
horsemanship as a metaphor for social control. As we shall see, these too return later in
the poem, freighted with major ideological significance.

Chariots of Fire: *Georgics* 1.

Vergil's consistent emphasis on the leader's responsibility for a failed endeavor seems particularly pointed given the challenges that Octavian faced in the early years of his reign. Civil war and universal conflict are (as I have argued) implicit in *Georgics* 2's grove fire, but are explicitly raised in the conclusion of *Georgics* 1. Vergil powerfully advertises his pastorally-themed poem's ideological concerns in a key moment of transition between books that seems to mimic the uncertain moment of political instability addressed in the text. The image of once-governable forces running out of all control is powerfully developed in a simile likening the turmoil of civil war to a charioteer who has lost control of his team:

*hinc movet Euphrates, illinc Germania bellum;
vicinae ruptis inter se legibus urbes* 510
*arma ferunt; saevit toto Mars impius orbe,
ut cum carceribus sese effudere quadrigae,
addunt in spatia, et frustra retinacula tendens
fertur equis auriga neque audit currus habenas.* (*Geo.* 1. 509-14)

The Euphrates is mobilizing from one side, from the other, Germany; neighboring cities, the compacts between them broken, are bringing war; unholy Mars lays

waste across the globe, just like the times when the chariots dive out of the gate, they speed up along the straightaway, and there, pointlessly gripping the restraints as he's borne along by his horses, is the driver - and the chariot doesn't listen to reins. 65

Like the fire in *Georgics* 2, then, a force originally deployed for one purpose converts itself to another, unforeseen end. The motion of the chariot as its uncontrolled horses bound forward around the track (a setting implied by the image's starting-gates) is also like the fire, encircling the grove in a vortex at 2.308.¹³⁶ Moreover, Vergil deploys the charioteer image as the conclusion to a sequence of solar references, allusions to Caesar's death at the height of his power, and a prayer fraught with anxiety over the newly empowered Octavian's still-precarious bid to restore order. Together, these elements form a suggestive constellation that evokes an old myth: that of Phaethon, which was beginning to take on powerful new associations.¹³⁷

The imagery of chariot-racing, as previously mentioned, is implicit in the proem's opening parade of invoked divinities.¹³⁸ The juxtaposition of the chariot simile with the

¹³⁶ Barchiesi also comments on the common "vortex" imagery between Phaethon's conflagration in *Met.* 2 and the chariots of the Circus Maximus; see Barchiesi (2005) *ad* 2.230-4. This imagery admittedly becomes somewhat confused, since in the Circus the solar object (obelisk) stands in the center and other objects (chariots) circle it, which is not how the *mundus* operates; Phaethon makes a linear journey from E to W, and not explicitly an orbit. Yet I, with Barchiesi (2009) would argue that Phaethon's ride inherently evoked the activity of the circus, in that this was the context in which the Roman audience would be most familiar with charioteering.

¹³⁷ An identification dismissed by Lyne (1987) but convincingly made by Gale (2000, 188-192) and endorsed by Nelis (2008). On a more general level, Nelis (2008: 497 n.8) additionally notes that aspects of charioteering in the *Georgics* overall have attracted considerable attention recently, e.g. Balot (1998) Freudenburg (2001) 42ff., 78-82, Henderson (2002) 62ff., Hardie (2004) and (2005) 24-7, Nappa (2005) 66-8, 119-133, 158ff. 220, and Lovatt (2005) 32-9. See also Volk (2003).

¹³⁸ It is also suggestive, as Fratantuono (2011: 34) points out, that the proem's ensuing prediction of Octavian's catasterism places him next to the sign of Scorpio, who will draw in his claws to make room for the new god (*Geo.* 1.34-5), unlike the Scorpio which has *saeva braccchia* that must be avoided, according to Ovid's Sun-god (*Met.* 2.82-3). Scorpio later lashes out with its toxic tail at Ovid's Phaethon, sending the horses into their fatal stampede (*Met.* 2.196-200). Since

image of the sun in mourning for the death of Caesar (*Geo.* 1.466-8) suggests a 66
conflation between the death of Phaethon, for whom the sun could be expected to mourn,
and the assassination of Caesar. Yet again, there also are hints that Caesar himself,
“extinguished” (*extincto...Caesare*, *Geo.* 1.466) or “eclipsed” by death, is to be
identified with the veiled sun, and thus that it is Octavian who succeeds Caesar in the
Phaethon role. The association may have been especially apropos since Octavian, like
Phaethon, was advertising himself as the “son of a god.”¹³⁹ Hence, Vergil subtly
superimposes the legend of Phaethon upon the leaders vying for control over Rome. Fiery
destruction by implication emerges as the near-inevitable outcome of the race for
hegemony.¹⁴⁰

Phaethon is perhaps a natural narrative to reference in connection with any time
of trouble. Yet the specific factors of vexed claims to filiation between gods and mortals;
the sense of elite competition inherent in almost any chariot image from Homer and
Pindar onward.¹⁴¹ The outcome of worldwide calamity way well have conspired to make
Phaethon especially attractive given the political circumstances of the second triumviral
period and the still-shaky recovery of the 20’s BCE.¹⁴²

no known pre-Augustan model which might have inspired both authors explicitly details
Phaethon’s ride, however, this must remain only a speculation.

¹³⁹ 1.466-514; Gale (2000) 35-36. On the fundamental importance of Octavian’s early claims to
power as *divi filius*, see e.g. Southern (1998) 62-63.

¹⁴⁰ It is tempting to speculate further that Vergil’s allusive references to Phaethon may also hint at
a more virulent strain of rhetoric, perhaps still prevalent as he composed his *Georgics*, which may
have claimed that Octavian was unequal to the task set out for him by his father figure. Certainly,
it is reasonable to imagine that the intellectual elite of the time may have looked askance at the
prodigy of the *sidus Iulium* in light of the view, expressed in Aristotle’s *Meteorology*, that
Phaethon’s downfall was to be connected with a meteor shower that brought about a near-total
destruction of human civilization. See introduction, 18-21.

¹⁴¹ Chariots also come to signify poetic competition from an early period: see above, n. 137.

¹⁴² As discussed above, 38-40: the Circus Maximus, by its very structure suggestive of the circular
motion of the cosmos, had a temple to Sol rising out of the stands on the Aventine side; the entire

The collocation of fire and chariot racing in the final lines *Georgics* 1 may 67

well have had a potent currency at the time of the poem's composition, given the recent conflagration of the Circus Maximus in 31 CE. Vergil would not live to see Augustus dedicate his twin obelisks from Heliopolis in 10 BCE, but it is not necessary to insist on a specific reference to the Circus, or to Augustus' plans for its adornment, to see that charioteering, fiery destruction, the fate of Rome, and contested succession were all closely associated issues as Vergil composed the *Georgics*. Just as the confluence of these ideas perhaps naturally invited a re-reading of the myth of Phaethon, the burnt-out (and subsequently restored) Circus stood as a visual reminder of the same array of images and concerns.

The rebuilding of the Circus initiated under Augustus constituted an assertion of control over the city, the empire, and the very cosmos. It could perhaps be seen as a kind of monumental punctuation to the debate. A more triumphant narrative emerges from the new Circus: the Phaethon-associated "vocabulary" of images, including chariots, solar imagery, external threats, societal disaster, and the memory of the fire are all imminent, yet now are controlled, mediated, and displayed for public benefit. As we will soon see, Ovid is unwilling to let the phantom of Phaethon depart, and he clearly implicates both Vergil's poetics and Augustus' monuments in his treatment of the topic. Vergil revisits this imagery himself in the *Aeneid*, effectively re-activating the threat of fire only to suggest that it can be tamed by capable leadership.

Circus, Tertullian tells us, was dedicated to Sol. The *pièce de résistance* of Augustus' restoration was the obelisk with multiple solar affinities.

Vergil's expressions of anxiety over contemporary political instability, as advanced the *Georgics*, lend weight to the *Aeneid's* programmatic first simile.¹⁴³ Featuring an anachronistic importation from the Roman political sphere, the simile compares Neptune calming a storm at sea to statesman, respected for his personal prestige, who subdues a seditious mob assembled with stones and firebrands at the ready:

...levat ipse tridenti; 145

et vastas aperit syrtis, et temperat aequor,
atque rotis summas levibus perlabitur undas.
Ac veluti magno in populo cum saepe coorta est
seditio, saevitque animis ignobile vulgus,
iamque **faces et saxa volant—furor arma ministrat;** 150
tum, pietate gravem ac meritis si forte virum quem
conspexere, silent, arrectisque auribus adstant;
ille regit dictis animos, et **pectora mulcet,**—
sic cunctus pelagi cecidit fragor, aequora postquam
prospiciens genitor caeloque invectus aperto 155
flectit equos, **curruque volans dat lora secundo.**

...the master lifts (ships) with his trident, opens up huge sandbars, and calms the sea's surface, and then he skims along the topmost waves in his smooth vehicle. And just as when (as often amongst a great people) there arises a faction, and the unrefined crowd is running wild with opinion, and already, stones and firebrands are aloft (rage supplies weapons): then, if by chance they fasten their view on a man, one who carries weight because of his integrity and his record, they fall mute, and the stand with ears ready to listen; he guides their opinions with his statement, and he subdues their hearts. Just so did the whole splitting roar of the sea subside, and then, gazing across the surface of the waters, their father, conveyed across the open blue sky, wheeled his horses, and gave free rein: his chariot was obedient.

Vergil here situates his mythic narrative in relation to contemporary events at Rome in a proleptic fashion, even as he establishes the polarity of two of the *Aeneid's* most thematically significant terms: *furor*, seen in both the anger of the mob and the rushing of

¹⁴³ Briggs (1980) and Farrell (1991) provide ample demonstration of Vergil's intricate use of self-imitation and reuse of his *Georgics* in the *Aeneid*.

Aeolus' winds, and *pietas*, the defining virtue by which the statesman calms the mob 69 and by which Aeneas too is primarily distinguished.¹⁴⁴ Specific verbal parallels with the *Georgics* material suggest further resonances with the themes of civil conflict and sudden conflagration. A similarity between the raging crowd and ungovernable horses is suggested by their response to the leader's calm, confident presence: they prick up their ears (*auribus arrectis*).¹⁴⁵ Later, Neptune's magnificent exit from the scene at 1.157 emphasizes his command of the chariot. This detail stands out as a direct inversion of the image of the would-be *princeps*/charioteer- *manqué* in *Georgics* 1, where the frantic driver had no effect on a chariot which "would not listen (or cannot hear)," this leader offers free rein to his "obedient vehicle" (*curru... secundo*).

An affinity between the angry crowd and the flammable material of the oleaster in *Georgics* 2 also appears possible. The winds which cause the storm in *Aeneid* 1 to "brood" on the sea (*incubuerit mari*, 85) recall the lurking *tempestas* which foment the fire at *Georgics* 2.311 (*incubuit*). Here, it is the urban mob which rages out within a single population (*magno in populo... saevitque animis ignobile volgus*) in contrast to Mars amid global conflict (*Geo.* 1.511, *saevit toto Mars impius orbe*). At *Georgics* 1.508, instruments of peaceful agriculture are worked into blades (*curvae rigidum falces conflantur in ensem*); in this simile, *furor* also makes weapons out of everyday items

¹⁴⁴ Equally, this simile contains multiple correspondences with Neptune's own role in the fiery destruction of *Neptunia Troia* in *Aeneid* Book 2 (624 ff), a narrative to be read (as mentioned above) as a reflection of the Civil Wars of the 1st century BCE. For a discussion of the possible historical models for the statesman in this simile, see Morwood (1998), citing Harrison (1988) 55-9 and Austin (1971) *ad loc.* However, as Harrison (1988:56) justly remarks, "we need not limit the poet to one model only for a simile."

¹⁴⁵ An observation for which I owe thanks to Kirk Freudenburg, who remarked more generally in a recent conversation that he always teaches this scene as a re-working of the charioteer simile in *Georgics* 1. As Freudenburg further observes, Vergil again conflates a nautical event with charioteering (and, implicitly, with political competition) in the boat races of Book 5 (104-150).

(*furor arma ministrat*).¹⁴⁶ The situation in the *Aeneid* 1 simile, is, unmistakably, to be read as an urban political disturbance. Thus, the simile's imagery suggests a concatenation between control of the elements, charismatic leadership, a restive population, and fire, always at hand, an essential of human existence, weaponized: the worst-case outcome is a massive conflagration, destroying the very civic environment over which the contention began. This outcome is evoked, only to be averted, in the reader's imagination; yet the anxieties raised by its very possibility suggest the powerful place this type of scene held in the Roman imagination.

The *Aeneid's* most striking expression of how leaders lacking foresight or proper self-restraint invite large-scale disasters, as if by some transitive property, is the proleptic relationship between Dido's erotic fire and the eventual conflagration of her person and her city. Dido's narrative offers a *tour de force* of tropes linking fire and leadership, returning again to the model of *pastor-as-incendiary* established above. Against this material, we can assess the strength of various parallels and counterexamples that Vergil offers in the remainder of the epic. The connection Dido seems to exemplify between fire and female eroticism is often emphasized.¹⁴⁷ While certainly many examples fit this description, I would suggest that focusing so exclusively on the gendered aspect of

¹⁴⁶ In describing how the leader soothes (*mulcet*) the hearts of the crowd, Vergil may also allude to Vulcan's apotropaic epithet *Mulciber*, suggesting again the connection between psychic disturbance and urban conflagration.

¹⁴⁷ e.g. Miller (1995) 225: "as a number of scholars have noted, fire is a recurrent motif throughout the *Aeneid* and is associated with the dangers of uncontrolled passion of either an erotic or a heroic nature. Both sorts of passion are, in turn, associated with women and sexuality."

Dido's undoing may obscure her importance to Vergil's development of larger patterns connecting fire and leadership in specific ways.¹⁴⁸ 71

That Dido is an effective politician and an adept leader of men is first suggested by the résumé with which Venus presents Aeneas at 1.341-68, highlighting the queen's brilliant capability in the description of Dido's escape from Tyre, as well as the formidable start to her new city, and, most memorably, the emblematic phrase *dux femina facti*. Dido further displays a subtle command of rhetoric and a talent for defusing tense situations in her first speech: confronted with the insulting speech of the aggrieved Trojan refugee Ilioneus, she answers him calmly, smoothly, and point-for-point (1.561-78). With Dido's image as a gifted leader firmly established in Book 1, the tragic narrative of Book 4 presents itself as an object lesson in the risks of leadership destabilized by personal turmoil.

Fire becomes the most useful metaphor for illustrating the ruinous spiral of Dido, the *dux femina*, offering additional value as a proleptic device linking Dido's metaphorical inflammation with imminent outcomes for her person and her state.¹⁴⁹ When she utters her famous line at 4.23, *agnosco veteris vestigia flammae*, "I recognize traces of the old flame," she simultaneously signals the rekindling of her own dormant passions, and indicates Vergil's awareness of the metaphorical discourse with which he is

¹⁴⁸ Viewing Dido as metonym for her city, as well her as thematic and linguistic connections with earlier models, have been suggested by a number of scholars, e.g. Putnam (2010) 17-38. Nevertheless, the specific points brought out here can be hoped to yield fresh perspectives. Panoussi, in a recent study, has sensitively located a number of intertextual debts to the Homeric and the Sophoclean Ajax in the Dido episode, suggesting (among other points) their parallels as powerful yet doomed leaders; Panoussi (2002) 104-105. See also Monti (1981) 22 on the political aspect of Dido's enterprise; Rudd (1990) on her comparability with Aeneas; Horsfall (1973) and Nappa (2007) are concise and cogent on historical and literary models.

¹⁴⁹ For foreshadowing as the primary structuring device throughout *Aeneid* 4, see Ingallina (1995).

engaging. Vergil reinforces Dido's status as a vehicle of literary memory when she 72
burns atop a pile of mementos (*monimenta*, 4.598) of Aeneas, including his gifts rescued
from Troy.¹⁵⁰ Vergil, however, is converting a literary device so prevalent as to approach
cliché into a newly charged thematic tool, with power to evoke history, rhetoric, and
statecraft as much as ancient poetic, dramatic, and philosophical models. Simultaneously,
he signals his programmatic ambition to redeploy a dazzling array of texts, *topoi*, and
images in service of forging a new vision of Rome and Roman poetics.

In an illustration of the continued importance of leadership to Dido's
characterization, her commitment to protecting her city is not simply abandoned as the
flame of desire takes hold. In the opening lines of Book 4, centered around the tragic
undoing and demise, she is first and foremost (perhaps ironically so) still a ruler (*Aen.*
4.1: *at regina...*). When her sister Anna encourages Dido to pursue Aeneas, her closing
argument reminds Dido of the array of enemies apparently poised to attack Carthage
(*Aen.* 4.39-44). Pointing out the manifold political gains that a union with Aeneas would
secure, Anna appeals to the queen's sense of responsibility to her city. Tellingly, Vergil's
summation of the effect of Anna's words emphasizes the incendiary: (*Aen.* 4.54) *His*
dictis impenso animum flammavit/ amore, "with this speech she inflamed the heart with
weighty love." The occurrence of flame imagery in the context of political interactions is
strongly marked as a sign of danger, not just by the famous statesman simile in *Aeneid* 1,
but by the lengthy pedigree of "incendiary" rhetoric upon which both these passages
draw.¹⁵¹ The inflammation of Dido's spirit soon extends to the corporeal, and eventually

¹⁵⁰ *Iliacas vestes*, *Aen.* 4.648. See also (e.g.) Nappa (2007); O'Hara (1993a).

¹⁵¹ The metaphorically inflamed crowd of the statesman simile of *Aeneid* Book 1 presents one
such instance (see above, 68-70). Also (even more pointedly) in *Aeneid* Book 2, Laocoon,

to the civic realm.¹⁵² Her original love for her city, however, was essential in her undoing. 73

One famous passage is especially significant in light of its thematic and linguistic connections to the material from the *Georgics* discussed above, again uniting fire and the grove with leader and city.

*...est mollis flamma medullas
interea et tacitum vivit sub pectore vulnus.
uritur infelix Dido totaque vagatur
urbe furens, qualis coniecta cerva sagitta,
quam procul incautam nemora inter Cresia fixit 70
pastor agens telis liquitque volatile ferrum
nescius: illa fuga silvas saltusque peragrat
Dictaeos; haeret lateri letalis harundo.*

...the supple flame consumes her marrow, and all the while, pulsing silently within her chest, the wound. Dido never had a chance: she burns, goes careening through the whole city, possessed by madness like a deer, arrow-shot, a heedless thing that a shepherd hit somewhere deep in the Cretan woods; he's just fiddling around with his archery, and he abandons his weapon in flight, clueless: she, in flight, zigzags Dido's forests and glades, the death-dealing shaft stuck fast in her side.

Here, we see groves (*nemora*) used explicitly as an analogue for Dido's city.¹⁵³ This poetic doubling renders transparent the more allusive treatment from *Georgics* 2, which I

described as "burning" (*ardens*, *Aen.* 2.41) harangues the crowd with a forceful speech that fails to convince the Trojans of the threat presented by the Greeks' "gift" of the massive horse. For his troubles, Laocoon is devoured, along with his sons, by serpents with fiery eyes (*ardentisque oculos suffecti sanguine et igni*, *Aen.* 2.210). Soon the Trojans, entranced by the lying speech of Sinon, "burn" to learn the real (i.e. false) significance of the gift (*tum vero ardemus scitari et quaerere causas*, *Aen.* 2.105).

¹⁵² Later we will see Lavinia invested with similarly ambiguous fire imagery; cf. Conington-Nettleship's point (*ad Aen.* 7.79) that while "the fire round the princess herself portends her own bright fortunes, that which spreads from her over the palace portends the general conflagration of war over the land of which she was to be the cause." See also Servius' comment on the same line: *VULCANVM SPARGERE incendium belli significant. his autem duobus hoc ab augurio distat Ascanii, fumo et aspersione flammaram*. Finally, the sight of fire on her city walls is the factor that finally drives Amata to her suicide (*Aen.* 12.595-603).

¹⁵³ On this passage, see, e.g. Pöschl (1962) 78-81 and Ferguson (1970/1) 57-63. On the significance of the "Cretan" location see Duclos (1971) and Miller (1995) 238. See additionally

have argued can also be read as a metaphor for Roman urban society. Again, Vergil 74 hedges the blame between two parties, with the stricken doe characterized as *incauta*;¹⁵⁴ the shepherd here, clueless (*nescius*) like the *pastor inscius* witnessing the flood at *Aeneid* 2.303ff. The sense that the worlds of simile and narrative are colliding, with disastrous results, reflects more general cycle of ruin which Vergil creates in his program of allusion in *Aeneid* 1-4. As Putnam argues: “[the destruction of Troy], which [Aeneas] suffers as a character within his narrative, leads to the destruction of Dido, which his very act of narration helps to cause.”¹⁵⁵

The motif of a leader’s spirit “inflamed” with feelings inspired by reportage is repeated, when Dido’s rejected suitor, the neighboring King Iarbas becomes enraged at the news that Dido has embraced Aeneas as a partner (*Aen.* 4.196-7). Fama (personified “reportage”; less charitably, “Rumor”) swoops upon Iarbas and(4.197) *incendit...animum*

the commentaries of Austin (1982) (=1955) 45 and Williams (1972), 339-40. For further links between Dido and Turnus as doomed leaders, see Pöschl (1962) 97-138 *passim*. O’Hara (1993b) identifies three allusions to medicine and topography in *Aen.* 4 that he associates with Gallus in *Ecl.* 6 and 10, connecting Dido’s uncured wound and suicide to that of Gallus, a poet of some note undone, according to our sources, by his political ambition and overblown rhetoric. See also Johnson (1976) 81.

¹⁵⁴ cf. the incautious *pastores* who allow the blaze to catch at *Georgics* 2.303, as well as the simile in *Aeneid* Book 2 (304-08) in which Aeneas ultimately figures himself as a shepherd as he watches his city go up in flames (*stupet inscius alto accipiens sonitum saxi de uertice pastor*). Hornsby (1968, 151) suggests *inscius* is a stock description for shepherds. Chew (2002, 620), however, argues that this characteristic lack of awareness is in fact “a defining trait of Aeneas,” used of him some 13 times in the narrative (excluding similes). Chew (2002, 625) also points out that the violent behavior of the *pastor*-figures in the *Aeneid*’s similes grows in tandem with Aeneas’ violence in the narrative.

¹⁵⁵ Putnam (1998) 85. Equally, there is a sense in which “Sidonian” Dido, labeled “Phoenissa” twice as Cupid’s magic begins to take effect (1.671, 1.714) has been marked for the pyre from the start: even the gifts which thrill her heart are *flammis restantia Troiae* (1.679): the crown of Ilione, a princess doomed to suicide after her city’s capture, and the flame-colored cloak of Helen herself. Dido’s Phoenician identity and her attraction to gifts which survived the flames seem to recall the Phoenix myth here, but the sense of cyclical renewal activated is not one of rebirth and restoration, but of an inevitable return to violence. Compare also Philodemus, *Anthologia Palatina* 5.124: “already the young Cupids are sharpening their swift arrows, Lysidice, and a hidden fire is smouldering. Let us run, we unlucky lovers, before the dart is on the string. I foretell soon enough a great fire.” Trans. Macleod (1979) (=2007).

dictis atque aggerat iras, “inflames his spirit and banks up his wrath.”¹⁵⁶ In contrast to Dido and Iarbas, two leaders whose minds “ignite” over dubious advice (in the former case) or lascivious report (the latter) with devastating consequences, Vergil then presents us with a cautiously positive counterexample. When Dido launches her initial rhetorical attack upon Aeneas (under the influence of *eadem impia Fama*, 4.298), he responds levelly: *desine meque tuis incendere teque querelis* (4.360). In Book 6, Anchises’ tour of great Roman leaders-to-be in the underworld culminates with the summation at 6. 888-9: *Anchises natum per singula duxit/ incenditque animum fama venientis amore*. “Anchises led his son through them one by one, and inflamed his spirit with the love of future fame.”¹⁵⁷

The reformulation of *fama* and *incendium*, now with an ostensibly optimistic spin, remains striking and unsettling in its echo of the situations of Dido and Iarbas: can leaders, fire, and *fama* ever coexist peacefully? The lesson that Dido is a leader undone by *incendium* in its many forms, while Aeneas learns (partly, perhaps, from her negative example) to harness it (or only give it free rein when it suits him) reinforces itself at various points in the narrative. In the following section I examine instances in which Aeneas’ affinity with fire, while plentifully evident, is carefully differentiated from that of the flawed figures who steer their peoples towards disaster. The most compelling instance in the *Aeneid* of fire’s easy association with civil unrest occurs in *Aeneid* 5, in a passage that seems to suggest that twin forces of destruction can be checked by a uniquely capable leader.

¹⁵⁶ See also *Aen.* 11. 342, of the political operator Drances: *surgit et his onerat dictis atque aggerat iras*.

¹⁵⁷ On *Fama* in the *Aeneid* and elsewhere in classical literature, see now Hardie (2012).

Vergil fashions the Trojan women's attempted burning of their ships in *Aeneid* 5 as part of the book's larger function as a showcase for competing models of leadership. While the men are engaged in ideologically freighted sport competition at Anchises' funeral games, Juno dispatches her heavenly errand-maid Iris to stall the despised Trojans' progress towards Italy. Iris, disguised as the respected matron Beroe, urges a premature establishment of a new Troy on the spot in Sicily.¹⁵⁸ Iris-as-Beroe's instigation is fraught with rhetorical urgency: (*Aen.* 4.638-9) *iam tempus agi res/ nec tantis mora prodigiis. en quattuor arae/ Neptuno; deus ipse faces animumque ministrat*, "now is the time get on with it, and no more delay in the face of such clear divine signals. Look at the four altars to Neptune: the god himself is supplying the firebrands and the sentiment!" The last line provides a striking echo of the *Aeneid*'s first simile (*iamque faces et saxa volant—furor arma ministrat*, *Aen.* 1.150), but is disquieting in its multiple reversals of the defused situation described in Book 1.

Neptune, the god responsible for calming the waves at sea is here made out (albeit falsely) to be the *provocateur* to the mayhem about to erupt, while Beroe, the chosen persona for this speech, is the analogue of the statesman, invested with authority in her community due to her advanced age and distinguished family (*Aen.* 5. 620-1). Yet now our respected figure is being "ventriloquized," her authority exploited to advance Juno's

¹⁵⁸ Pseudo-Beroe also appropriates Aeneas' rhetoric of his quest for Italy from Book 4 (*Italiam Lyciae iussere capessere sortes; hic amor, haec patria est* (*Aen.* 4.346-7) to demand an immediate home: *hic quaerite Troiam; hic domus est* (*Aen.* 5.637-7).

destructive agenda.¹⁵⁹ “Beroe,” rather than using her stature in the community to 77
defuse the situation like the silent statesman of Book 1, becomes a vocal proponent of
insurrection, and even flings the first firebrand.¹⁶⁰ The ship-burning incident’s activation
of literary memory creates the disconcerting impression that our eyes, our ears, and
indeed our leaders cannot be trusted. Moreover, Neptune, the god who offers rescue from
the *furor* of a tempest that threatens to destroy the Trojan fleet in Book 1, and whose
referent in simile stares down an incendiary riot, is appropriated as the instigator of
Bacchically-inflected arson against these same ships.

In another kind of memory game, key moments in the narrative of Troy’s fall,
which in Vergil must simultaneously evoke fall of the republic, are re-enacted. As in
Aeneid 2, the crowd pursues its destructive course in the face of clear warnings from a
prominent member and a frightening portent.¹⁶¹ In a wild scene blending funeral rites and
popular uprising in a fashion reminiscent of the funerals of Clodius and Caesar, the
women seize flaming branches off the altars at which they had just been mourning
Anchises and fling them upon the sterns of the ships.¹⁶² Finally, the episode cannot but

¹⁵⁹ The words that complete the speech, *haec memorans*, though not an unusual way to denote a
speech, implies a certain familiarity with the words issued, perhaps suggesting that Iris-as-Beroe
is reciting a speech prepared for her, or alluding to a well-known scene from another text.

¹⁶⁰ (5.641-2) *haec memorans prima infensum ui corripit ignem/sublataque procul dextra conixa
coruscatet iacit*, “she was the first to snatch up the harmful fire with violent intent, and lifting it
up high in her hand she brandished it and hurled it from a distance.”

¹⁶¹ Pyrgo, the former nurse of the Trojan royal house, insists this apparition cannot be Beroe;
when challenged, the women waver but are further incited by Iris-as-Beroe’s escape to the
heavens on her rainbow (*Aen.* 5.650-663).

¹⁶² In a further clue that we should read this improvised arson as an attack on Rome’s future, the
sequence is reiterated by Turnus, who incites his followers to ignite the Trojan ships in Book 9
(71-76). Turnus and his enthusiastic troop of arsonists, cheering their instigator on as he hurls his
improvised weapon (plundered from nearby hearths) creates a strong visual cue to reimagine the
scene in contemporary Rome. This gleeful incendiarism and the transformation of the ships into
Nymphs, in fact may be even more specifically targeted for a Roman audience in light of the still-

call to mind the Trojan counterattack against the ships of the occupying Greeks in 78
Iliad 15: Troy's greatest moment of hope comes when Hector, the "shepherd of his
people," sets fire to the Greek ships beached on the shores of his homeland, struggling to
end his city's lengthy period of virtual captivity at the hands of the besieging army.¹⁶³ In
Aeneid 5, the Trojan women also seek deliverance from their long struggle by hurling fire
onto hated ships: their own, which have come to represent a new form of captivity.

Young Ascanius seems to recognize the Iliadic parallel as he tries to curb their
frenzy: (*Aen.* 5.671-2) "*quis furor iste novus? quo nunc tenditis*" inquit/ "*heu miserae*
cives? non hostem inimicaque castra/Argiuum, vestras spes uritis...", "What new uproar
is this? Where, now, are you headed," he said "alas, you wretched citizens? This is no
enemy, no Greek camp, but your own promised future you are torching..." Ascanius'
reproach, notable for its deployment of terms with powerful civic connotations (*furor*
novus, cives, spes) points up the women's failure to recognize the reality of their
situation, holding in check a literary memory about to take control of the scene. On an
ideological level, Vergil may also be suggesting that those eager to renew the violence of
the late republic, or even specifically to (re)deploy incendiary tactics to achieve their
political ends (as in 22 BCE) may be, as it were, "reading from the wrong script,"
unaware that their actions are no longer appropriate in a changing world.

The consequences of the crowd's actions, however, are no longer within their
control. As Vergil wryly comments on the women's scattered contrition: (*Aen.* 5.680-1)
Sed non idcirco flamma atque incendia viris/ indomitas posuere, "But not for this have

recent memory of Clodius, political arsonist *extraordinare* of the late republican era, who
notoriously had burned the Nymphs' temple down. See above, 41-2.

¹⁶³ *Iliad* 15.470ff.

flames and firestorms relinquished their untamed power.” Like the horses of 79
Phaethon’s chariot (suggested in the image of Vulcan’s un-reined-in rampage), a force
unleashed without sufficient forethought appears poised to overwhelm any efforts to
check it. Here Aeneas, invested for the first time with full authority at his father’s funeral
games, is finally able to intervene in a disaster that seems to defy human control (*Aen.*
5.687-691): *Iuppiter omnipotens, si nondum exosus ad unum/ Troianos... da flammam*
evadere classis/ nunc, pater, et tenuis Teucrum res eripe leto, “Almighty Jupiter, if you
don’t just yet hate all Trojans down to the last man, if some of the old reverence yet
considers human endeavors, let the flame depart from our fleet, father, and snatch the
shaky Trojan state away from doom.” If verbal cues in the preceding section asked us to
recall Neptune’s calming of the waves and the wild crowd subdued by the statesman,
Aeneas’ prayer now should remind us of how far he has come since that early crisis. At
the same time, it poignantly evokes the losses of the previous seven years.

Aeneas’ new and greater measure of authority is driven home in the prayer’s
conclusion. Aeneas cries out: (*Aen.* 5. 691-3) *vel tu, quod superest, infesto fulmine mortis/*
si mereor, demitte tuaque hic obrue dextra, “or else, hurl what’s left of us down to death,
if I deserve it, and wipe us out with your own smiting hand!” Aeneas here offers himself
as the redeemer by whom his people’s worthiness of rescue should be measured (*si*
mereor here calling to mind the *merita*, “services” which distinguish the statesman in the
Neptune simile). In so doing, he not only matches, but exceeds the statesman’s control
over his people in the original simile. He seems to claim the power of the statesman’s
referent, Neptune, and of the storm’s instigator, Juno: that is, a divinely appointed
command over the elements themselves.

The impulse towards presenting the leader as an almost godlike figure can be 80 traced to literary and societal precedents in Hellenistic kingship. Its increasing traction among the competing dynasts in the late republican era, however, had created significant disturbances in Rome. Augustus, establishing sole hegemony, made his city into an advertisement of the harmony and majesty of the accord that he claimed to have forged between gods, people, and ruler. Vergil, likewise, powerfully expressed the vision of a human and divine world in the (re)making in the Shield of Aeneas (*Aen.* 8.626-728), forged in Vulcan's fire. Ovid grew up with a world in which these images, if not yet quite taken for granted, were far more normalized: his Augustan city is a playground, not a battlefield. Nevertheless, his treatments of urban fires and especially his Phaethon narrative suggest a keen awareness of the ideological freight invested in them, and a wily engagement with the *princeps* over who was the more successful "controller" of this unstable element.

Ovidian Instigations.

Ovid's particular blend of myth, history, and religion yields provocative treatments of power dynamics. His poetry often juxtaposes competing representations of the same narrative or problematizes the explanations offered for various phenomena.¹⁶⁴ Andrew Feldherr has recently argued for a nuanced definition of the "politics" of Ovid's work:

¹⁶⁴ This taste for contradiction may have been part of what made Augustus and his legacy such an attractive topic for Ovid. As Williams (1994b: 155) has argued, trying to read either a "pro" or "anti" Augustan stance in Ovid's poetry is reductive: "he is surely ambiguously both and completely neither." As scholars have increasingly recognized, the dichotomy between the benefits and drawbacks of the principate was already very much in play during the Augustan era: the need to reconcile the "two sides" of Augustus seems to have become a *topos* in early imperial literature (cf. Williams 2009: 204-6 and Hardie 1992: 61).

not necessarily designed to forward a pro- or anti-Augustan stance, instead Ovid 81 stimulates “reflection on and redefinition of the hierarchies operative within Roman society.”¹⁶⁵ Augustus transformed Roman time and urban space into political affirmations of his reign.¹⁶⁶ His great calendrical monuments and the newly revised lists of annual celebrations worked in concert to celebrate his accomplishments in statecraft, urban management and religious renewal. At the same time, the so-called *Fasti Triumphales* (beginning with Romulus and ending, effectively, with Augustus) asserted his military supremacy.¹⁶⁷ Ovid’s two overlapping projects on time, the *Fasti* and the *Metamorphoses*, capitalize on these new perspectives, creating an equally monumental and elaborate counterpoint to Augustan rhetoric of space and time.¹⁶⁸

Within Ovid’s poetic elaborations of Rome’s festival Calendar, as well as in his account of mythic time, fire is inscribed repeatedly. His description of the rites performed on the Parilia both draw upon the well-worn rhetoric of Rome’s cycle of destruction and renewal. In the *Metamorphoses*, however, Ovid’s portrayal of Phaethon as an unstable

¹⁶⁵ Feldherr (2010) 7, endorsing the position famously outlined by Kennedy (1992). Feldherr rejects both pro-Augustan (e.g. Galinsky 1975, Habinek 1997) and anti-Augustan attitudes argued by various scholars, and also rejects the attempts to prove that “the poem articulates a specific view of what metamorphosis is” (Feldherr 2010, 34). On the relationship between Ovid and Augustus, see also McKeown (1984) and especially Barchiesi (1997). For the implications of the *Fasti* and free speech, see Feeney (1992).

¹⁶⁶ Wallace-Hadrill (1987); Beard (1987); Purcell (2003) 12-40; Rüpke (1995); Feeney (1992) and especially (2007); on the *Fasti* specifically, Fantham’s (2002) discussion in Boyd (ed.) provides a rich overview of the topic.

¹⁶⁷ These monuments belied Augustus’ actual (lack of) military prowess and actively suppressed that of certain other contemporary figures. See discussion in Feeney (2007) 167-204. Feeney observes that “Ovid capitalizes on these two perspectives in his two overlapping masterpieces on time,” the *Metamorphoses* and the *Fasti*. Ovid’s proem to the *Metamorphoses* announces that he will work his way from the origin of the world down to his own (*mea tempora*, 1.3-4), forming a crucial intersection with *tempora*, the first word in the *Fasti*,

¹⁶⁸ As Feeney puts it, “the arrow of Ovid’s hexametric time in the *Metamorphoses* carries on down until it hits the circle of his elegiac time in the calendrical *Fasti*.” Feeney (2007) 169, following on the insights of Barchiesi (1991).

heir unequal to the task of managing his father's chariot clearly reworks and renews 82
Vergil's anxieties over imperial control. The poet reveals deep cultural concerns with the
issue of succession in leadership, setting them in a more clearly re-stabilized environment
that nevertheless brings with it a new set of perils.

Eternal Flame: Fire in the *Fasti*.

The *Fasti*, Ovid's "most Roman poem,"¹⁶⁹ is explicitly oriented toward the *princeps* and
primarily concerns itself with the mesh of rites, legends and structures that formed
Rome's religious life.¹⁷⁰ Just as Augustus incorporated into his new calendar of the
ancient *fasti* new *feriae* celebrating anniversaries of his own recent achievements, so too
does Ovid link the imperial family into his accounts of traditional festivals.¹⁷¹ Scholarship
viewing the poet's stance toward the *princeps* as antagonistic often reads the books of the
Fasti as implicit engagement with Augustus over control of time, in which Ovid's
characteristic wit ironically undermines the overt praise of the emperor.¹⁷² Following
Feldherr's comments on the *Metamorphoses*, it may be better to understand Ovid's
readings of Roman ritual, which John Miller characterizes as "fragmented" and "ironic,"
as perhaps in keeping with his overarching impulse to interrogate (and thereby to

¹⁶⁹ Miller (2002) 170.

¹⁷⁰ For debates surrounding the address to Germanicus at the opening of the poem as we now have it and the possibility that the proem to Book 2, addressed to Augustus, was the poem's original preface, see Fränkel (1945) 239-40 n. 8; Miller (1991) 16 and 143-44; Holzberg (1995) 351-53; Miller (2002) 167-68.

¹⁷¹ Pasco-Pranger (2006) explores this theme in depth, in a manner similar to Feldherr's approach on the *Metamorphoses*.

¹⁷² As Miller (2002: 169) formulates the matter: Rome's own ancient cults and importations from Greek mythological tradition and are set against imperial intervention into Roman religious practice, and the narrator's "fragmented voice" forms a counterpoint to Augustus' "totalizing force."

destabilize) the power dynamics at work in Roman society. As Miller further 83
observes, “a constant change of pace is at the heart of the Ovidian aesthetic.”¹⁷³ Though
fire is of course a major feature of many rituals, its essential character as an agent of
change and transformation makes it especially suitable for narratives of destruction and
renewal. Several key points in the *Fasti* emphasize this connection, highlighting the role
of leadership in moments of risk and disaster both as the fervently desired protector and
restorer, and as a potential precipitator.

In *Fasti* Book 4, Ovid explicitly identifies the Parilia as a ritual open to all
(*popularia sacra*), indicating the citywide context in which we are to receive his
narrative. Roles are prescribed: the people collect the *februa*, ritual instruments of
purification from death’s pollution, from Vesta’s representatives while the task of the
pastor (4.735) is cleansing the flock and pens.¹⁷⁴ While the niceties of animal hygiene
were perhaps of little relevance to *Urbs Roma*, Augustus’ and Agrippa’s analogous
efforts to restore and sanitize Rome’s urban structures were well known. In parallel,
Augustus’ role as the director of public purifications in 28 BCE¹⁷⁵ (and *Pontifex Maximus*
from 12 BCE onward) reinforce his identification with Ovid’s *pastor*, tasked with making
ritual offerings and prayers for the protection of his charges. Ovid’s version of these rites

¹⁷³ Miller (2002) 183-184. Moreover, the exuberant variety of Ovid’s approach may be particularly suited to the polyphonic and multidimensional nature of Roman cult. As Beard concludes in her classic study on the Parilia, “it is the continuing capacity to generate new stories and aitiologies that is crucial for the continuance of a festival...as new stories take over from the old, so the ‘meaning’ of the ritual changes,” Beard (1987) 3; after Fantham (2002) 221 n. 63. Feeney (1998:129-31) has a short discussion of the Parilia as an emblematic example of this trend, commenting on the productive tension between the story’s alternate versions: (Feeney 1998: 130) “[the] foundation of the city is now viewed in a variety of interpretive contexts, for the day is multiply over-determined as a moment of origins of all kinds.” See also Pasco-Pranger (2006).

¹⁷⁴ On the *februa* in the *Fasti* and elsewhere in Latin literature: see Green (2004) *ad* 1.43-4.

¹⁷⁵ In 28 BCE Augustus performed the purifying rites of the *lustrum* after a gap of some forty-one years (RG 8).

evokes the list of pests in the first book of Vergil's *Georgics* in a deliberate pattern of 84 allusion. This context returns us to the anxiety-ridden period of the composition of the *Georgics*, reminding us of the previous era's pervasive civic conflict. The prayer to Pales perhaps likewise invites the memory of Vergil's fervent (by now, amply fulfilled) prayer for Octavian's survival and for the end to civil conflict which concluded *Georgics* 1.¹⁷⁶

The prayer to Pales complete, Ovid moves on to the popular ritual of leaping over bonfires, an extraordinary spectacle for which he offers a list of explanations:

<i>omnia purgat edax ignis vitiumque metallis</i>	785
<i>excoquit: idcirco cum duce purgat oves?</i>	
<i>an, quia cunctarum contraria semina rerum</i>	
<i>sunt duo discordes, ignis et unda, dei,</i>	
<i>iunxerunt elementa patres, aptumque putarunt</i>	
<i>ignibus et sparsa tangere corpus aqua?</i>	790
<i>an, quod in his vitae causa est, haec perdidit exul,</i>	
<i>his nova fit coniunx, haec duo magna putant?</i>	
<i>vix equidem credo: sunt qui Phaethonta referri</i>	
<i>credant et nimias Deucalionis aquas.</i>	
<i>pars quoque, cum saxis pastores saxa feribant,</i>	795
<i>scintillam subito prosiluisse ferunt;</i>	
<i>prima quidem periit, stipulis excepta secunda est:</i>	
<i>hoc argumentum flamma Parilis habet?</i>	
<i>an magis hunc morem pietas Aeneia fecit,</i>	
<i>innocuum victo cui dedit ignis iter?</i>	800
<i>num tamen est vero propius, cum condita Roma est,</i>	
<i>transferri iussos in nova tecta Lares,</i>	
<i>mutantesque domum tectis agrestibus ignem</i>	
<i>et cessaturae subposuisse casae,</i>	
<i>per flammam saluisse pecus, saluisse colonos?</i>	805
<i>quod fit natali nunc quoque, Roma, tuo.</i>	

Devouring fire purifies all things, refining waste out from metals; for this reason, does it purge the sheep and their leader alike? Or since that discordant pair, fire and water, are the opposing seeds of all things, did our fathers conjoin these elements, thinking it fitting to touch the body with fire and sprinkled water? Or do [people] think these [elements] are the major two, because they contain the source of life: the exile loses the use of them, and by them the bride is made a wife? I can scarcely believe this one: there are some who believe that the allusion is to

¹⁷⁶ Fantham (2002) 220-221.

Phaethon and Deucalion's flood. Some people also say that when shepherds 85 were striking stones together, a spark suddenly leaped forth; the first, indeed, was lost, but the second was caught in straw; does the flame at the Parilia have this explanation? Or is the custom more probably based on the piety of Aeneas, whom, even in the hour of defeat, the fire allowed a safe escape? Surely it is not closer to the truth to say that, when Rome was founded, orders were given to transfer the household gods to new shelters, and those changing homes set fire to their rustic huts and cottages soon to lie empty, and that the cattle leaped through the flames, and the settlers too? It happens even to the present time on the birthday of Rome.

The obscurity created by such polysemous explanations need not necessarily conflict with the unifying aspect of Augustan ideology.¹⁷⁷ Yet the fracturing of authority in this passage is notable. Naïve in one line, and incredulous the next, the *Fasti* and their narrator strive to accent what Miller calls “the fissures in [their] ‘balkanized’ system of thought” on religion and tradition more generally.¹⁷⁸ The emphasis on shepherd and flock at the start of the passage invokes the leadership metaphors apparent in Vergil's treatment of *pastores*. The concepts of fire and water, as well as of marriage and exile, are presented as diametric opposites, suggesting the themes of conflict and internal strife. They also accent the highly Roman nature of the thinking Ovid presents here, citing rituals and injunctions specific to Roman practice.

The dueling destruction myths of Deucalion's flood and Phaethon's fire further extend the theme of conflict.¹⁷⁹ Ovid's engagement with Vergil is rendered yet more transparent in the next line, which references Aeneas' miraculous escape from Troy. The positing of a link to Rome's mythic origins in Troy's flames again tethers the origins of

¹⁷⁷ Fantham, notes this in her commentary (*ad loc.*); Miller discusses the question more generally: Miller (1992). In any case, such polysemy is a standard feature of Latin didactic and antiquarian writing: for further discussion of Ovid's manipulation of the generic conventions, see e.g. Harries (1989) and Newlands (1995).

¹⁷⁸ Miller (2002) 170.

¹⁷⁹ Phaethon in particular reinforces the connection with *Georgics* 1.

Roman society to leaders unable to prevent catastrophe. Finally, the rather puzzling 86 suggestion of intentional destruction on the part of migrating populations again invokes the incendiary *pastor*.¹⁸⁰ More alarmingly, the implication seems to be that the *pastor*-figures in 801-805 actually set fire to their own huts, calling to mind the frequently burned Hut of Romulus at Rome. Still worse, the huts were still occupied by cattle and settlers, who were then forced to escape *per flammās*.

Ovid's rhetorical expression of disbelief (*num tamen est vero propius?*) both calls attention to the idea of a willed destruction and to the outrageousness of this behavior; its proximity to the preceding lines may even hint at the alternate tradition accusing Aeneas of betraying Troy.¹⁸¹ The recurring trope of the torch-wielding itinerant should encourage us to see a link between the presentation of Rome's mythic, seminomadic ancestors from Aeneas (a reluctant wanderer and perceived interloper from Troy onward) to Romulus (the leader of a gang of shepherd bandits, according to legend).¹⁸² Rhetoric concerning the fratricidal king (whose story follows this episode in the *Fasti*) as well as characterizations of certain polarizing political figures as "scorched-earth" radicals, who bring about change by force and at the expense of existing structures, had played a major part in the crises of legitimacy in the first century BC.¹⁸³ If *pastores* at the start of the passage seem to be placed in an unambiguously positive light, charged with cleansing the

¹⁸⁰ Here the title is obscured in the phrase "those changing homes," but the figure is nevertheless adumbrated with both leadership and livestock.

¹⁸¹ Recently discussed in Gowers (2011) 106-108. See also Casali (1999) 206 and n. 6 on the tradition in some Greek historians, starting with Menecrates of Xanthos, of Aeneas' betrayal of Troy (resisted by Horace, *Carm. Saec.* 41-43 and displaced onto Antenor by various Roman historians: Braccisi (1984) 123-48). See also Ussani (1947), Galinsky (1969): 3-61, esp. 46-51.

¹⁸² Explanations of this rite are immediately followed by the story of Romulus and Remus, further reinforcing the idea that leadership is at issue throughout the account of the Parilia.

¹⁸³ Habinek's discussion of Cicero's use of images and characterizations suggesting banditry or vagrancy builds on and expands on Shaw's (1984) findings; Habinek (1990), published with new bibliography and notes in Habinek (1998) 69-87. See above, 40-2 and notes.

flock and restoring order, by the end of the passage they are rendered problematic or 87 even sinister.¹⁸⁴

Ovid's treatment of Vesta in *Fasti* 6 again references an iconic image from the cityscape to foreground the tension between the Rome's eternal and enduring character, and the vulnerability of even its most ancient and sacred structures to annihilation. Continuity is created not through eternal preservation, but through rebuilding and commemoration. Perhaps inspired by Vesta's close association with the legend of the Trojan escape, Ovid's meditation on the form and function of Vesta's temple seems to point towards the causes of its destruction. Ovid opens with the temple's humble roots under King Numa:

*quae nunc aere vides, stipula tum tecta videres,
et paries lento vimine textus erat.
hic locus exiguus, qui sustinet Atria Vestae,
tunc erat intonsi regia magna Numae;
forma tamen templi, quae nunc manet, ante fuisse 265
dicitur, et formae causa probanda subest.
Vesta eadem est et terra: subest vigil ignis utrique:
significant sedem terra focusque suam.*

The buildings which now you see roofed with bronze, you might then have seen roofed with thatch, and the walls were woven of tough osiers. This little spot, which now supports the Hall of Vesta, was then the great palace of shaggy Numa. Yet the shape of the temple, as it now exists, is said to have been its shape of old, and it is based on a sound reason. Vesta is the same as the Earth; under both of them is a perpetual fire; the earth and the hearth are symbols of the home.

The comment on the material here is telling. Thatch and wicker construction were of course reflective of ancient building practices in the area, presumably still evident in the nearby Hut(s) of Romulus. Similar materials were also, however, to be found in the *opus craticium*, decried by Vitruvius for its flammability, used to construct a great deal of

¹⁸⁴ As Shaw argues in an influential discussion of Roman outlawry, shepherds at all periods were easily figured as anti-state entities (and vice versa); Shaw (1984).

inexpensive housing at Rome. Using such substances to house an “eternal flame” 88
does appear to be asking for trouble, to say the least. Moreover, the situation was
essentially replicated in the innumerable home hearths of poor dwellings around the city,
making the image especially alarming in its reminder of the potential each of these fires
had to initiate a colossal destruction.

Having motivated the risk factors in the opening sequence, Ovid raises the stakes
in the following lines (6. 349-436), reminding us of the Gallic Sack of 390 BCE; of the
many tales connecting the sacred image of Minerva housed in the temple to the city’s
survival; and finally of a salient instance of the temple’s destruction in 241 BCE:

*heu quantum timuere patres, quo tempore Vesta
arsit et est tectis obruta paene suis!
flagrabant sancti sceleratis ignibus ignes,
mixtaque erat flammae flamma profana piaae; 440
attonitae flebant demisso crine ministrae:
abstulerat vires corporis ipse timor.*

Alas, how greatly did the Senate fear, when the temple of Vesta caught fire, and
the goddess was almost buried under her own roof! Holy fires blazed, fed by
wicked ones, and a profane flame mingled with the pious. Stunned, the priestesses
wept, hair streaming down; fear had stripped them of bodily strength.

Vesta’s temple and its structural survival are a recurring source of anxiety for authors
concerned with Rome’s destiny. Beyond this, Ovid’s audience could be expected to retain
the memory of the temple’s more recent destructions of 47 BCE, as well as the outbreak
of 14 BCE. The rescue of the Vestal cult items here is the everlasting legacy of Maximus
Caecilius Metellus, the Pontifex Maximus of 241 BCE (*Fast.* 6.443-55). According to the
legend Ovid follows, Metellus willingly lost his eyesight as a result of having viewed the
Palladium, a statue from which men’s eyes were prohibited, as he rescued it from the

burning temple of Vesta.¹⁸⁵ Metellus' blinding exemplifies the vaunted self-sacrifice 89 for which leaders during the "Old Republic" became legend, while perhaps also hinting at the transgressions required of extraordinary individuals in order to preserve the Roman state. In the *Fasti*, this incident perhaps even works to create a precedent for the *princeps*' recent decision to relocate the Vestal shrine to his home on the Palatine: (*Fast.* 6.453-4) "The goddess whom he carried off approved the deed and was saved by the service of her pontiff" (...*factum dea rapta probavit/ pontificisque sui munere tuta fuit*).

The praise of Augustus that follows constructs an image of the ruler's unchallenged control over the Vestal flames, and over the virgins who attend them (6.455-460). This claim, however, immediately destabilizes itself with a commemoration of a victory by Brutus, ancestor of Caesar's assassin, and a further recollection of the slaughter of the triumvir Crassus, along with his son and his legions at Carrhae (6.461-466). In presenting a series of political figures (or their namesakes) who were all wiped out in the conflicts of the preceding generation, there is perhaps a whispered argument that the celebrated order under Augustus came when none were left to contest him. Rome's newfound "stability," by implication, would seem to have of enduring if it was won at the cost of eliminating so many of Rome's most capable and ambitious leaders. Ovid has already allusively suggested that flames, like those who watch over them, cannot prevail indefinitely by including the parallel destruction myths of Phaethon and the flood, in his possible aetiologies for the rituals of the Parilia (*Fast.* 4.783-84). This line appears to reference Lucretius' interpretation of these narratives (*DRN* 5.380-95) as

¹⁸⁵ On the relationship between Augustus and the Vestals as depicted by Ovid, Korten (1992) examines the sources thoroughly. I do not, however, subscribe to Korten's suggestions of accusations of sacrilege in the *Fasti* leading to Ovid's exile (Korten 1992:137-45).

allegories of the temporary victory of one element over the others. The evocation of 90 flood, fire, and Phaethon brings us to the more general opposition between flood and fire as forms of collective disaster, a theme expanded and universalized in the *Metamorphoses*.

Flood, Phoebus, and Phaethon: *Après moi, l'incendie?*

The themes of narrow escape from disaster and fragile, perhaps even unsustainable recovery, explored above in material from the *Fasti*, are perhaps even more present in the *Metamorphoses*. The Phaethon episode is the longest in the *Metamorphoses*, spanning some 400 lines, dwarfing the flood and undoing the lengthy recovery in Book 1.¹⁸⁶ Coming in the aftermath of such a sequence of decline, destruction, and renewal, Phaethon answers the inevitable question such narrative arcs pose: *what comes next?*

The narrative leading up the great flood in *Metamorphoses* 1 has often been explicitly analogized with the cycle of civil conflict at the end of the republic.¹⁸⁷ Seneca's criticism of the flood sequence is often cited: he objects to it as strangely detached or even playful in its presentation of worldwide calamity.¹⁸⁸ Yet the epic and cosmic magnitude of the event is brought out in the episode's opening lines. Ovid frames the cataclysm as the necessary eradication of a society born from the violence of the

¹⁸⁶ Ovid's treatment of this episode, as well as his possible sources and the *nachleben* of the Ovidian Phaethon, are all exhaustively studied by Csaki (1995), though there is little focus there on allusions that do not mention Phaethon specifically or on ideological aspects.

¹⁸⁷ See, e.g. Barchiesi's comments on the Iron Age and the Gigantomachy (Barchiesi 2005 *ad loc.*, esp. 1.144-8, 151-162), as well as on the political character of the Council of the Gods (1.163-152), which creates an analogy between the meeting of the gods and a meeting of the Senate.

¹⁸⁸ See introductory remarks in Anderson's commentary *ad loc.* and Seneca, *NQ* 3.27.13.

Gigantomachy.¹⁸⁹ The earth, now driven past redemption by a brutally bloodthirsty 91 ruler, King Lycaon, and his scheme to stage a coup against Jupiter, must be undone.¹⁹⁰ Alessandro Barchiesi and others have commented on the political nature of the divine council that assembles to address the problem as at once suggestive of monarchy and of Rome's own senate.¹⁹¹ The direct invocation of Augustus (one of only two in the poem) at 200-5, with its ambiguous language of assassination and conspiracy, bifurcates the text of Jupiter's speech just as the gods' zealous responses momentarily interrupt him in the narrative, further calling attention to the ideological overtones of the passage.

Following on the gods' clamor for justice and the disconcerting address to Augustus, Jupiter's continued speech reads almost as a point-for-point inversion of his mighty prophecy in Book 1 of the *Aeneid*. Told as a recollection from the past rather than a reading of the future, Jupiter's opening statement promises the punishment of a tyrant, rather than the establishment of a kingdom: Lycaon's home is struck with lightning for his offenses and burned to the ground, just like that of Tullus Hostilius, providing one hint at a Roman context. Lycaon's transformation, the first metamorphosis related in the poem and thus of programmatic significance, reveals Lycaon's true nature: he becomes a wolf (and the *omen* of his *nomen*) a creature of pure, devouring aggression.¹⁹² The line, *fit*

¹⁸⁹ *Met.* 1.151-62.

¹⁹⁰ On this episode, generally see Anderson (1989).

¹⁹¹ Barchiesi also mentions the still-controversial notion that this section draws not just upon classic epic models in Homer and Ennius, but in Cicero's lost *De Consulatu Suo* (on which see Courtney 1993, 156-73).

¹⁹² The male Lycaon-lycanthrope may even suggest a precursor to the she-wolf that would become Rome's totemic creature, yet is stripped of any nurturing characteristic imparted by the fecundity of the female version. Anderson (1989) points out several ways in which Lycaon is a misleading paradigm, but this does not obviate but rather emphasizes its programmatic status. Ovid organizes and situates the story of Lycaon carefully, and the episode's subversion of epic models has major ideological significance. As Anderson points out: "Ovid re-inforces those political equations when he introduces his first 'epic' simile to characterize the uproar that

lupus et veteris servat vestigia formae (*Met.* 1.237) neatly references Dido's famous 92 pronouncement at *Aen.* 4.23, *agnosco veteris vestigia flammae*.¹⁹³ The proleptic link here between Vergil's *vestigia flammae* and Ovid's *vestigia formae* is perhaps part of a larger program in *Metamorphoses* 1. Further reading of Ovid's Jupiter speech in *Met.* 1 against Vergil's in *Aeneid* 1 produces a strong impression that the survival of ruling families is a dicey proposition, since Ovid swaps the narrative of the destruction of a ruling house for the prophecy of the rise of the Julii in Vergil.

Ovid's invocation of Augustus (*Met.* 1. 200-205) has already equated the loss of a leader (or his heir, as Barchiesi points out) with a global catastrophe: *totusque perhorruit orbis* suggests both an earthquake and the metaphorical recoil of the earth's people from the assassination of its leader.¹⁹⁴ Jupiter's speech also foretells Phaethon's crisis of legitimacy while also referencing Lucretius' prediction of universal catastrophe, "recalling" that the world's greatest destruction will be incendiary.¹⁹⁵ The reference here simultaneously corresponds to the Lucretian vision, Ovid's nod to it in *Fasti* 4, and the upcoming conflagration in the *Metamorphoses*' next book.¹⁹⁶ Generalized intimations of Stoic *ekpyrosis* are laced throughout Jupiter's speech, and as the flood narrative unfolds,

interrupted Jupiter's harangue (200ff.). That makes it clear that the gods respond like Roman senators on a specific political occasion which the poet blandly evokes, but a writer like Tacitus would have developed with sardonic mastery. Jupiter has been the unscathed 'victim' of a blundered assassination-attempt." Anderson (1989) 93.

¹⁹³ While also recalling the gnomic pronouncement on human society offered, e.g. by Plautus: *lupus est homo homini* (*Asin.* 493), with its suggestion of man's innate tendency towards competition and internecine aggression; Barchiesi (2005) *ad loc.*

¹⁹⁴ But see Anderson (1989) 93 n. 4, with bibliography on the dispute over what Roman Caesar we are to understand as the addressee.

¹⁹⁵ See Wheeler's discussion in Wheeler (2000) 26-8, and for bibliography 28, n.68-9 and 28 n.72.

¹⁹⁶ See Wheeler (2000) 28 and n. 75; for discussion of the *Fasti*, see above 82-9.

in turn, the imagery of chariots as a vehicle not just of competition but of destruction, 93 already deeply familiar from Vergil becomes prominent.¹⁹⁷

The upheaval of the flood and the Vergilian allusions which conclude the sequence serve to approximate, in narrative and textual terms, the distress of the civil war and the fervent desire for settlement and security that pervade Vergil's work. In providing the bridge between the first and second books of the poem, Ovid's Phaethon episode suggests succession on formal as well as thematic levels.¹⁹⁸ Poetically, this sequence provides Ovid with an opportunity to rework his predecessor Vergil's intimations of the Phaethon myth at length. Ideologically, it seems to stress the potentially disastrous consequences of combining family dynamics and global politics.

Ovid introduces Phaethon in traditional fashion, as the son of Sol/Helios (here syncretized with Apollo).¹⁹⁹ Phaethon initiates the plot when his anxieties over his parentage are activated, and his desire to prove himself drives him towards his catastrophic end.²⁰⁰ The story's contours took new dimensions in the late Augustan period: themes of imperial succession, the education of the *princeps*-to-be, and of the

¹⁹⁷ At *Met.* 1. 276-82 (*immitite habenas*, 280; *defrenato...cursu*, 282) Jupiter's command for the unleashing of torrents, as Barchiesi points out, echoes the tone of Neptune's imperious reproach to stormwinds at *Aen.* 1.124-41, but with opposite effect (Barchiesi *ad loc.*). *Met.* 1.330-42 again alludes to the *Aeneid*'s paradigmatic simile with its image of Neptune restoring the sea's equilibrium likened to a public figure subduing a rioting crowd (*mulcet...profundum*, *Met.* 1.331, cf. *pectora mulcet*, *Aen.* 1.153).

¹⁹⁸ Political readings of Phaethon in Ovid: O'Hara (2007: 112-113 n. 27) suggested some time ago that this episode invited a reading as a metaphor for succession. Fratantuono (2011: 31-60) offers detailed analysis of the episode's relationship to Vergil's *Aeneid*, and situates it as a preparatory episode for later sections of the *Metamorphoses*. Fratantuono also gives succinct summary of the episode's potential ideological subtext (Fratantuono 2011: 34-5). My reading focuses more on other ideological aspects of the Phaethon episode, including its possible relationship to the topography of Augustan Rome, and on passages that relate specifically to the Vergilian texts treated in this chapter (see above, 55-75).

¹⁹⁹ Syncretization with Apollo is signaled here by the use of the epithet Phoebus at 1.752. See discussion of Sol-Phoebus-Apollo in Barchiesi (2005) *ad loc.* and Miller (2009), 259-259.

²⁰⁰ For bibliography on possible Greek models,

overwhelming weight of the responsibility which now came with the conferral of the 94 ever-expanding *imperium* were, as Barchiesi puts it, “becoming central to the Roman imaginary and to epic poetry.”²⁰¹ From the dispute over lineage which begins the episode to the extravagant monument to lost promise which concludes it, Ovid’s Phaethon narrative reworks well-worn models to address the specific cultural preoccupations and monumental rhetoric of Augustan Rome.²⁰²

The impulse of the Augustan principate to present transformative political events and programs as returns to the past finds parallels in his architectural and monumental rhetoric.²⁰³ Much as Augustus worked to normalize the extraordinary in his urban innovations at Rome, Ovid’s world allows the previously unimaginable to become, in some ways, the routine. Statues and images do not just appear within the text as the final products of metamorphosis; they themselves undergo metamorphosis, coming to life and shaping the narrative.²⁰⁴ As much as any of Ovid’s suddenly-speaking statues, Augustus presented himself as the living realization of divine and idealized models; Augustus’ own house on the Palatine, home also to Apollo and Vesta, appears to have reflected this tendency, as did many instances of his coinage and portraiture.

²⁰¹ Barchiesi, introductory remarks *ad loc.* 1.750-2.365 (p. 230). On these themes more generally, see Hardie (1993).

²⁰² Feldherr in Hardie (2002) ed., 176.

²⁰³ Widely discussed since Zanker (1988); particularly relevant to this passage are discussion of this phenomenon by Platt (2009) and Barchiesi (2009).

²⁰⁴ Feldherr in Hardie (2002) ed., 176. Equally, what can at first appear as stock images, or silent objects of the ekphrastic gaze can insist upon a role as agents endowed with voice and authority, as in the Actaeon episode, in which Diana reacts to the unwelcome observer of her picturesque bathing scene with swift and final retribution. On metaphor and allegory, see Hardie (1999).

The many points of correspondence between the Augustan Temple of Apollo 95 Palatinus and the Ovidian Palace of the Sun have inspired detailed analysis.²⁰⁵ The scene of Phaethon's arrival at the *regia Solis* is designed to elicit wonder, with striking visual and verbal echoes of some of Augustan Rome's most ideologically loaded sites and texts. Phaethon, however, seems shocked at the newness of the scene in the Sun's palace. He is described at 2.31 as *rerum novitate paventem* ("alarmed at the novelty of things"). Phaethon's reaction is understandable in a mortal upon crossing the threshold of a divinity, but viewers of the dazzling new vision of Rome springing up around them may frequently have experienced a similar sense of shock. In employing the concept here, Ovid seems at once to convey the dazzling totality of Augustus' vision for Rome's future, and to remind us of its fundamentally revolutionary character.²⁰⁶

The collocation in lines 1-3 of *Solis erat...fastigia* calls to mind Propertius' description of the solar chariot atop the Palatine temple (*Solis erat supra fastigia currus*, 2.31.11). An image from the pictorial vocabulary of Rome's triumph over disorder, rendered as art by Propertius is thus poised to function as a protagonist of chaos (for the chariot does indeed take on "a life of its own") in Ovid's poem. The architectonic ivory (*ebur*) in *Met.* 2.3, picking up the glow from the golden stone pillars and rosy bronze-alloy fittings beneath it (2.1-2) may indeed have evoked Augustus' gleaming temple;²⁰⁷ echoing characterizations of Troy's oriental grandeur from republican tragedy, it also accesses the strong connection in the Roman imagination between material splendor and

²⁰⁵ In particular the brilliant array of precious construction materials common to both structures has been mentioned. The most extensive treatment is from Barchiesi in Hardie (ed.) (2009); see also Barchiesi's 2004 commentary.

²⁰⁶ Cicero was perhaps already activating the subversive connotations of the phrase *res novae*.

²⁰⁷ Also reported by Propertius as featuring ivory elements at 2.31.12.

impending demise.²⁰⁸ Likewise, Vulcan's handiwork on the doors employs terminology from the literary-critical and figurative art registers: *materiam superabat opus: nam Mulciber illic/ aequora caelarat medias cingentia terras/ terrarumque orbem caelumque, quod imminet orbi* (2.5-7). The epithet *Mulciber* references Vulcan's metallurgic aspect, deriving from *mulceo* ("to soften," as through heating and hammering in the forge).²⁰⁹ Although the Palace of the Sun itself exists in a cosmic realm that presumably cannot be threatened by fire, all too soon, the world represented on the doors by Vulcan's craft will itself be consumed, providing nothing more than kindling for Phaethon's conflagration.

The palace door's vision of a well-ordered universe set within its glorious architectural context, as Feldherr says, presents Phaethon with "nothing less than the ordered cosmos whose construction we witnessed in the first book." This is an insight we should consider carefully in light of the analogy drawn between the Sun's palace and the Augustan Palatine advanced above. As Augustus' Palatine/Circus complex represented a recovery from and redemption of the chaos of civil war, so Ovid's *regia Solis* represents the restoration of the earth after the flood.²¹⁰ As Feldherr has further argued, when Phaethon passes through the doors of the *regia Solis*, he moves into a world of animated

²⁰⁸ Ennius, *Scaen. fr.* 91 Jocelyn; Barchiesi (2005) *ad loc.* We might also remember that Augustus' adjacent home actually did burn down in 3 CE. Therefore, the suggestion of reflected flames and collapsing dynasties imminent in this reading may in fact not have been in the best taste, if written after the conflagration; if written before, in retrospect the joke may have become distinctly unamusing.

²⁰⁹ Perhaps reminding us of Venus' famous plan to destroy Dido: *cingere flamma reginam meditor* (*Aen.* 1.1674).

²¹⁰ Phaethon, the young *arriviste*, is in some ways taking on the role Apollo played at the start of the Delian Hymn as he first enters the company of the gods; rather than disarming the tension of the situation as Apollo did by setting down his bow and taking up the lyre, however, Phaethon demands access to the instrument of the earth's destruction.

artistic figures, beginning with the *pater* himself, the Sun-god.²¹¹ The Sun is 97
surrounded by a charmingly well-ordered set of figures representing the hours and
seasons: a kind of living sundial which also functions, perhaps, as a finely drawn
allegorical portrait of the kind of rhetorical claims to control over time that Augustus was
promoting. Ovid appropriates allegorical models familiar from earlier literature and
imbues them with contemporary significance: namely, Augustus' own efforts to reform
and regularize the calendar, and the many cues offered in Rome's urban fabric to
commemorate and demonstrate that achievement.

The surroundings in which Phaethon finds himself are precisely a place where
visual art and imagined narrative come alive. Yet with this cognitive leap comes risk:
Feldherr's insight that Phoebus' palace is a space in which the conceptual is given
physical form places the emphatic opening line of Book 2 (*regia Solis erat*) under a new
focus. Stoics in particular equated Apollo with the Sun, and spoke in terms of the solar
governance of the universe.²¹² Vergil's fourth *Eclogue*, a poem with its own vision of the
sequence of ages and its own set of civil war associations, promotes a notion as a new
golden age with the phrases *redeunt Saturnia regna* (6) and *tuus iam regnat Apollo* (6).
Together, these phrases seem to form a close linguistic/conceptual analogue for Ovid's
regia Solis.²¹³ Servius Danielis' commentary, however, credits the original promotion of

²¹¹ Feldherr (2002), 177.

²¹² Stoic political and philosophical discourse had a particularly powerful following in late republican and early imperial Rome, and much of Augustus' solar/ Apolline rhetoric can be seen as engaging with it. See Miller (2009) 209-259.

²¹³ Additionally, as Miller (2009: 256) notes, Vergil's original sequence suggests a need to avert a "showdown between Apollo and Saturn for sovereignty in a new era," in which the "last age has now arrived and Apollo now (10 *iam*) reigns," suggesting a preoccupation with succession similar to the one I have argued for Ovid's Phaethon episode. The eclogue's primary models, Miller notes further points out, is Theocritus' *Idyll* 17, which promotes the ruler Ptolemy Philadelphus as a demi-god who rules a vast domain.

the phrase *regnum Apollinis* to the late-republican mystic Nigidius Figulus: his 98
treatise *On the Gods* is reported to have transmitted a prediction of the Magi that “the
reign of Apollo is about to come.”²¹⁴ Nigidius finds in this language not a comforting
prophecy of stability and security, a new *aureum saeculum*, but a notice of impending
Stoic *ekpyrosis*.

The prediction of doom that this text suggests to Nigidius should make us think
again of Vergil’s influences, as well as of Ovid’s. Paul Allen Miller argues that Vergil
seems to have adapted the notion of Apollo ruling a climactic age; yet, as Miller
continues, the treatment in Vergil strips away the main point of Nigidius’ Stoic exegesis,
which worked to characterize that age as a trajectory towards catastrophe.²¹⁵ If the hours
and the seasons are a tangible expression of abstract time periods, as Feldherr has
convincingly argued, then the *regia Solis* might also be a reference to the *regnum
Apollinis*. Ovid, it would appear, has brought that catastrophic *telos* back into the picture,
using a complex of visual and conceptual rhymes to construct, metapoetically, an
inventive and paradoxical window allusion back to the apocalyptic vision of Nigidius.²¹⁶

Moving from the extended ekphrasis of the *regia Solis* the major interaction of the
episode, in the exchange between Phoebus and Phaethon we see a great deal of the
Roman language of the *suasoria*, the rhetorical and cultural training ground common to

²¹⁴ The nature of the phrase *regnum Apollinis* is highly contested; for recent discussion see Miller (2009) 254-260.

²¹⁵ Miller (2009) 256-7. On the overlap between politics and astrology in this period, see especially Barton (1994a) 38; Barton (1994b) 151-153; Barton (1995); Wallace-Hadrill (2005) 64.

²¹⁶ Additionally, Barchiesi notes the line which starts Book 2, *regia Solis erat sublimibus alta columnis*, which echoes Vergil’s metrically heavy line at *Aen.* 7.170, *tectum augustum, ingens, centum sublime columnis* (Barchiesi *ad loc.*). This line may therefore invite us to ponder *regia Solis*, and *regnum Apollinis* and *tectum augustum* (or is it *Augustum*? No ancient reader or listener would even ask) as virtual equivalents.

poets and statesmen alike.²¹⁷ Phaethon is either unwilling or unable to engage in 99
rational discourse, though, refusing to address the logic of the reasons Phoebus arrays
against the irrational goals of his newfound progeny. Instead, clinging fixedly to his
original purpose, “aflake with his desire for the chariot” (*flagrat ..cupidine currus*,
2.104), Phaethon simply insists on his prize. More generally, in this passage and in the
preparations that follow, the heavily proleptic use of fire imagery and metaphor recalls
that employed by Vergil for his Dido narrative. This, along with the existence of at least
two tragic versions of the tale known from antiquity, alerts us to Phaethon’s status in the
Metamorphoses as paratragic figure, doomed by the externalization of his own innate
passions. Thus, the use of the Homeric calque *magnanimus* (*Met.* 2.111) an inheritance
from Lucretius’ more abstracted and inspirational version of the myth no longer seems
lofty as it was for Lucretius, or even poignant.²¹⁸ Rather, the obstinacy and
overconfidence that Ovid has conveyed in his construction of Phaethon’s character tinge
it as an ironic comment on the blatantly unrealistic ambitions of our hapless
protagonist.²¹⁹

²¹⁷ 2.50-102; see Barchiesi’s (2005) comments *ad loc.*

²¹⁸ On the debt to Lucretius in this line: Barchiesi (2005) *ad loc.*

²¹⁹ Perhaps this term also figures Phaethon as a throwback to the violence of the antediluvian *genus sanguineum*, who invite Jupiter’s wrath in Book 1 by becoming *ingentes animo* (1.166). Also, as noted by Barchiesi (*ad loc.*), this flood narrative both corresponds to Lucretius’ prediction of universal destruction and prefigures the characterization of the Phaethon episode as a kind of Stoic *ekpyrosis*. We may also see in the Sun’s warning at 2.83 to Phaethon about the Scorpion, who will reach out for Phaethon with its pincers (*bracchia*), a nod to *Georgics* 1, and its hyperbolic suggestion that the divinized Octavian will be lifted to his place in the stars by this constellation (*bracchia contrahit ardens/ Scorpios*). Speculation that the two passages share some common source pinpointing Scorpio as the precipitating figure in the fall of Phaethon is attractive (see also Fratanuono’s reading of the moment as a reversal of Octavian’s catasterism at Verg. *Geo.* 1.34-5), but cannot be advanced beyond this point. If there was no common source, however, it is all the more striking that Phaethon’s attempt at a divine journey would meet its undoing at the very constellation Vergil designates as the divinized Augustus’ eventual destination.

Also key to the passage are terms laden with connotations of statecraft, urban 100 spectacle, and the reciprocal relationship between leader and population expressed and reinforced during *munera* and other festal occasions. The Sun's warning to Phaethon at 2.99, *poenam pro munere poscis*, ("you demand punishment as a present!"), draws upon the ancient mythic trope of the fatal gift, yet echoes terminology that Cicero placed in a similar antithesis when describing a shocking reversal in the political fortunes.²²⁰ It also seems possible, however, to read the phrase as a glossing on the torture and execution (*poenae*) that featured prominently in Roman public entertainments (*munera*), again reinforcing Barchiesi's reading of the episode as a "fatal charade" with strong connotations of the public entertainments offered by leadership.²²¹

Ovid seems to deny the idea of taking Phaethon's rise and fall as mere amusement, however, in the episode's climactic conflagration. The focalization giving us access to Phaethon's point of view, and to his very sensations as he loses control of his cosmic chariot excludes the possibility of our coming through this adventure as detached observers (*Met.* 2.227-237):

*Tum vero Phaethon cunctis e partibus orbem
adspicit accensum nec tantos sustinet aestus
ferventisque auras velut e fornace profunda
ore trahit currusque suos candescere sentit; 230
et neque iam cineres eiectatamque favillam
ferre potest calidoque **involvitur** undique fumo,
quoque eat aut ubi sit, **picea caligine** tectus
nescit et arbitrio volucrum raptatur equorum.
Sanguine tum credunt in corpora summa vocato 235*

²²⁰ Cic. *Agr.* 2.92. Taken in abstract terms, the phrase certainly is suggestive of the type of charge that might be leveled against those individuals who traded their political autonomy for a nominal rank or standing. Lucan too, in his narrative of the civil war between Caesar and Pompey, makes frequent use of the breakdown between the categories of *poena* and *munus*.

²²¹ See Barchiesi (2009). The phrase may also carry additional resonance with the games presented annually at the Volcanalia, one of Rome's most ancient civic cult celebrations.

*Aethiopum populos nigrum traxisse colorem;
tum facta est Libye raptis umoribus aestu
arida...*

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Then, truly, Phaethon sees an earth in flames from end to end, and he can't stand a heat this intense: the air he sucks down burns like it's from the depths of a furnace. He feels his own chariot become white-hot. No longer can he bear the ash and the sparks blasting out, and he is enveloped in hot smoke on all sides. And where he's going, where he even is: smothered in pitch-black fog, he has no clue, swept along at the discretion of his flitting horses. It was at that point, as blood, so people believe, was drawn to their bodies' surface, that the Ethiopians got their dark coloring. That's when Libya became a desert, her moisture stolen in the stifling wave of heat...

This passage has several points of correspondence with Vergil's discussions of fire and his subtle Phaethon-figurations in the *Georgics* and the *Aeneid*. The image of Phaethon seeing the world aflame recalls the lines on the global ramifications of civil conflict introducing the charioteer simile from *Georgics* 1 (509-511). We also find common elements of the language used to describe the thick smoke at *Georgics* 2.308-9, (*ignis*) *totum inuoluit flammis nemus et ruit atram/ ad caelum picea crassus caligine nubem*.²²² We also see the drying up of damp earth, as described in the *Georgics*: (1. 87-88) *omne per ignem/excoquitur uitium atque exsudat inutilis umor*. Especially powerful is Ovid's point-for point deconstruction of the actions of Vergil's Neptune in *Aeneid* 1.

Unlike Vergil's Neptune, who rides triumphantly away from the scene in his "obedient vehicle" at *Aen.* 1.155-6, Phaethon is at a loss as to how to proceed here and has no idea where he is or how to calm his frightened horses: (*Met.* 2.169-170) *ipse pavet nec qua commissas flectat habenas/ nec scit qua sit iter*, "himself in a panic, he knows

²²² With Vergil, we view the disaster as if from a distance, watching as the fire encircles the grove. Phaethon, however, feeling the heat and choking on the scorching fumes as he is encircled (*involvitur*) and wrapped in the pitchy smoke (*picea caligine tectus*), demands a much stronger sense of identification.

neither how to turn the reins, nor, if he did know, which way to go.” Nor, even if he 102
did know, could he command his horses (*nec, si sciat, imperet illis.*)²²³ Rather than the
authoritative Vergilian Neptune, Phaethon seems to resemble Vergil’s *pastores nescius*
and *inscius*. As for Ovid’s Neptune, his power is evidently much diminished, as he
attempts to reprise his heroic moment from *Aeneid* 1: three times he tries to break the
surface of the boiling sea, and three times he fails (*Met.* 2.270-1 *ter...ter*). Neptune is as
powerless to intervene in this crisis as Aeneas is to embrace the ghost of his wife Creusa,
lost in the fall of Troy (*ter...ter, Met.* 2.792-3). Thus, we see the failure of Vergilian
statecraft to meet the challenges posed by the Ovidian future, imagined as a confrontation
between water and fire. There is no contest.

For Vergil, the upheavals of the past are remembered as the price at which a
secure future was won for Rome. For Ovid, who grew up amid the security of Augustan
hegemony, the triumviral conflict is a distant memory, and imperial succession is the new
crisis of legitimacy: the glimpse of the future his Phaethon offers us is that of a return to
the past, rendered all the more deadly by the vast consolidation of power that Augustus
had achieved.²²⁴ Ovid’s treatment of polysemous strands of tradition in the *Fasti*, like the

²²³ Finally, Vergil explicitly compares Neptune’s stabilizing influence over the sea at 1.151 to that
of a Roman statesman “heavy” (*gravem*) in his *pietas* and distinctions (*meritis*); here, it is
Phaethon’s fatal lack of hefty balance (*gravitate carebat*, 2.162) which leads to his undoing. For a
different approach to the chariot in this episode, see Zissos and Goldenhard in Hardie et al. (eds)
(1999).

²²⁴ There is additional mileage to be gained from the hyperbolic mourning of Phaethon’s mother
and sisters, and the grandiloquent epitaph they offer to the *vestigia currus* (a final nod to Vergil’s
vestigia flammae?) that fall from the sky at 2.318 after Jupiter’s intervention. The *tumulus*, with
its stone epitaph, recall the Augustan funeral complex in the Campus Martius; several brilliant but
doomed heirs to the regime were commemorated with a mass of ceremonies, and both visual and
verbal monuments, both there and elsewhere, cf. discussion of Gaius and Lucius’ honors in
Fantham (2006) 104-105. Finally, the extravagant mourning of the Sun himself, which puts the

destructive tours-de-force in his fire and flood narratives, serves simultaneously to 103
create a comprehensive network of allusions and associations that advance his poetic
vision, and to emphasize the fragility and mutability of that vision. The tension between
the lingering memories of past cataclysm and the ever-present possibility of renewed
conflict is perhaps preserved and even cultivated in order to necessitate the ruler's
continued authority, or the poet's continued narrative. Manilius, coming late in the
Augustan sequence, seems to distill the lessons and imagery offered by his poetic
predecessors into an expression of a universal tendency towards self-immolation, which
only the most careful of rulers can control. Yet as we will see, fire continues to insist on
its own essential uncontrollability, and thus to function as a continual challenge to the
authoritative figures in the text.

Manilius: Fire in the Sky.

In several important respects, Manilius provides a fitting punctuation to our sequence of
authors. The intellectual heir not just to Ovid and Vergil as a writer of long-format epic,
but also to Vitruvius as a writer of a specialist treatise which advertises its real-world
applications, Manilius is no less totalizing in his vision than these writers, and deeply
concerned with the political import of his astrological findings. Perhaps because of his
own sense of intellectual belatedness as much as the imperial succession to which he was
witness, for Manilius the survival of the state through times of transition is a major
issue.²²⁵ Manilius fuses the leadership themes raised by his Latin predecessors with Greek
technical and philosophical models: especially in his moments of digression from his

world on indefinite hold, suggests Augustus' elaborate display of grief after the massacre of
Roman legions in the Varian disaster.

²²⁵ On the controversy here see Volk (2009) 156-158.

primary model, Aratus' *Phaenomena*, he often reveals the contemporary concerns and 104 specific ideological debates of the readership for which he was shaping his material.²²⁶

The Phaethon myth dominates the programmatically significant close of the first book of his *Phaenomena*. Perhaps even more significantly, the final surviving lines of Book 5 again explicitly evoke the theme of civil conflict, raising the specter of a world in which the disadvantaged majority realize the strength of their numbers, and rise up to engulf the universe in flames.

Like *Metamorphoses* 1, Manilius' first book begins with an extended cosmology, describing the formation of the cosmos and the division of the elements. The very first line, however, makes clear not only Manilius' debt to Vergil, but also his argument that the stars he is describing are important because of their implications for life on earth. The phrase at *Astr.* 1.1-2, *conscia fati/ sidera*, "stars charged with knowledge of fate" is an unmistakable echo of the introduction to Dido's final lines in *Aeneid* 4: (519-20) *testatur moritura deos et conscia sidera fati*, "on the brink of death, she called to witness the gods and the stars charged with knowledge of fate." With these words, Dido simultaneously seals her own fate, motivates her city's future enmity with Rome, and ensures its final destruction at the end of the Punic Wars.²²⁷ The cycle of violence evoked by the phrase's original setting is unsettling, but Manilius seems to put paid to it by insisting that his project is made safe by the peaceful conditions of the current regime (*Astr.* 1.13 *hoc sub pace vacat tantum*, "there's only an opportunity for this during peace"). Like Vitruvius, he dedicates his treatise to his *princeps*, explicitly acknowledging his own work as a

²²⁶ On all points, see Volk (2009).

²²⁷ Referenced more explicitly Manilius' description of the wasteland Libya (*Astr.* 4.658-661), which produced Hannibal, who "blasted with fire the Alpine peaks...and poured Libya into Latium."

product of the peace established by Augustus. Thus, the Phaethon-like wish he expresses to traverse the skies and gain familiarity with the constellations (*Astr.* 1. 13-15) is rendered harmless (or so it seems in the opening lines).²²⁸ The end of Book 1, however, destabilizes the vision of peace celebrated in its opening lines, by associating Phaethon and his ambitions with the worst catastrophes of Roman history.

Manilius at 1.685-750 offers a polysemous set of explanations for the Milky Way, the last and most substantial of which attributes the Milky Way's shape to Phaethon's path of destruction as he spun out of control: (*Astr.* 1.736) *patrio curru per signa volantem*, "hurtling through the constellations in his father's chariot." The significance of taking over the "father's chariot," already shaped by Ovid as a metaphor for anxiety over succession in the Roman principate, becomes even more emphatic in the phrase here. Given the clear set of metaphors linking leadership of the state and control of a chariot, the adjective *patrio* here may also suggest the word's close relationship to the Roman notion of the *patria*, which, as in Vergil's programmatic simile from *Georgics* 1, is spinning out of control. Manilius goes on to offer an even more elaborately political alternate cosmology, in which the Milky Way becomes the abode of catasterized heroes (*Astr.* 1.755-804) from Troy on through Roman history, up to the first-century dynasts (including Augustus, whose place there is anticipated).²²⁹ This dovetails directly into a

²²⁸ If we accept the arguments of Volk (2003), Manilius again figures himself as a cosmic charioteer in the poem's second book (*Astr.* 2.138-40). Given his explicit reference to Phaethon's unsuccessful ride through the cosmos in Book 1, it would seem as if Manilius asks us to see him as a Phaethon figure (minus the fall): prepared by his training and knowledge, he is able to guide his chariot through an "empty circuit/ orbit" (*vacuo... orbe*, cf. Volk 2003: 631) around the earth. Volk (2003) comments on the prevalence of chariot imagery in Manilius generally, but does not mention Phaethon specifically.

²²⁹ Cicero identifies the Milky Way with the abode of history's heroes in the *Somnium Scipionis* (19), though in a parallel text (*Tusc.* 1.43) the soul is said to ascend to the moon.

discussion of fire as the most pervasive and powerful force in the cosmos, one which 106 “takes hold of bodies that suit its nature” (*Astr.* 1.822, *materiamque sui deprendit flamma capacem*). This point suggests the affinity between fire and those it afflicts, much like the proleptic flames of desire that afflict Vergil’s Dido and Ovid’s Phaethon. In the form of comets, fire is a harbinger of barren crops, plague (if a society has already become dissipated and unwarlike, as at Athens), and wars, particularly civil: Manilius mentions Philippi, Actium, and the battle against Sextus Pompey, who “took captive the waters made safe by his father” (*Astr.* 1.809, *aequora...cepit defensa parenti*), again suggesting the theme of unworthy heirs corrupting the elements mastered by their fathers.

Gale makes a key point about such digressions when she argues that special attention is due to sections in the poem without any obvious technical relevance, since their very “tangentiality” should alert us to the importance of other poetic and cultural agendas.²³⁰ Gale delineates numerous intertexts between 1.896-913 of the *Astronomica* and the end of Vergil’s *Georgics* 1, noting in particular the prominent Vergilian motif of doubling in both passages. As Vergil frames Philippi as a repetition of Pharsalus, Manilius also “caps” Vergil by representing Actium as a further doubling of Philippi (*repetita...rerum/ alea*, ‘affairs put once again at hazard’), suggesting a renewal of conflict down the bloodline.²³¹ Sextus Pompey and Augustus, finally, follow in their respective fathers’ footsteps.²³² Perhaps more emphasis is due, however, to the centrality of doubling to Manilius’ entire project: he is claiming, in a far more direct way than we have thus seen, a “doubling” or twinship between his historical figures and their heavenly

²³⁰ Gale in Green and Volk, eds. (2011) 213. See also Bajoni (2004).

²³¹ Fought on the same battlefield which is this ‘fertilized a second time with Roman blood,’ [*Geo.* 1.491-2].

²³² Gale in Green and Volk (2011) 216.

avatar, Phaethon. The ideological issues raised by Phaethon's fiery demise, which 107
Vergil and Ovid address less overtly and refuse to resolve clearly, are connected in
Manilius not just with other images of urban conflagration, but with the worst crises any
state can face.

Manilius concludes his catalogue of earthly chaos with lines suggesting that the
chaos has been managed, while perhaps also questioning the penchant among mortal
rulers for divine self-fashioning:

*sed satis hoc fatis fuerit. iam bella quiescant,
atque adamanteis discordia vincta catenis
aeternos habeat frenos in carcere clausa.
sit pater invictus patriae, sit Roma sub illo,
cumque deum caelo dederit, non quaerat in orbe.*

But let this be enough for the fates. Now let wars calm, and may Discordia, bound
in adamantine chains, have eternal restraints, shut tight in her prison. Let our
country have its unconquered father, let Rome be under his command, and since
she has given a god to heaven, she should not seek one on earth.

Discordia and Phaethon appear to be natural companions for Manilius, connecting the
Vergilian themes of leadership, conflagration and civil unrest in a single unified passage.
The last line also seems to suggest pointedly that leaders should learn from Phaethon's
fate and focus their attention on terrestrial issues, rather than cosmic ambitions. Though
the final lines of Book 1 end on a positive note, Gale is certainly right to label the finale
of Manilius' first book far more ideologically problematic than its proem.

Striking, overtly political re-formulation of this idea also occurs as the conclusion
of the *Astronomica* as we have it (5.734-45). According to Manilius, if the republic (*res
publica*, 738) of the heavens, which has founded a sky-city (*urbem caelo*, 739), did not
have a class-system that prevented the population (*populus*, 742) from having "power
proportional to its numbers" (*vires pro numero*, 743), the whole universe would go up in

flames.²³³ The importance of these passages for our study is twofold. On the one hand, they are a useful illustration of how overt the rhetoric surrounding fire and leadership could be, in contrast to the more covert and paradoxical readings imminent in Vergil and Ovid. On the other hand, they recontextualize ideologically driven images and narratives advanced by earlier Augustan authors in an explicitly cosmological and natural-philosophical setting. The ideological import of the astronomical discourse in which Manilius participated appears to have had a profound impact on authors in the Neronian and Flavian periods, a theme I explore further in the next chapter. 108

Conclusion:

In a sense, Augustus was as occupied as Ovid, Vergil, and Manilius were in the business of breaking down categories and blurring definitions between myth, history, and contemporary life at Rome. Augustus engaged with his own set of narratives (or, put less charitably, of fictions) and controlled his own set of metaphors, creating a dense environment of monuments, coins, events, and rituals that promoted his ascent to power and associated him with figures from myth and history. Likewise, the authors in Chapter 1 all draw a tight figurative nexus between mythic heroes, historical leaders, the Roman *princeps*, fire as a cosmic force, and fire as an expression of urban decay and political instability. At the most general level, the message seems to be that it is not the complete avoidance of fires, but rather the response to them, that is crucial to the assessment of leadership. When a leader could associate himself successfully with control over fires, or capable recovery from a destruction, a fire could in fact be quite advantageous.

²³³ Lowe (2004).

optimistic or pessimistic; rather his poetry shows a keen awareness of the potential dangers in any scenario, an unflinching recognition of the costs even of an inevitable destruction, and a nuanced sensitivity to the tension inherent in his blend of cosmological and historical material. Ovid's most significant relation to Augustan rhetoric, finally, may not be that of poet to *princeps*, but of one creator of fictions to another. In Augustus, Ovid recognized a subtle mind and a worthy competitor in the field of manipulating narrative strands, and creating striking images that conveyed their own truths.²³⁴ Manilius, finally, seems to lay bare the code in which his models were speaking, as he repeatedly links leaders, fire, cosmic dissolution and urban destruction in transparent ways that suggest the centrality of this rhetoric to the cultural discourse from which all our authors drew. As we will see, this constellation of concepts has profound implications for the ways in which not only Nero's fire, but his entire reign is presented to us in the material and literary record. In the ashes of the fire of 64, authors could not help but see *Troia antiqua*, and perhaps an end to *imperium sine fine*. Nor could Nero avoid associative links not just with his Trojan ancestors, but with his mythic counterparts: Dido and Phaethon.

²³⁴ Feldherr (2010) 61, 81. Feldherr (2010: 314) denies that Augustus himself was an "artist" *per se*, but the rest of his discussion makes clear that the first *princeps* was certainly a consummate inventor and curator of images.

CHAPTER TWO. *Sequitur Clades*: the Trajectory into Neronian Catastrophe

Introduction:

Chapter 1 reviewed Augustus' self-figuration as a new founder of Rome and an "anti-incendiary" as a key component of his claims to power as the redeemer of Rome's late-republican and triumviral collapse, fulfilling a cosmos-ordering destiny that he analogized with Rome's rise from the ashes of Troy. These efforts developed in parallel with the efflorescence of literature concerned with redefining the past and setting a course for Rome's future. In the work of Vergil, Ovid, and Manilius, disasters from myth and distant history became allusive proxies for commemorating the triumviral conflicts as well as for voicing anxieties about renewed instability. Equally, passages from Livy and Vitruvius create the strong impression that Rome's urban fabric and its susceptibility to fire are a powerful metaphor for its tendency towards political entropy and ideological instability. Thus, authors across genres overlapped the motifs of civil discord and conflagration in *Urbs Roma* and in the cosmos, creating a new set of narratives to justify, stabilize, and occasionally to call into question the values of the new era. Augustus and the authors working under his auspices were successful in using these images selectively to create a positive image of emergence from chaos, distancing Rome from the internecine strife and urban violence that had eaten away at its core.

In this chapter, we will see how the political impact of fire at Rome and the literary depictions of conflagration come to a spectacular intersection during the reign of Nero. As the whole world "knows," *Nero fiddled while Rome burned*. The dubious veracity of this statement belies its import as cultural touchstone, bringing urban disaster,

leadership, and creative expression together in a single potent image. No story from 111 Roman history is better known than the allegation that when the Great Fire of 64 CE was at its height, Nero took the opportunity to perform a song of his own composition on the fall of Troy.²³⁵ The enduring mystique of Neronian Rome and its self-immolation has much to do with the baroquely villainous portrait of Nero constructed by later sources: the post-Neronian “Nero” is the product of a uniquely hostile literary and historical tradition.²³⁶ Yet the living Nero seems to have invited and developed a type of category confusion that exacerbates the problem of trying to separate fact from fiction. A preliminary look at the evidence immediately fragments the striking image of Nero’s fire-inspired performance into a list of questions, possible literary allusions, and intractable source problems, which can serve here as an introduction to the central question of trying to understand the narrative of Nero and of the 64 destruction.

Suetonius and Dio place Nero’s aforementioned fateful recitation in two different locations and in two different costumes. Suetonius puts Nero at the top of tower in the Gardens of Maecenas on the Esquiline, Dio on “the highest point of the Palatine”; Suetonius uses the term *scaenico habitu*, suggesting it was a stage costume, while Dio describes him in the beltless frock of a citharode. Both versions, however, place Nero at a high vantage point on one of his properties, from which he could watch the catastrophe unfold below him as he sang of Troy’s destruction. The point is significant, because both

²³⁵ Tacitus presented the story as no more than contemporary rumor, and only as an explanation for why popular perception did not praise Nero more for his outstanding relief efforts in the wake of the fire. Suetonius and Dio reframe their own versions of the rumor as hard fact, but vary in respect to location; the attire described by the two authors also differs, and has implications for the genre imagined for the piece. The discrepancies are presented in Champlin (2003) 60-65. See also Gyles (1947).

²³⁶ A point summed up well in the introduction of Elsner and Masters (1994) 4-5.

Nero's subject matter and his position recall Aeneas' description of the fall of Troy in 112 *Aeneid* 2, which he witnesses first from the roof peak of his own house, and then from a series of mysteriously panoptic yet safe locations thereafter.²³⁷ Nor are Nero's location and attire the only problematic points.

According to Tacitus, Nero's performance also in some fashion served to mirror current destruction unfolding before him: "[the rumor spread that] he had sung the Trojan destruction, likening present catastrophes to ancient (*cecinisse Troianum excidium, praesentia mala vetustis cladibus adsimulantem*)."²³⁸ It is hard to say from Tacitus' phrasing whether we have here a case of Nero extemporaneously composing verse which both referenced Troy and commented on the events unfolding at his doorstep, or whether the context in which he allegedly performed the lines on Troy simply invited the association. Both are standard methods of creating literary allusions, exceptional only in the immediacy (and perhaps the magnitude) of the occasion that invited the comparison. They certainly suggest Nero's relish of the conceit that he, as a Roman emperor descended from Aeneas, would simultaneously enact both Aeneas' experience of watching the his city burn, and his subsequent recounting of Troy's fall. Nero might also here be imagined in a role akin to that of Priam: according to Dio (62.16.1), Nero claimed to envy the mythic king's experience of simultaneously witnessing both the end of his

²³⁷ *summi fastigia tecti*, Verg. *Aen.* 2.303; later, Aeneas gives an account of witnessing the death of Priam inside the palace, apparently from the rooftop where he and his doomed troupe of warriors have just toppled a tower onto a column of Greeks (*Aen.* 2.469-5-558); finally, Aeneas later beholds from a safe distance a line of Trojan women arranged for distribution along with other spoils of war (*Aen.* 2.760-767). Further implicating this narrative in the net of Roman history is the well-known status of *Aeneid* 2 as an analogue for the fall of the Roman republic. On Vergil's particularly pointed use of historiographic sources in the death of Priam, Morgan (2000).

²³⁸ Tac. *Ann.* 15. 29. 3

reign and his city, but we should recall that this is a remark also attributed to 113

Tiberius.²³⁹ Libby reads this behavior as part of a larger paradigm shift around the treatment of myth at Rome: while Augustus and his contemporaries were adept at shaping Trojan myth to fit contemporary circumstances and signal his plans for Rome's future, Nero reverses this process, shaping his present to fit literary models.²⁴⁰

The confusion detailed above, over which emperor suffered from a Priam complex, as well as over which Trojan leader Nero might have imitated in 64, reflects a larger truth of the era: that Nero himself seems to have been an energetic creative force behind many of the anecdotes describing him in terms that seem borrowed from myth and tragedy. The blurring of real people into characters, and lives into plots, had begun long before Nero's ascent to power. Nero was, in some ways, simply iterating and extending the patterns in mythopoetic self-fashioning set by Augustus, but he seems to have done so with unprecedented energy. The obsession with performance and display runs through his entire career.²⁴¹ Early in his reign, the young *princeps* seemed poised to revive or even surpass the identity of his revered predecessor Augustus as the institutor of a new Golden Age of Roman peace, cultural production, and urban splendor. The revival of literary creativity under Nero did indeed leave us the works of Lucan, Seneca, and Petronius, the

²³⁹ Dio 58.23. 4-5: Tiberius "often...exclaimed 'When I am dead, let the earth be engulfed in flame!' Frequently, too, he would count Priam as blessed because "all at once, along with both country and rule, he met his end." The likelihood that many incendiary quips attributed to Nero by later authors were actually "harvested" is discussed below (137).

²⁴⁰ Libby (2011: 209-210) formulates it succinctly: "When Nero molds the historical present based on the mythical past rather than revising myth to fit contemporary circumstances, he also allows myth to take over reality, and when he sings his own *Sack of Troy* while Rome is burning, he similarly blurs the line between theatrical and real-life tragedy."

²⁴¹ Pliny would later disparage Nero as the *imperator scaenicus*: Plin. *Pan.* 46.4. On Nero's obsession with the theater and the arts: Bartsch (1994) is fundamental, esp. 1-62; Boyle (1994) 34-37 and (2006) 183-88; Champlin (2003) 53-83; Edwards (1994); Frazer (1966); Griffin (1984): 160-63; Gyles (1962); Morford (1985); Woodman (1993). After Libby (2011) 212.

epigrammatist Lucilius, and (probably) the pastoral poet Calpurnius Siculus.²⁴² In 114

this chapter, a set of complementary readings delineates a consistent thematic concern with the triangulation of leaders, fires, and urban disaster among Neronian authors, much of which in all likelihood predates the catastrophe of 64 CE.²⁴³

The texts examined in this chapter reveal the powerful influence of the authors discussed in Chapter 1, who had quickly attained canonical status in the world of Roman literature. They also demonstrate the continued preoccupation with imagery and storylines concerning catastrophe and conflagration in the years leading up to of 64. Furthermore, a few texts strongly invite readings as covert literary responses to the fire itself. To outline Chapter 2 in full, an impressionistic set of anecdotes concerning Tiberius, Caligula, and Claudius foregrounds the ongoing cultural preoccupation with leaders and disasters at Rome. Here, however, I review and re-contextualize these anecdotes in relation to the risks and opportunities that large-scale fires at Rome presented to the *princeps* in the period between the death of Augustus and the Great Fire. Next, I briefly delineate the Neronian fire, an event well studied yet still open to new questions.²⁴⁴

²⁴² Nero's cultivation of a literary circle at Rome: Griffin (1984) 146-55; Morford (1973) 210-15 and (1985) 2003-30; Sullivan (1985) 19-56. Sen. *Apocol.* 4; Calp. *Ecl.* 1.33-88 and *Einsiedeln Eclogues* 1.38-41 and 2.15-38. Sullivan (1985, 56-59) reads *Einsiedeln Eclogues* 1.38-41 as an ironic comment on Calpurnius Siculus' overdone praise of the new Golden Age under Nero. After Libby (2011) 212 n.259.

²⁴³ Although few of the passages selected can be securely dated as pre-or-post-conflagration, the likelihood that much of it was written before the disaster is reinforced by the unhappy fact that Seneca and Lucan were both dead by the end of 65, and Petronius (in all probability) followed them a year later.

²⁴⁴ Champlin (2003) and Griffin (1984) are comprehensive and responsible; see also Rubin (2004); a brief but important assessment of the postclassical reception is sketched in Grafton, (2010).

behavior before, during, and after the destruction, which were part of a larger pattern of transgressive performance and spectacle characterizing his persona. The gestures and pageantry attributed to Nero before, during, and after the fire of 64 themselves form a kind of literary text: they seem deliberately adjusted to fit and recall mythopoetic models.²⁴⁵ The focus here is not on what we can prove about the “real” Nero, but on how the legendary Nero’s use of Troy and other mythic tropes played into his response to the Fire of 64. The work of Neronian authors further reflects Nero’s disordered priorities for Rome, emphasizing the era’s fractured relationship with the Augustan legacy, as well as with the more distant, mythic past.

In the course of treating Neronian literature, priority goes to Lucan’s *Bellum Civile*, the work most clearly targeting the epic traditions surrounding urban destruction and universal conflagration explored in Chapter 1. A selection of key episodes in the *Bellum Civile* will provide a framework for exploring a related set of ideas drawn from Seneca’s vast literary output. Among Seneca’s most compelling treatments of the topic are his extended series of evocations of the fate of Phaethon, a recurring theme in a wide range of his works, and his epistolary meditation on the devastation by fire of the provincial capital Lyon, a text with strong potential to be read as a response to the 64 conflagration. Petronius in his *Satyricon* likewise displays a preoccupation with incendiary themes that together seem to target Nero’s alleged song of Troy’s destruction, as well as the emperor’s well-known rivalry with Lucan.

²⁴⁵ Libby (2011) 209-210.

All three authors share a preoccupation with themes of internecine strife, 116 spectacles of death and violence, and crises of personal identity in the face of overwhelming and capricious authority. Rather than attempting to disentangle the complex possibilities of influence among our three authors, a set of complementary readings seeks to delineate a consistent thematic concern with the fraught triad of leaders, fires, and urban disaster. The sense of living dangerously which pervades the work of Neronian authors found striking confirmation in the demise each author met: all were forced to commit suicide by Nero's command. In a fitting reversal, within a few years Nero himself would imitate the death he had so often decreed for his contemporaries. Altogether, Neronian literature concerning fire and unstable leadership was well positioned to become eerily prescient, if perhaps slightly overdetermined, in the wake of 64 and Nero's catastrophic end. Nero, already apparently an enthusiastic exploiter of poetic images in his daily existence, became an ideal repository for the rich supply of previous texts linking leaders and fire. The best revenge of Nero's victims may ultimately be the way in which their works effectively "frame" Nero for the fire of 64, an effect subsequent authors and emperors would recognize and exploit with remarkable energy.

Destruction and Dynasty: Imperial Cremations.

A massive cremation spectacle marked the beginning of Tiberius' reign. Augustus' enormous pyre, set in a purpose-built monumental complex, and its carefully orchestrated ignition provided a demonstration of pyrotechnical virtuosity that was implicitly a massive display of power. Like Julius Caesar's memorably disruptive funeral in 44 BCE,

the event was marked by thronging crowds, incendiary *coups de théâtre*, and a monument marking the site eternally. This cremation, however, was an exquisitely orchestrated and elaborately controlled affair: Dio tells us that Augustus had drawn up detailed plans, including a number of gestures which appear to be calculated parallels to the memorable occurrences and prodigies attending Caesar's death.²⁴⁶ The overwhelming public expression of grief apparent in the riotous funeral of 44 BCE, with its overtones of mystical deification, was a powerful memory which Augustus would have seen the advantage in activating at the crucial point of transition.

Thus, Augustus' cremation plan reintroduced some of the most memorable effects of Caesar's cremation and deification, even as it ensured against the risk of upheaval. Moreover, the ceremonies enshrined and inscribed this transformative moment within the sanctioned space of the Augustan Campus Martius, a veritable theme park of Julio-Claudian monuments. Designed as a sacred enclosure for the incineration of deceased members of the imperial family, Rome's monumental *ustrina* were constructed to accommodate the central spectacle of an enormous bonfire. Rome's first emperor had initiated construction of a massive mausoleum almost immediately after establishing political primacy.²⁴⁷ Augustus may also have chosen the site for, and even built his own *ustrinum* adjacent to the Mausoleum.²⁴⁸ Whether Augustus or Tiberius chose the site, the

²⁴⁶ Similarities include the wax images displayed in place of the actual body, the heavy participation of military units lending the occasion the air of a triumph, and the supposed signs of apotheosis (a comet for Caesar, and eagle flying up from the pyre for Augustus). See Dio 56.33-44; see also Davies (2000) and (2004) 10-12.

²⁴⁷ Suetonius tells us 28 BCE; *Aug.* 100-101.

²⁴⁸ On the Mausoleum and *ustrinum*, see Davies (2004) 24-27 and 49ff, Rehak (2006) 25-61, Haselberger et. al, (2002) "Mausoleum" and "Ustrinum"; Boatwright (1985). Note however Gallia's (2007) concern expressed in a review of Rehak (2006): "...despite [Rehak's] claim that Strabo wrote his description of the [ustrinum] site 'sometime before his (sc. Augustus') death' (p. 33), we do not know when this location was established. In fact, Strabo (who refers to the

Augustan *ustrinum* remained as a perpetual commemoration of the rituals, spectacles, 118 and risks of staging funerals for significant figures in the regime.²⁴⁹

Tacitus draws a clear connection between the management of Augustus' funeral rites on the Campus Martius and the basis for Tiberius' claim to power.²⁵⁰ This impression is reinforced by the overwhelming military presence at the funeral.²⁵¹ It seems likely that the threat of renewed civic unrest attendant upon the death of a leader, and the arson closely associated with such unrest, would have offered a plausible pretext for a forceful assertion of authority on the part of the new emperor. With each successive state funeral, the Julio-Claudian cremation precinct and the various tombs on the Campus Martius became more prominent parts of the Rome's "mental map" as well as of its religious and commemorative life.²⁵² Thus, state funerals became instrumental in linking

monument as a *καύστρα*) may be describing a monument set up by Tiberius on the site after Augustus' body was cremated."

²⁴⁹ Various interpretations and reconstructions of the imperial *ustrina* have been attempted (see note above). In any event, the highly regulated and demarcated nature of the Augustan *ustrinum* (evidently imitated by later imperial *ustrina*, and suggested also in Strabo's account) again suggests the extreme set of precautions and controls necessary to manage such an event safely in the urban environment, a monumentalized reminder of the military's implied regulation of the crowd at the event itself.

²⁵⁰ Tiberius issued a statement that the oversight of the funeral was the only public duty he claimed (*...de honoribus parentis consulturum, neque abscedere a corpore, idque unum ex publicis muneribus usurpare*: "...he would attend to the rites due his father, would not abandon the body: this alone of public duties would he take over.") Then, Tiberius immediately set about stationing armed men throughout the city in a clear demonstration of his command: *sed defuncto Augusto signum praetoriis cohortibus ut imperator dederat; excubiae, arma, cetera aulae; miles in forum, miles in curiam comitabatur*, "but once Augustus was dead, he gave the signal to the Praetorians just like an emperor: there were watches, weapons, and the rest of a court's guard detail; soldiers backed him up in Forum and Curia alike."

²⁵¹ Concern over a re-emergence of the riotous response to Caesar's death might provide an arguable motivation for such measures, but Tacitus characterizes the close military supervision of Augustus' cremation on the Campus Martius as a deeply sinister foretaste of the repressive environment of the remainder of the Julio-Claudian dynasty.

²⁵² In Erasmo's elegant summation: "Death ritual separates the living from the dead but recollection of its practice also unites generations. Thus, the site, permanently associated with death and death ritual, transformed an urban setting into an urban setting of death." Erasmo (2008) 5. Erasmo additionally cites (2004) 27–44. For the physical and figurative visual effects of

emperors and fires in the pre-Neronian era; they offered leaders a chance to activate 119
imagery of fire and death via a mediated spectacle in which order was strictly imposed.

Literary Conflagrations: Dissidence and Book Burning.

Imperial cremations of predecessors seems to belong to the old motif of burning the fields to make them more fertile, a motif related to the phoenix rising from the ashes, which was suggested in the eagle released from the midst of the burning pyre: these are purifying and rejuvenating fires that leave behind a stronger polity. The control an emperor wielded over his subjects' fates, and over Rome's future more generally, is also suggested in anecdotes concerning another type of incendiary event in which representation and commemoration are at stake: the practice of burning material deemed ideologically threatening, and the deliberate destruction of potentially damaging records.

Under Tiberius in 25 CE, legal action against the historian Cremutius Cordus was, according to Tacitus, "a new charge heard for the first time" (*novo ac tunc primum audito crimine*). Dissidence in other literary forms had been suppressed for some time, notably in the case of the Augustan-era dissident Titus Labienus.²⁵³ Additionally, Suetonius mentions the burning of thousands of prophetic writings when Augustus took over as *pontifex maximus*, and a great deal of evidence points towards the suppression of

recarved or removed statues after memory sanctions, see also Varner (2000) 9–26; Flower (2001) 58–69 and (2006) *passim*.

²⁵³ cf. the burning of Titus Labienus' works in 6-8 CE; Sen. *Con.* 10. On Labienus, see discussion by Syme (1938) and (1978: 213-4); Knox (2004:7); Hennig (1973) 245-254. The burning of Labienus' works was vigorously protested. Previous charges of *maiestas* for written and spoken criticism of the government had been leveled against Aemilius Scaurus in 24 CE. See Sen. *Con.* 10, 203, Sen. *Suas.* 2.22, Tac. *Ann.* 6.9 (so McHugh 2004: 393).

astrological magical writing under Augustus and Tiberius alike.²⁵⁴ Augustus' ban on 120 the publication of Senate proceedings, as much as the gesture of control implied in moving the Sibylline Books, Rome's most influential set of prophetic books, to Apollo's shrine on the Palatine are equally suggestive of his interest in controlling what information was publically available.

Finally, in the Augustan era Timagenes of Alexandria, an influential literary authority, was resident in Rome and wrote an account of the *acta Caesaris Augusti*.²⁵⁵ Before this book was published, however, a disagreement with the *princeps* led him to consign his own works to the flames.²⁵⁶ As the elder Seneca tells it, this gesture was a retaliatory one: in return for being debarred from the emperor's house, he would deprive the Roman community of his work "as if he too would debar the emperor from his genius."²⁵⁷ Yet Seneca the Younger describes the disagreement in more detail, describing the specific point of disagreement as a combination of Timagenes' unflattering opinions concerning the members of the imperial family, and his "recklessly refined" wit (*temeraria urbanitas*).²⁵⁸ This story, for the younger Seneca, serves as an example of the

²⁵⁴ Suetonius mentions the burning of prophetic records at *Aug.* 31.1; the banning of publication of Senate records, at *Aug.* 36.1. For the further discussion of the exact dates of these actions, and their possible impact on the discussion of Sibylline prophecy in Augustan literature, see Miller (2009) 134 and 234-80. On the suppression of astrology and magic, see, e.g., Tac. *Ann.* 2.27, 2.32; Suet. *Tib.* 36; Dio 56.25.5; Cramer (1945) 181-185.

²⁵⁵ On the life of Timagenes: *Fr.Gr.Hist.* 88 T 1-8; *P-W* col.1063-4.

²⁵⁶ The account of Forbes (1936) remains valuable, and sensitively locates the nexus between forced book burnings and those instances when authors themselves wish to destroy their own works.

²⁵⁷ Sen. *Contr.* 10.5.22. As Fear (2010: 430) argues: "In this version, Timagenes is represented as engaging in a parallel and trumping bout of interdictions, as Augustus's *interdictio domo* is countered by Timagenes' own *interdictio ingenio*." Gunderson (2003:94-7) productively compares this episode to the myth of Prometheus.

²⁵⁸ Engels (2000:238) rejects the notion that Timagenes' actual work was anti-Augustan in content, but this does not preclude the point that the burning his books occurred as a result of his conflict with Augustus.

first *princeps*' ability to resist the urge to punish harshly, in the face of extreme 121 provocation.²⁵⁹ Yet the net effect of the encounter was already a distortion of the historical record, under the overwhelming influence of imperial interdiction. In this sense, Timagenes' book-burning forms a precedent for the more extreme forms of censorship soon to emerge.

No one before Cremutius Cordus, however, had been charged with *maiestas* (that is, harm to the integrity of the state) for writing a history (*editis annalibus*); with this shift, writings hostile to the principate went from being considered defamatory to seditious.²⁶⁰ The problem, according to Tacitus, was the author's sympathetic portrayal of Brutus and Cassius. An anecdote from Seneca, to be discussed further below, suggests that personal animosity between Cremutius Cordus and Sejanus may have been the more proximate cause of his undoing.²⁶¹ The senate decreed that Cremutius Cordus' books were to be burned by the aediles.²⁶² Cremutius Cordus himself committed suicide, either forced to it or as a form of protest.²⁶³

We know from Tacitus' ensuing digression on the futility of destroying history, as well as from Seneca's own discussion of Cremutius Cordus' work in adulatory terms, that copies of at least some of his works survived and were republished under Caligula.²⁶⁴

²⁵⁹ *ex quibus appareat iram illi non imperasse*: "as a result of which, it is evident that anger did not rule him," Sen. *De Ira* 3.23.4. The anecdote, as Fear (2010: 430 n.7) observes, "is thus one of the usual examples cited in assessments of literary freedom under Augustus" (e.g. Griffin 1985:181–82, Raaflaub and Samons 1990:442–43, Feeney 1992:7–8).

²⁶⁰ Tac. *Ann.* 4.34.

²⁶¹ Seneca, *Consolatio ad Marciam* (*Dial.* 6.22.4); Bellemore (1992).

²⁶² Tac. *Ann.* 4.35. Their role as official book-burners seems a perverse distortion of these officials' original function as protectors of Rome's infrastructure and providers of entertainments.

²⁶³ McHugh (2004) 402, with bibliography.

²⁶⁴ Though it is perhaps of note that Quintilian (10.1.104) could only read a mutilated (or perhaps expurgated) version of Cordus' account of Octavian's rise to power. The treatment in Tacitus is treated in Suerbaum (1971) and reviewed in McHugh (2004). On Cordus in Seneca, see

Nevertheless, the implications of such a gesture were clear: no writer, or his work, 122 was safe from retaliation and suppression of the most drastic kind.²⁶⁵ Nor did the punishment of those voicing criticism for the emperor at Rome necessarily entail formal prosecution. Caligula would probably have needed no recourse to law when he retaliated against the author of a mime with a line of *double entendre*, burning this time not a book, but the man himself.²⁶⁶

The transfer of the emperor's implied capacity for destruction from an author's works to his person is striking, and it provides a new level of applicability for the metaphors surrounding "inflammatory" language. Tacitus may hint as much in his own presentation of Cremutius Cordus' monumental speech at *Annals* 4.35.2: *num enim armatis Cassio et Bruto ac Philippensis campos optinentibus belli civilis causa populum per contiones incendo?* ("Are Cassius and Brutus occupying the fields of Philippi? Am I inflaming the people to stir up civil war with my harangues?). The use of incendiary imagery in Tacitus occupies more attention in Chapter 3. The texts examined in this chapter show, however, that well before Tacitus, Roman authors were very much alive to the political potential of such metaphors. Tacitus inherited an extensive vocabulary of ideologically tinged fire imagery with which to embellish his own work.

Bellefleur (1992). On the topic of censorship in antiquity, see Rudich (1993) and (1997). See also Cramer (1945) and Pease (1946) 145-160. Tacitus' account is to be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

²⁶⁵ As Rudich (2006: 7) notes: "The Latin language did not know a word for 'censorship' as a technical term along the lines of our modern usage, that is, 'suppression of the written word.' The evidence, on the other hand, leaves no doubt that such suppression, which included the very physical form of book burning, repeatedly occurred under the Roman Empire, starting with the creation of the new political system, known as the Principate, by Augustus."

²⁶⁶ Rudich (1997) 16. The incident (from Suet. *Cal.* 27) is but one of a list of Caligula's depredations offered here by Rudich. Others included banishing a teacher of rhetoric for a mere declamation at school on the traditional topic of tyrannicide (Dio 59.20), and all but removing from the libraries the works of Virgil and Livy on the grounds that "the former was a man of no talent and little learning, and the latter wrote a verbose and careless history" (Suet. *Cal.* 34.).

The amount of pressure placed on an individual publishing written work under these conditions, as Herington remarks, “is almost unimaginable to the ordinary citizen of the present day, perhaps even to the statesman.”²⁶⁷ Seneca the Elder, who was himself the author of a (lost) historical treatise of Rome’s history from the time of the civil wars almost up to his own death, elsewhere describes the situation under Augustus’ successors as one in which an author must choose between his works and his life (*caput potius quam dictum perdere*, *Contr.* 2.4.13). Altogether, although book burning and threats to the lives and livelihoods of politically problematic authors were not unknown under Augustus, under Tiberius the association between the two risks crystallized into a recognizable motif: both invited the metaphor of the funeral pyre, adding a new meta-literary dimension to literary allusions to fire.

The alarming skid of metaphor towards reality is readily apparent in the elder Seneca’s account of immediate reaction to the burning of Labienus’ work:

Contr. 10.7: *Non tulit hanc Labienus contumeliam nec superstes esse ingenio suo voluit sed in monumenta se maiorum suorum ferri iussit atque ita includi, veritus scilicet, ne ignis, qui nomini suo subiectus erat, corpori negaretur. non finivit tantum se ipse sed etiam sepelivit.*

Labienus did not withstand the affront, nor did he wish to be a survivor of his own masterpiece; instead, he had himself borne to the tomb of his ancestors and walled up inside, lest the fire which had subsumed his reputation be denied his person. He did not just end his life – he buried himself.

Contr. 10.8: *Cassi Severi, hominis Labieno invisissimi, belle dicta res ferebatur illo tempore quo libri Labieni ex senatus consulto urebantur: nunc me, inquit, vivum uri oportet, qui illos edidici.*

Cassius Severus, a man massively odious to Labienus, did have a nicely phrased remark going around at the time when Labienus’ books were being burned by senate decree: “Now you’d better burn me alive too: I know those [books] by heart.”

²⁶⁷ Herington (1966) 429. After Rudich (1997) 25.

Each of the above anecdotes illustrates, in different ways, the new and more physical threat implied by the act of burning books. Labienus' death scene reinforces the close association of fire with death and proper burial. His fear that fire might be denied his own body, as Hennig suggests and Pettinger reiterates, could indicate his fear that if he were to live on he would be charged with *maiestas*, and thus denied a proper burial.²⁶⁸ Cassius Severus, for his part, wittily mocks the futility of attempting to destroy ideas, which transcend the paper on which they are conveyed. Unwittingly, however, he anticipates the aggressive exterminations to come: not simply of books, but of their authors.

Leaders and Disasters: Moments to Shine.

A Roman leader's response to the ever-looming crisis presented by urban fires continued to lend itself to broader interpretations of the performance of his duties. Tacitus sums up one such incident from late in Tiberius' reign:²⁶⁹ *quod damnum Caesar ad gloriam vertit exolutis domuum et insularum pretiis* ("This damaging incident Caesar adapted to benefit his reputation, covering the cost of houses and apartment blocks").²⁷⁰ A fire provided a chance to build the emperor's image: if not literally through monumentalizing reconstruction, then in goodwill and political capital obtained through financial support to those whose property had been destroyed. Stimulating long-term reconstruction as well as

²⁶⁸ Pettinger 2012, 89-90 n. 66; Pettinger cites Hennig 1973, 251 ff.

²⁶⁹ The Aventine Fire in 36; see discussion below.

²⁷⁰ Tac. *Ann.* 6.45.

providing for immediate needs in the aftermath of a destruction, these financial payouts were a tangible expression of imperial concern after a disaster. 125

Fires and relief efforts thus reinforced the bond between the ruler and the ruled, authorizing individual residents to rebuild as they saw fit while reinforcing ties of dependency to the *princeps*. At the same time, public scrutiny made the emperor's response to a crisis potentially damaging, if he failed to conduct himself with aplomb. A massive fire on the Caelian Hill in 27 CE was taken, along with the recent collapse of an amphitheater in Fidenae, as part of a general set of ill omens in Tiberius' reign. Tiberius, absent at the outset, took the event seriously enough to abandon his vacation on Capri and return to the city to survey the damage.²⁷¹

Nondum ea clades exoleverat cum ignis violentia urbem ultra solitum adfecit, deusto monte Caelio; feralemque annum ferebant et ominibus adversis susceptum principi consilium absentiae, qui mos vulgo, fortuita ad culpam trahentes, ni Caesar obviam isset tribuendo pecunias ex modo detrimenti.

The scent of this disaster [at Fidenae] had not even dissipated, when an outbreak of fire caused extraordinary harm to the city, totally burning out the Caelian. They said the year was doomed and that the *princeps* had deliberately planned his absence, assigning blame for happenstance, the way a mob does; except [Tiberius] Caesar headed them off by payouts in proportion to losses suffered.²⁷²

Tacitus's language clearly illustrates two important points: the first is the extent to which Tiberius' initial absence rankled popular sentiment, which was already distressed after the Fidenae incident. The second is the apparent naturalness of blaming the emperor for an apparently random disaster.²⁷³ The unity of the sentence's sequence may further suggest that Tiberius' distribution of funds might be viewed as a disingenuous gesture

²⁷¹ Tac. *Ann.* 3.63-65.

²⁷² Tac. *Ann.* 4.64.1.

²⁷³ Tacitus links the two events with the phrase introducing the fire episode: *nondum ea clades exoleverat*, "the disaster [at Fidenae] hadn't even faded out..." (Tac. *Ann.* 4.64.1).

calculated to silence suspicions of the emperor's culpability.²⁷⁴ Yet the regularity with 126 which Augustus evidently had issued monetary assistance in times of crisis suggests that payouts to the public after the outbreak of fires, no less than the work of the *vigiles* to prevent them, by this point formed a standard part of the repertoire of the *princeps* at Rome.

At the scene of a fire which threatened the temple of Vesta (yet again) in 29, Tiberius' already diminished image as protector of the city and leader of the urban cohort was apparently further threatened by his mother's initiative at the incident.

Sed et frequenter admonuit, maioribus nec feminae convenientibus negotiis abstineret, praecipue ut animadvertit incendio iuxta aedem Vestae et ipsam intervenisse populumque et milites, quo enixius opem ferrent, adhortatam, sicut sub marito solita esset.

Then too he frequently cautioned her to stay out of affairs that were serious and not appropriate for a woman: most of all when he realized she had been onsite during a fire at the temple of Vesta, participating along with the civilians and haranguing the troops so that they would assist more energetically, as she used to do when things were under her husband's command.

Suetonius situates the scene of the fire of 29 in a sequence illustrating the protracted power struggle between Tiberius and Livia, reinforcing the sense that a moment like the fire created an opportunity for high political theater. Livia's efforts here, which Suetonius characterizes as a renewal of her more prominent public role as Augustus' empress, suggest again that the leader's response to fires was a matter of some importance, especially when they threatened symbolically significant structures.²⁷⁵ The presence of

²⁷⁴ The notice comes in a larger sequence at the end of the *Annals* detailing the impact of Tiberius' relocation to Capri, and the emperor's habitual truancy seems to lie behind much of the resentment against him.

²⁷⁵ Tiberius seems finally to have hit the mark late in his reign in 36, when fire ravaged the densely settled Aventine Hill, as well as large parts of the adjacent Circus Maximus. Both Tacitus and Dio remark on the impressive sums dedicated to relief measures in 36, and on the general

Tiberius or his rivals-*cum*-proxies during or after a fire seems to have been an important mode of displaying patronage and concern for the urban population, so much so that Tiberius actually competed with his family members for the opportunity. The gesture has roots in the self-promoting gestures of Crassus and Egnatius Rufus; analogous efforts to support the stricken population with gifts of money apparently normalized, if not initiated by Augustus, now seem to be standard practice.

Caligula, despite his reputation for courting disaster, seems to have been exceptionally aware of the importance of projecting a message of concern for the city: only one recorded fire took place under his auspices, and Dio commends the newly minted *princeps* for his energetic assistance to the military in extinguishing it.²⁷⁶ The effort to protect the *Aemiliana* district where this fire broke out, an area with probable links to the *cura annonae*, highlights the connection between care of the city and management of the grain supply,²⁷⁷ criteria closely linked in the public's estimation of a ruler.²⁷⁸ Caligula's civic-minded and apparently emulation-worthy efforts notwithstanding,²⁷⁹ he gained more notoriety for his penchant for the outrageous.

success and positive reception of Tiberius' efforts. Tacitus emphasizes that the money was explicitly designated for replacing and repairing commercial and residential properties, possibly with an eye toward distinguishing Tiberius' motive for rebuilding from that of his monumentalizing predecessor.

²⁷⁶ Dio 59.9.4; *Fasti Ostienses* 1.1.13.1 (Smallwood 31.30).

²⁷⁷ The fire occurred in the as-yet not securely located Aemiliana District: either the warehouse district near the so-called Porticus Aemilia, or on the Southern Campus Martius near the Diribitorium. Either location would have been a key point for grain distribution and as such a source of major concern to any emperor who wished to remain in power. Significantly, Suetonius records Claudius' efforts to put out a later fire in the same location as part of a larger passage illustrating his scrupulous attention to the supply and distribution of grain (Suet. *Claud.* 18).

²⁷⁸ Smaller fires at Rome in Claudius' time mainly make it into the record on account of the antiquity of the temples destroyed or the value of the art destroyed in the fire. These too, however, seem to have an ideological point to make as presented in the sources, representing yet another irreparable rupture with Rome's republican past. Additionally, the chance survival of evidence of an unrecorded fire close to the future site of the Colosseum illustrates the importance

Caligula seems to have recognized (and less astutely, commented aloud upon) 128 the value that a real catastrophe would have added to his image. According to Suetonius, Caligula occasionally complained about the relative stability of his reign (*Calig.* 31):

queri etiam palam de condicione temporum suorum solebat, quod nullis calamitatibus publicis insignirentur; Augusti principatum clade Variana, Tiberi ruina spectaculorum apud Fidenas memorabilem factum, suo obliuionem imminere prosperitate rerum; atque identidem exercituum caedes, famem, pestilentiam, incendia, hiatum aliquem terrae optabat.

He used to complain openly about the state of his tenure, because it lacked the distinction of any public calamities; the principate of Augustus by Varus' disaster, that of Tiberius by the theater collapse at Fidenae were made memorable; over his own rule, though, oblivion loomed due to his very prosperity. He wished repeatedly for a massacre of troops, famine, plague, conflagrations, or some kind of earthquake.

While Caligula is not likely to have won many fans with statements like the above,²⁸⁰ at its heart we have a perfectly valid political truth: the dramatic responses that such crises necessitated were memorable moments, offering major opportunities for political leaders to garner attention and accolades. Caligula recognized that he could not portray himself as the people's "rescuer" if they needed no rescue.

of quickly rebuilding ideologically significant sites: the small templar structure crediting Claudius as restorer after a fire lies in close proximity to the Palatine/Forum axis and probable association with not only the triumphal route, but with the *collegium* of brass wind instruments, who had a closely adjacent shrine. The site, also speculated to be near Augustus' birthplace, was also apparently significant enough to merit further remodeling not long after its post-fire rebuilding, to include new statues of Agrippina and Nero, presumably when the latter became emperor in 55/56; after Agrippina's assassination in 59, her statue was removed and her title plastered over. See Panella (1996) 115-131 and 201-216.

²⁷⁹ When the same zone, the Aemiliana district, again succumbed to conflagration under Claudius, not to be outdone he established a sort of command center in the Diribitorium, from which he personally directed the firefighting for two days. In a similar vein, Claudius oversaw construction initiated by Caligula to provide Rome with two new sources of fresh water, the marvelously well-functioning Aqua Claudia and the Anio Novus; see Barrett (1989) 195.

²⁸⁰ And while it does certainly fit in suspiciously well with literary traditions of overweening leaders willing destruction on their people: see the anecdotes concerning Tiberius below at 127-8.

times of crisis, the apparent evolution of a mythology surrounding the survival or destruction of the emperor's portrait in accidental fires speaks to the increasingly divinized stature of the *princeps* at Rome. Tacitus reports that the fire of 27 spared nothing on the Caelian except a portrait of Tiberius. Supporters of the *princeps* even went so far as to use the parallel to justify a call to change the name of the Hill from Caelius to Augustus, arguing as follows: *evenisse id olim Claudiae Quintae eiusque statuam vim ignium bis elapsam maiores apud aedem matris deum consecravisse. sanctos acceptosque numinibus Claudios et augendam caerimoniam loco in quo tantum in principem honorem di ostenderint*, "(it was said) the same had occurred with Claudia Quinta's statue: having twice escaped fiery violence, it was dedicated by our ancestors in the temple of the Mother of Gods; also, that the Claudii were sacred and counted as deities, and veneration was to be increased where the gods showed honor towards the *princeps*." This propitious event invited association with the similar survival of the Claudia Quinta statue when the temple of Magna Mater had burned down under Augustus²⁸¹ The ruler's figurative capacity to make or unmake his subjects was both dramatized and jeopardized in moments of crisis, when forces outside his control could at least be imagined to take precedence over the ruler in shaping Rome's future. The

²⁸¹ Tacitus (*Ann.* 4. 64) points out that people in Rome remarked on the parallel at the time. The Magna Mater incident seems already to have provided convenient material for the Augustan image-making machine; this reoccurrence smacks of a gesture designed to respond to critics of Tiberius' tendency to retreat from Rome. In the same sense that the center of the Empire was wherever the emperor happened to reside, the emperor could never truly be absent from a Rome so thoroughly permeated with his images: each was a localized expression of his *genius*, and at the same time an almost infinitely replicable expression of his authority. Unlike the unique statue of his purported ancestress Claudia Quinta, Tiberius' statues thus would seem perhaps the most likely item of note to escape a fire in a noted senatorial enclave, rendering the fanfare with which the "prodigy" was greeted somewhat hollow.

monuments and statues representing the emperor's influence, divine favor and eternal 130 presence around the city could become either a liability of damaged, or a mark of distinction if spared by a conflagration.

Phaethon and the *Princeps*: Anticipating Annihilation?

Along with evidence for the actual disasters which took place, or alternately were averted under the auspices of the Julio-Claudian successors, we should consider the apparently powerful strain of apocalyptic anxiety which seems to have beset the period, particularly that of Tiberius. Romans' calculations of their *saecula* and the finite allowance thereof were practically a national pastime. Augustus had addressed similar anxieties a generation earlier with a series of monuments and celebrations suggesting a re-setting of the cosmic clock, which would allow the Romans yet another multi-century span of glory. Given the harrowing saga of Augustus' series of doomed successors, and the inevitable power vacuum created by his death after a lengthy span of unopposed rule, these anxieties seem to have been renewed. Dio recounts a series of negative omens in the year following the Palatine fire of 15 CE, concluding with a report of a widely disseminated oracle presaging Rome's imminent collapse.²⁸²

The prophecy of doom in 15 CE and others like it may have darkened the outlook on Julio-Claudian succession from the outset. This unpromising beginning sets the tone

²⁸² ...[people were] furthermore disturbed not a little by an oracle, reputed to be an utterance of the Sibyl, which, although it did not fit this period of the city's history at all, was nevertheless applied to the situation then existing. It ran: "When thrice three hundred revolving years have run their course/ Civil strife upon Rome destruction shall bring, and the folly, too,/ Of Sybaris . . ." Tiberius, now, denounced these verses as spurious and made an investigation of all the books that contained any prophecies, rejecting some as worthless and retaining others as genuine (Dio 57. 18.4-5).

for a number of dire quips attributed to Tiberius in his later years. Dio tells us that the 131 elderly Tiberius “often...exclaimed ‘When I am dead, let the earth be engulfed in flame!’ Frequently, too, he would count Priam as blessed because “all at once, along with both country and rule, he met his end.”²⁸³ The anticipation of Rome’s end had been a pervasive literary trope at least since the middle republic.²⁸⁴ The difference here seems to be Tiberius’ disconcerting capacity to see such visions realized. The idle wish of an emperor was always perhaps a bit too close to fulfillment for the comfort of many.

Chapter 1 provided an account of the development of the Phaethon myth as a metaphor for contested succession: first, in the midst of the triumviral conflicts, and again in anticipation of Augustus’ demise. Under Tiberius, the triangulation between fiery destruction, flawed leadership, and general anxiety over imperial succession again finds expression in the Phaethon myth: according to Suetonius, Tiberius’ assessment of his presumed heir Caligula was “that he was raising a viper for Rome, and a Phaethon for the planet,” (*se natricem populo Romano, Phaethontem orbi terrarum educare*).²⁸⁵ If this quotation, one of many comparable anecdotes about this emperor,²⁸⁶ can be accepted as genuine, it certainly lends support to the reading of Ovid’s Phaethon as a potential

²⁸³ Dio 58.23. 4-5.

²⁸⁴ Some evidence of it can be traced back as far as Ennius’ Gallic sack (154-5 Skutsch, cf. Feeney 2007: 93ff and Paul 1982: 148-50, with bibliography) and Polybius’ Scipio, weeping at the fall of Carthage.

²⁸⁵ Suet. *Cal.* 11. The fraught nature of imperial succession is also captured in another anecdote: Dio (57.18.2) describes Tiberius’ sardonic rejection of the offer to rename his birth month of November in his honor, a gloomy prophecy fashioned as a stinging query: “So what will you do *if* [emphasis mine] there is a thirteenth Caesar?”

²⁸⁶ Suetonius (*Tib.* 62) may give us some further sense of the contemporary context which gave Tiberius’ apocalyptic musings such impact when he proffers another of the aging *princeps*’ bitter witticisms: “Lucky Priam. He survived all his children!” Offered in a larger discussion of Tiberius’ wretched family history, the remark highlights the suspicion with which he viewed all potential heirs.

metaphor for imperial succession.²⁸⁷ It further suggests the ideological and aesthetic 132 climate in which Caligula and, later, Nero were reared and trained for their positions. To create striking impressions, to self-mythologize, and to reach for cryptic or even disturbing parallels were perhaps not aberrant behaviors, but the mode of expression in which they, and Rome, had been conditioned to think and respond to events.

Forte an dolo principis: The Neronian Intervention.

Altogether, in the decades leading up to Nero's installation as *princeps*, we see already the clear importance of exemplary behavior in times of crisis and the rhetoric of spectacular building projects and funerary spectacles. We also see corresponding evidence of an increasingly powerful administrative machine to manage crises. Even prior to 64, several incendiary incidents and/or urban disturbances seem to have attracted attention in their own right. That they were later re-imagined or reinterpreted as harbingers of the Great Fire does not necessarily preclude the significance they may have carried in their own time as further variations on the themes established by previous Julio-Claudian rulers. As we close in on Nero and his reign, however, our source problem looms larger.

Reliant mainly on the narratives of Tacitus, Suetonius, and Dio, we must acknowledge that the grotesque portrait of Nero that emerges is the product not only of a uniquely hostile historiographic tradition, but also of a literary sensibility that eagerly

²⁸⁷ As with all our evidence from later historiographers, we must bear in mind the *gusto* with which the Roman population at large shaped their historical agents as figures of myth. Yet we should also keep in mind that Roman leaders did an excellent job of this for themselves, and were not afraid to flirt with a dangerously double-edged message.

sought parallels between the last Julio-Claudian and the doomed leaders and maniacal tyrants of myth and literature. Yet many of the alarming comments about Nero's behavior apparently originated in his own lifetime. Nero himself seems to have been instrumental in inviting or even constructing certain of the most damning parallels.²⁸⁸ Though selectivity with facts and a free hand with fanciful speculation on the part of subsequent sources render the "real Nero" almost wholly inaccessible, it seems clear that the living Nero was working with a rhetorical and ideological "vocabulary" of images and behaviors profoundly influenced by previous poetic and historical discourse.

Just as in the microcosm of Rome, where any of a seemingly limitless range of social and environmental factors could touch off an urban catastrophe at any time, the larger empire could experience disasters for countless reasons that were beyond the emperor's control, yet nevertheless perceived as his responsibility. The sense that the Roman world at large is tipping out of balance under Nero after the "happy quinquennium" of his early reign is reinforced by several incidents in the years 62-63 CE: Nero's repudiation of his dynastic marriage to Octavia in favor of his mistress Poppaea prompted rioting at Rome. Following Nero's remarriage to Poppaea (as well as Octavia's gruesome execution), the birth of Nero and Poppaea's daughter Claudia Augusta, greeted with wild celebration in January of 63, dashed his hopes for a male heir. The child died only four months later, another young Julio-Claudian whose death prompted (indeed,

²⁸⁸ On the preservation (cf. Suet. *Ner.* 39) of supposedly contemporary verses accusing Nero of arson, incest and matricide, as well as of transforming the city of Rome into his private palace, see Courtney (1993) 479. On Tacitus' transmission of an accusation leveled by one of Nero's own Praetorians that the emperor had started the Great Fire (*Ann.* 15.67.3), see Champlin 2003: 185-6. See now also Libby 2011: 210-211. Champlin (2003) presents the definitive case for Nero's own agency in advancing his identity as a mythic figure, but see also Boyle's (2008) comments on the "histrionic culture" of early imperial Rome more generally.

demanded) widespread public displays of grief. Around this time, a massive earthquake also occurred, leveling several towns in Campania.²⁸⁹ 134

Disasters around Italy, as well as in the provinces could become sites of anxiety for the Romans, a society generally obsessed with their own city's precarious position at the top of Fortune's wheel. Just as the flames of Carthage moved Scipio to a tearful anticipation of Rome's eventual doom, every destruction reminded the Roman imagination of the day when a permanent end would come to the city's preeminent status in the world. Pendant to this is the recurring trope of the survival or destruction of structures and images closely associated with the emperor, expanding the complex of ways in which divine favor, or lack thereof, could be attached to rulers in the aftermath of disaster. Tacitus, in the final summation of the unusual events of 62, includes a portent which might well be the result of chance. Yet for a reader who knows what 64 will bring, the implication is anything but random: "during the same consulship [his] gymnasium totally burned up after a lightning strike, and the likeness of Nero within it melted into a shapeless mass of bronze."²⁹⁰ The gymnasium in Tacitus' notice had only been built that year: as with Poppaea's child, the promised "replica" of Nero and (before her gender was

²⁸⁹ Tac. *Ann.* 14. 59-65. By Tacitus' account, 62 also featured a colossal earthquake that devastated Pompeii and the surrounding area. On the disputed date of the Pompeii earthquake: Seneca, writing a more closely contemporary account, seems to place the event in the following year, so we have 62 in Tac. *Ann.* 15.22.2; 63 in Seneca, *NQ* 6.1. See Williams (2012) 10 n. 26 and Wallace-Hadrill (2003); for discussion of the event in Seneca's writings, see Williams (2012) 213-218 and Ker (2009) 107-109.

²⁹⁰ Obvious similarities exist between this notice and some of the portents surrounding the story of Caligula's fiery apparition: while the story of the haunting is from Suetonius, Pliny the Elder tells us that in the reign of Nero the Lamian *horti* were also stuck by lightning and partially burned, and that a large portrait of Nero was destroyed in the blaze. Finally, both stories would have stood in piquant contrast to any stories still circulating concerning the miraculous survival of Tiberius' statue in the Caelian fire of 27.

known) presumed heir to the throne, here too, with a year's brief span Nero's claims 135 to authority and divine favor are denied by forces beyond his control.

The notion of Nero's culpability in the Great Fire is so enmeshed in the modern conception of Rome's history that it becomes difficult to judge how much of the behavior attributed to him is credible, how much is deliberate distortion, and how much of it, however bizarre it seems now, may actually have been perfectly reasonable under the circumstances. Tacitus grapples with the same problems in his own account of the fire, the earliest one to survive that covers the event in detail.²⁹¹ The social and ideological atmosphere at Rome into which the fire erupted cannot be separated entirely from Tacitus' larger program of condemnation.²⁹² Still, his account is the best representation we have of the kinds of events and omens the Romans would have had on their minds in the months leading up to fire, as well as of the events which could attain significance in retrospect, once the fire's magnitude became clear.

Tacitus situates the fire immediately after a carefully crafted set-piece detailing an especially decadent banquet thrown by Nero's increasingly powerful advisor and all-around henchman, Tigellinus, on and around the illuminated Lake of Agrippa. The level of debauchery depicted is one Tacitus admits was typical of the time; it also most probably preceded the fire by some months. Nevertheless, the vignette notably includes

²⁹¹ 15.38.1: *forte an dolo principis incertum (nam utrumque auctores prodidere)*. To this, add his professions of doubt on the veracity of accounts of Nero's behavior at 15.39 (...*pervaserat rumor...*) and his neutral observation that Nero simply *seemed* to seek to convert the destruction to his own glory, not that he had intentionally done so at 15.40: *videbaturque Nero condendae urbis novae et cognomento suo appellandae gloriam quaerere...*

²⁹² To be explored further in Chapter 3.

the comment that “Nero used the whole city as his house.”²⁹³ This sneer suggests 136

indirectly the kind of expansion of domestic entertaining and image-making already pioneered by Augustus on the Campus Martius, and soon to be pursued to excess in Nero’s Golden House.²⁹⁴ Upon this scene of moral dissolution, a disaster of cosmic proportions rushes in:

sequitur clades, forte an dolo principis incertum (nam utrumque auctores prodidere), sed omnibus, quae huic urbi per violentiam ignium acciderunt, gravior atque atrocior:

Catastrophe ensues: whether accidental or by the *princeps*’ plot, uncertain (since sources record both versions); but it is more serious and aggressive than anything that ever previously happened to this city from fire’s harm.²⁹⁵

Reading Tacitus’ account together with later sources, the story that emerges is as follows.²⁹⁶

On the evening of July 18-19, 64 CE, fire broke out among the market stalls that crowded the eastern end of the Circus Maximus. Carried by a strong wind, the flames quickly swept through the shopping area and up the wooden superstructure of the Circus. By the time a firefighting force was assembled, the fire most probably had raged beyond

²⁹³ Tac. *Ann.* 15.37. As Griffin observes, the comment also foreshadows the accusations leveled against Nero of taking over the city after the fire. Griffin (1984) 140.

²⁹⁴ See Ch. 1: Fire and the Imperial Residence (50-3); on Nero’s *domus/urbs* conflation in Tacitus, see Cogitore (2002).

²⁹⁵ Tacitus quickly re-situates us to follow the trajectory of the fire in a more straightforward way. Still, as with the accounts of excess that preceded the Boudiccan rebellion, he perhaps offers us insight into the types of associations between imperial misbehavior and national disaster that were common enough at the time.

²⁹⁶ The following account is generally uncontroversial, and based mainly on the fundamental account provided by Tacitus. Eleven authors mention the fire altogether: Tac. *Ann.* 15.38-43; Suet. *Ner.* 21.1, 38; Dio 62.16-18; Pliny *HN* 18.5; Pseud. *Sen. Ep. ad Paul.*, 11 (12); Stat. *Silv.* 2.7.60-1; anon. *Oct.* 831-33; Aurel. *Vict. Lib. de Caes.* 5; Eusebius *Hier. Chron.* 64; Eutr. *Brev.* 7.14; Sulp. *Sev. Cron.* 2.29; Oros. 7.7.4-6; Lucan’s *De Incendio Urbis* does not survive. Additional information and modern assessments cited selectively. In general this section draws heavily on Rubin (2004) and Champlin (2003).

the limited potential of the *vigiles*' most commonly utilized tactics such as bucket brigades and selective demolition to create firebreaks in the fire's immediate path.²⁹⁷ The first fire ever recorded to extend beyond the boundary of a single *regio*, the 64 blaze would also have overrun the training and organizational capabilities of a firefighting culture which seems to have evolved on a localized basis. The forces of the *vigiles* were assigned by region, and would have had little reason to develop strategies for an event of this fire's magnitude.

The firefighting cohort thought to have been responsible for responding to the outbreak in the Circus was stationed across the Tiber, and probably would have faced an obstacle in bridges crowded with panicked civilians running in the opposite direction.²⁹⁸ Little seems to have had an impact on the progress of the blaze until the sixth day, when Tacitus tells us that a total demolition of every building at the foot of the Esquiline created a firebreak which seemed briefly to put an end to its progress. Shortly thereafter, though, the fire rekindled on the property of Tigellinus, the impresario of Nero's

²⁹⁷ Fires of sufficient severity create their own weather, sucking wind inwards from different directions to create a kind of cyclone effect (observable in modern calamities such as the 1948 destruction of Dresden) which even today is extremely difficult to extinguish; Rubin (2004) 103-104.

²⁹⁸ Rubin (2004) 103-104. Firefighting efforts would probably have co-opted all urban cohorts and not a few civilians, but would almost certainly have been futile and, especially at the early stages, impeded by civilians fleeing pell-mell through Rome's famously narrow and winding streets. Dio (62.16.4-6) describes it in terms which, if not actually based on first-hand sources from 64, seem likely enough to have been the case in almost any such event: "...those who were inside their houses would run out into the narrow streets thinking that they could save them from the outside, while people in the streets would rush into the dwellings in the hope of accomplishing something inside. There was shouting and wailing without end, of children, women, men, and the aged all together, so that no one could see thing or understand what was said by reason of the smoke and the shouting; and for this reason some might be seen standing speechless, as if they were dumb. Meanwhile many who were carrying out their goods and many, too, who were stealing the property of others, kept running into one another and falling over their burdens. It was not possible to go forward nor yet to stand still, but people pushed and were pushed in turn, upset others and were themselves upset."

debauched lake party, in a different section of the city. It then continued unabated for 138 another three days, this time leveling the city's monumental districts north of the Capitoline (less densely settled, and now largely evacuated, presumably), resulting in less loss of life but covering an even wider swath of the city. Tacitus provides a memorable summation of the impact: "Rome, indeed, is divided into fourteen districts, four of which remained uninjured, three were leveled to the ground, while in the other seven were left only a few shattered, half-burnt relics of houses."²⁹⁹

Nero could hardly have been unaware that his actions during and after the destruction would be scrutinized, and much of his conduct sounds absolutely appropriate and generally consistent with what could be expected, given the precedents that might have guided his decisions. Absent at the start of the fire, Nero did not return from his country seat at Antium until the flames began to threaten his new home, the *Domus Transitoria*, built to connect his properties on the Palatine with his gardens (still called "Maecenas' Gardens") at the foot of the Esquiline.³⁰⁰ Once he had returned to the city, Nero seems to have waged a vigorous campaign to contain the fire.³⁰¹ Moreover, relief

²⁹⁹ There is some debate about exactly which regions were spared, which partially damaged, and which destroyed, but the most common estimates have Regions I, V, VI and XIV unscathed, III, X and XI destroyed, and the remaining seven in states of moderate to severely damage.

³⁰⁰ Tacitus seems to present this as a basis for censure, if not suspicion (as it seems to have been in 27 when Tiberius missed the fire on the Caelian). Realistically, however, fires broke out in the city constantly, and many must have taken more than a day or two to extinguish. It would probably have taken some time for Nero, reliant only on relayed messages, to realize this one's magnitude.

³⁰¹ Rumors that agents of the emperor were setting fires around the city or demolishing buildings, though consistently presented by Tacitus, Suetonius, and Dio as mere hearsay, nevertheless strongly suggest Nero's pernicious intent. If true at all, however, the rumors just as easily might be misunderstood or deliberately distorted accounts of "backfiring" (in firefighting terminology, the practice of burning a zone in a controlled fashion to deny an approaching blaze any additional fuel). Likewise, the demolition of buildings to create strategically laid firebreaks is an activity which Tacitus elsewhere acknowledges was instrumental in the near-total suppression of the fire at the foot of the Esquiline on Day 6. Also, it seems probable that not only the *vigiles*, but the

efforts in the immediate aftermath were swift and thoroughgoing. Finally, Nero 139 outlined some ambitious long-term strategies to make the rebuilt city safer from the threat of future fires.

No emperor before Nero faced a disaster that hollowed out the core of Rome so thoroughly and so suddenly. The urban chaos that Augustus reversed perhaps constituted a challenge on a similar scale, but it was a slow collapse that had happened over decades of neglect punctuated by bursts of open conflict. Augustus' improvements came along with his gradual programs of social reform and reformation of the urban administrative structure. Tacitus' account of the Neronian fire, by contrast, provides indirect evidence of a rather well-functioning administrative system already in place, which sprang into action immediately to provide food, housing, and other assistance to Rome's displaced population. A general clean-up cleared the rubble, and Nero offered rewards for quick rebuilding. Tacitus even pays Nero a rare compliment in his overall assessment of the rebuilding effort, stating that the long-term reconstruction measures taken to protect the city also added to its beauty. Nero also seems to have taken great care to reassure the public: he appeased the gods, offering immediate prayers and sacrifices on a grand scale.

The tremendous sense of religious alarm that death and destruction on this scale would have evoked is an often overlooked aspect of the impact of the 64 fire. The sheer number of irrecoverable dead, and the impossibility of offering them correct burial, must be imagined as a source of deep distress for a society as invested in death ritual and

other urban cohorts and, as with the fire in the *Aemiliana* district in 54 CE, able-bodied civilians would all have been pressed into these efforts. Some confusion about who was answering to whom, or what was to be accomplished in the demolition and controlled burning efforts is only to be expected. The argument for Nero's innocence is most clearly laid out in Bradley's 1978 commentary on Suetonius (Bradley 1978). See also Rubin (2004:104) on firebreaks as a likely explanation for the rumors of arson and demolition.

commemoration as the Romans.³⁰² Nero seems to have recognized some of the long- 140 term religious impact and designed propitiations accordingly. The Sibylline Books were consulted: at their behest rites were performed to appease Vulcan, Proserpina and Ceres, while the matrons of the city supplicated Juno, its ancient protectress during the Gallic Sack.³⁰³ Epigraphic evidence from the Domitianic period asserts that under Nero's authority "after the city burned for nine days" a set of altars were vowed, designated to receive annual sacrifices on Vulcan's festival day in August "to ward off fires" in the future.³⁰⁴ Religion also played its part in Nero's identification of a "guilty" party to be blamed for the fire: a large number of Rome's nascent Christian sect, already suspected (with some reason) of hostility towards Rome.

In Rome's marginalized Christian community, Nero found a group who could be blamed for the fire without harm to Rome's overall identity. Nero wasted no time in punishing them in spectacular fashion, offering the grim reprisals as a public

³⁰² On the religious importance of burial, Erasmo (2008: 210 n. 15) quotes Toynbee (1996: 43): "All Roman funerary practice was influenced by two basic notions—first, that death brought pollution and demanded from the survivors acts of purification and expiation; secondly, that to leave a corpse unburied had unpleasant repercussions on the fate of the departed soul." See also Morris (1989) 296–320 and (1992). While the purifying properties of fire might have in some cases alleviated concern of pollution, the lack of access to the body, and the absence of any real site to deposit remains would seem to bring its own set of religious concerns.

³⁰³ Vulcan's supplication requires little explanation. While Proserpina and Ceres might also seem logical choices as deities associated with death and immediate survival (interrupted food supply chains and destroyed storehouses made famine after such disasters a major concern), Champlin points out a possible topographical connection. These were not, he suggests, the goddesses of the temple of Ceres, Liber, and Libera (Proserpina) on the lower slope of the Aventine, despite their close proximity to the altar vowed to Vulcan which eventually was situated there; instead, Champlin suggests (2003: 205-6) "what the Sibyl was prescribing was supplication of the *mundus*," a vaulted subterranean pit sacred to both Proserpina and Ceres, that was opened on three days in the year to expose a conduit to the underworld. See Festus 126 L; Macrobius, *Saturnalia* 1.16.18; Warde Fowler (1912). Regardless of the specific locations and deities associated with Nero's actions, the point holds that religious gestures were central to his program of recovery.

³⁰⁴ These altars are discussed extensively in Chapter 3, 222-33 and Appendix (A).

entertainment in his Vatican circus complex. Dressed as a charioteer Nero mingled 141 with the spectators, illuminated by the light created by a great number of Christians, who perished as “human torches” set throughout the property.³⁰⁵ Fashioned into exemplary executions befitting their supposed “crimes,” the Christians were thus incorporated into Nero’s larger program of allusive self-fashioning as Rome’s champion and protector. Moreover, as Champlin has argued, the range of mythic themes evoked in many of their punishments may actually have been linked the names and images associated with zones damaged by the fire.³⁰⁶ These “fatal charades” were this a kind of revenge on behalf of the city, reasserting Rome’s topography and identity in the aftermath of near-annihilation. The probable falsity of Nero’s accusations against the Christians is irrelevant: this classic instance of scapegoating may have done much to satisfy the feelings of a grieving and frightened population with little sympathy for a marginal group known for beliefs and practices at odds with Roman values.

There can be no doubt that poor leadership can result in catastrophic events. The issue explored here is to what degree, and how readily, the Roman imagination went one step beyond this truism, inferring that catastrophes were necessarily attributable to bad leaders. Tacitus formulates it nicely when he describes the crowd in the aftermath of the Caelian fire of 27 CE as converting *fortuita ad culpam* (chance to blame). Three types of evidence are available to those wishing to argue that the fire was Nero’s doing: several

³⁰⁵ Tac. *Ann.* 15.44.

³⁰⁶ Even the gruesome nature of the punishments, as Champlin has shown, may reflect a kind of poetic justice: some female victims were dressed as Danaids commemorating the damage to the Augustan domus/ Apollo temple on the Palatine, with its famous Danaid portico, while another starred in re-creation of the gruesome death of Dirce, tied to a rampant bull, reflecting the lost Amphitheater of Statilius Taurus. The significance of the Christians tied to stakes and used as “human torches” needs little explication. Champlin (2003) 136-9.

anecdotes detailing apparently suspicious remarks and behavior in the months leading 142 up to 64, as well as allegations of bizarre behavior during the fire;³⁰⁷ a few incidents reported by later historiographers of contemporary accusations of arson;³⁰⁸ and what we might call the “*cui bono?*” argument, pointing to the material benefit derived from the disaster: Nero’s extraordinary appropriation of urban space to construct his fabulous Golden House.

Nero: Self-Mythologizer *Extraordinaire*.

In Nero’s Rome, every human action or gesture could become an allusion to myth or literature. Historical actors’ own awareness of this allusivity can then inform their behavior, just as later historiographic treatments of the incident can embellish their accounts with mytho-poetic details. Texts thought to belong to the first half of Nero’s rule already suggest the emperor’s tendency to invite fire imagery and incendiary metaphor as part of his quasi-mythic self-characterization. Likewise, certain of Nero’s actions before the fire later drew suspicion as mythically inspired stagecraft, suggesting that Nero planned the destruction of Rome as a particularly perverse form of “Fatal

³⁰⁷ In addition to the anecdotes from Tacitus recounted above, Nero reportedly had reprised some of Tiberius’ notorious utterances: he comments in Dio on the good fortune of Priam, who witnessed the simultaneous destruction of his home city and his reign. Suetonius, meanwhile, has Nero citing the same tragic line “when I am dead may the earth be overwhelmed by fire” as Tiberius, but Nero substitutes “alive” for “dead.” Champlin points out, however, that since all these quotations have denser, more appropriate contexts in the Tiberian narratives, it seems highly probable that they were simply “harvested” to suit the situation that 64 seemed to invite: “Nero could have been imitating Tiberius, but folklore or literary artifice seem more likely sources.” Dio 62.16.1 for the Priam remark; Suetonius (*Ner.* 38.1) offers the tragic (mis)quotation. After Champlin (2004) 319, n. 13. See earlier discussion of Tiberius, 109-10. We might also wish to consider that later authors with a vested interest in laying the groundwork for the set-piece of 64 might have deliberately included traces of such sentiments in their accounts of earlier rulers.

³⁰⁸ Griffin summarizes the contemporary rumors nicely in Griffin (1984) 132.

Charade.”³⁰⁹ Champlin lays out in detail the evidence for Nero’s embrace of the roles 143 of Oedipus, Orestes, and Periander of Athens as figurations for his rumored acts of incest with his mother and partial responsibility for his adopted father’s death; his subsequent assassination of his mother; and his murder of a pregnant wife, respectively. Other pieces of evidence further suggest the pervasiveness of allusivity in public performances at the time; while they cannot be called Nero’s own self-fashioning, they do reflect the values he promoted.

In an epigram of Lucillius, a man’s theft of apples is sufficient to implicate him in the myth of Heracles – and “like Heracles before him, (he) furnished a great spectacle for all: burnt alive.”³¹⁰ This image recalls the symbolic nature of Nero’s method of executing the Christians after the Great Fire; we also know that Nero is often imagined as presiding over such events.³¹¹ Another anecdote retailed by Suetonius describes a re-staging of Afranius’ second century BCE play *Incendium*, presumably a broad comedy set, as Afranius’ other works were, at Rome.³¹² During the show, the set was actually torched: performers scrambled to evacuate, but were allowed to keep the items they seized in their escape from the flames. Nero, the presenter of the spectacles as part of his games “for the

³⁰⁹ On the theatricalization of death as punishment and entertainment: Coleman (1990) 44–73 discusses the term “fatal charade” and vets the ancient sources (especially) Tertullian; Kyle (1998) analyzes fatal charades and the punishment of *noxii* through spectacles and their disposal from the late republic to the Christian era; Hutchinson (1993) 306–14 for literary texts that present death as spectacle. After Erasmo (1998) 217 n. 12.

³¹⁰ *Anth. Pal.* 11.184; on the probable historical veracity of the scene, see Coleman (1990) 60–61.

³¹¹ On the allegorical executions of the Christians, see above: 140–42. Coleman (1990) esp. 68–9 catalogues the Roman executions staged as imitations of well-known myths, and Nero’s influence is suggested in another story (Suet. *Ner.* 12.2): a condemned man forced to play the part of Icarus is said to have splattered Nero with blood as he reenacted the doomed youth’s fall to his death. After Libby (2011) 213 n.265. See also Bartsch (1994) 155ff on the Icarus anecdote and Nero’s propensity for “stage invasion.”

³¹² On Afranius generally: see e.g. Kenney (1983) 193–4. On the surviving fragments of other works by Afranius: Manuwald (2010) 150–2.

eternity of the Empire,” watched from a specially built balcony on the set.³¹³ Though 144 Suetonius give no firm date, Champlin dates this performance to Nero’s *Ludi Maximi* in 59 CE.³¹⁴

The “real life” aspect of the re-performance of *Incendium* is likely to have been an imperial innovation,³¹⁵ particularly gripping here for the way in which the players replicate as entertainment a frantic scramble for safety which, even before 64, would have been all too familiar to its audience. Moreover, if this event really did predate the fire by several years, the visual impression made on the public by the image of Nero sitting from a high vantage point, viewing the conflagration as entertainment, becomes a significant factor in the rumors which later took hold about his behavior during the 64 fire. In the next section, Nero’s legendary lyre performance during the catastrophe and his construction of the Golden House are treated as “texts”, which will provide the starting point for our treatment of Neronian authors.

Nero’s Song of Troy: an Instant Classic?

The story of Nero’s performance, re-creating Troy’s fall amid the flames of Rome, has several types of appeal. First, Troy and its fall, an evergreen topic for Roman poets, seems to have been very much in vogue at the time, making this a likely refrain for anyone composing at the moment of the fire.³¹⁶ Second, the tale trades upon Nero’s

³¹³ On the performance of *Incendium*: Suet. *Ner.* 11.2. On the balcony: Suet. *Ner.* 12.1. See also Kelly (1979) 30 n. 6. After Champlin (2003) 287 n. 46-47.

³¹⁴ Champlin (2003) 69.

³¹⁵ See, e.g., Manuwald (2011) 119; Manuwald additionally cites Boyle (2006) 145, 160-188.

³¹⁶ Surviving indications of the trend include Seneca’s *Troades* and *Agamemnon*, Lucan’s lost *Iliacon* as well as *Bellum Civile* 10, Petronius’ “Halosis Troiae” at *Satyricon* 89 (discussed further below); Persius *Sat.* 1.1–5 mocks Attius Labeo, a Neronian-era poet who translated the *Iliad* and

known propensity for taking the stage and singing to the lyre, a behavior already 145 sufficiently aberrant for a Roman *princeps* as to suggest a capacity for unlimited deviance. Third, the gesture strikes an epic chord of its own, echoing the famous scene from *Iliad* 9, in which Achilles, setting himself apart from the actual war raging outside his very camp, takes up his lyre and sings the “glories of men,” usually understood to mean that his song was a war poem. Nero’s performance thus produces in effect a *mise-en-abyme* much like that of Achilles’ song.³¹⁷

Most importantly, though, the image has Nero doing what *everyone else* was doing, if not in the midst of the fire, then certainly in its immediate aftermath. That is, the important part is not the singing *per se*, or even singing of Troy, but singing of a legendary destruction. Assessing a critical moment’s magnitude in parallel with myth and legend was an entirely natural, in fact an expected response to any significant event in Roman culture.³¹⁸ Tacitus himself records the zeal with which survivors set about constructing the similarities between the 64 destruction and the Gallic Sack, even reckoning the interval between these two conflagrations as a kind magic square –like diminution into equal numbers of years, months, and days.³¹⁹

Nero’s behavior during the fire is impossible to verify. It may indeed have provided grounds for suspicion. Yet it seems clear that blame was all too quickly assigned to leadership in the wake of a cataclysm, as Tacitus observes in his account of

the *Odyssey* word for word. Only a line of Labeo survives, given by the scholiast on this passage; see Courtney (1993) 350. Persius also mentions here his own *Polydamas et Troiades* (*Sat.* 1.4).

³¹⁷ *Iliad* 9.189. A parallel also recognized the chorus of the *Octavia* (800-819).

³¹⁸ cf. Champlin (2003) 237.

³¹⁹ Tac. *Ann.* 15.41: *fuere qui adnotarent XIII Kal. Sextiles principium incendii huius ortum, quo et Seneones captam urbem inflammaverint. alii eo usque cura progressi sunt, ut totidem annos, mensesque et dies inter utraque incendia numerarent.*

the Caelian fire of 27.³²⁰ The greatest boon to his detractors seems not to have been 146
the events of July 64, however, but the actions Nero took afterward. Nero's Golden
House, perhaps the most salient example of his determination to live a life out of myth,
was made possible by the fire.

The Golden House: Nero's Self-Portrait?

The Golden House was a sweeping revision of Rome's urban image, a totalizing
environment that was all-encompassing in its reimagining of urban space. Unprecedented
in scale, if not in the general trend it expressed in its expansion of the footprint of the
imperial residence, the house's very imaginative richness perhaps almost inevitably
invited suspicions of prior planning. Accusations that "all Rome was becoming Nero's
house" originated in Nero's lifetime, and several later sources recount Nero's ambition to
have the city renamed in his honor.³²¹ Yet as we have seen, calls to rename at least parts
of the city after successful recovery from fire began as early as Tiberius.³²² As for the
charge that Nero was treating Rome as his house, the idea breaks in two different
directions.

Tacitus comments that Tigellinus' pre-conflagration lake party constituted an
appropriation Nero's part of urban space for a domestic style of entertainment, as noted
above.³²³ This inappropriate (in Tacitus' view) extension of access to the emperor's

³²⁰ See above, 124-30.

³²¹ Tac. *Ann.* 43. 1; and were later echoed by Pliny and Martial, both supporters of the Flavian
dynasty's efforts to characterize Nero in the most negative terms possible. Martial *Spect.* 2.4;
Pliny *NH* 33. 54, 36. 111; Suet. *Nero* 39.2.

³²² See above, 124-30.

³²³ Tac. *Ann.* 15.37.1: "[Nero]...set out banquets in public places, and used the whole city as if it
were his house," (*ipse...publicis locis struere convivia totaque urbe quasi domo uti*).

private entertainment already suggests that Nero had little interest in sheltering 147
himself from public view. Additionally, scholarship of recent decades questions whether
Nero's admittedly unprecedented use of urban space really implies the tyrannical land
grab it is often assumed to have constituted.³²⁴ The complex may not have been designed
as an exclusive retreat, but rather as a place of *inclusion* available, in varying degrees, to
the urban population at large. Due to the panoramic effect of the bowl formed by the pre-
Colosseum valley, surrounded by the Palatine, Caelian, and Esquiline hills, much of the
property would have been highly visible from many vantage points around the city,
forming a sort of amphitheater in which the *princeps* could stage spectacles not only for,
but perhaps even *with* the residents of *urbs Roma*.³²⁵

Chapter 1 discussed the ways in which Augustus spread monuments throughout
the city evoking features and functions once confined to individual residences. This
extension of *domus in urbem* (as it were) effectively cast him as the *paterfamilias* of

³²⁴ First argued in detail by Griffin (1984) 139-141. The set of buildings and water features now associated with the Golden House altogether form a complex reminiscent of the Campanian seaside villas prized by the Roman elite, but Champlin's reassessment of the evidence for the Golden House convincingly argues that there is little reason to believe that the property was ever intended to be private in the modern sense of the term. That is, the estate certainly belonged to Nero, but excavations of the area have begun to make it clear that major thoroughfares continued to run through the property. Moreover, Champlin suggests that the baths on the Oppian (dedicated as the Baths of Titus, but argued by Coarelli to have originated as a Neronian project) and the so-called *Stagnum Neronis*, a large artificial lake at the bottom of the shallow valley now occupied by the Colosseum, formed a complex not unlike the inarguably public Baths of Nero and Lake of Agrippa on the Campus Martius. The latter had been the venue of Tigellinus' fabulous illuminated public entertainment only months before the fire, which were (as Champlin argues) a sort of miniaturized version of the pleasure cruises popular in Baiae. See also Champlin (2003) 187-210.

³²⁵ Even if the population at large did not have regular access to all parts of the residence, Champlin speculates that on certain occasions only the traditional imperial properties on the Palatine and the Esquiline *horti* would have been kept private, allowing at least select members of the public access to bath, entertainment, and park zones comparable to those on the Campus Martius. Champlin (2003) 208-209. See also Flower (2006) 231 and 340 n. 75-76 for further bibliography.

Rome's newly united urban "household." Blurring the line between city and country, 148 public and private, *domus* and *horti*, the Golden House quickly redeveloped a huge swath of destroyed land by leaving much of it open, but far from empty. It presented not an impoverished echo of what had been lost, but a startlingly new vision of urban living, an imperial domain imagined as a microcosm in the heart of the city. The design ambitions of the Golden House complex align Nero himself with solar imagery in ways that seem a deliberately distorted echo of Augustus, Nero's nearest predecessor in the monumental scale of the rebuilding which the city now faced.

In another neo-Augustan gesture, Nero's solar stylings, a clear revival of Augustus' most defining imagery, only seem to have fully taken hold in the year 64.³²⁶ Increasingly, scholarship has recognized the probability that the colossal statue that Nero intended for the vestibule of his new abode represented him as Sol from the beginning, rather than seeing than the Sol imagery as post-Neronian repurposing.³²⁷ Nero as the Sun God signifies a new era of peace and prosperity, echoing the visual rhetoric so essential to Augustan "Golden Age" political ideology.³²⁸ Nero elides the distinction, however, that Augustan rhetoric had at least notionally preserved between earthly ruler and divine.³²⁹

³²⁶ As Champlin notes, we see representations of Nero as Apollo Citharoedus as early as 62, but this is in a capacity distinct from his solar associations.

³²⁷ Most importantly, Bergmann (1998) 133-230; Albertson (2001); Champlin (2003) 129-131 and Rutledge (2012) 126-7 provide further argument and bibliography.

³²⁸ Only after 64 do we see the radiate crown in his portraiture. Dio also assigns the first of Nero's public appearances as a charioteer to the year 64. For further discussion, see Champlin (2003) 112-144; see now also Pollini (2012) 151-3. Pollini (2012) comments on Neronian solar/charioteering imagery's power to evoke of Ovid's Phaethon at 161 n. 116.

³²⁹ In a less another instance of Nero's penchant for outsized self-representation, according to the elder Pliny (*HN* 35.51) a 120-foot-tall portrait of Nero, painted on linen, was exhibited in the city ("a thing unknown hitherto," as Pliny tells us; this passage offers an arresting parallel to *HN* 34's discussion of *audacia* in artistic ventures). The picture was just completed when it was burnt by lightning, along with the greater part of the surrounding gardens. Though this anecdote does not mention the Sun in particular, the similarities with the Phaethon myth are striking: attempting

Tacitus remarks on the ingenious design of the new estate,³³⁰ which Suetonius 149 describes as a brilliantly conceived artificial seascape constructed around a man-made lake, with cities and towns represented in miniature. Intricately engineered surprise features enhanced the totality of the experience: piping installed in the ceiling sprayed perfume on guests periodically, and a dining room revolved “day and night, like the cosmos.”³³¹ In fact, the cosmic theme runs all through the design of the complex. As mentioned above, the estate’s design exploits the same bowl-like valley that would later enhance the effect of the Colosseum. Surveyable from various vantage points, the view reveals tended lands and wilderness, mountainous waterfalls, all anchored by the focal feature, the so-called *Stagnum Neronis*, a virtual “sea” surrounded by tiny “cities.” On the ridge of the Oppian hill along the north rim of the valley, structures associated with the Golden House set on an east-west axis already lend themselves to interpretation as an imitation of the sun’s trajectory through the sky. To the southwest, Augustus’ Apollo-themed compound on the Palatine would be clearly visible. Overall, the design provides precisely the sort of panoramic view of the world that Ovid’s Phaethon is afforded as his chariot mounted to the sky’s apex: the basin of the *Stagnum* is an analogue for the Mediterranean, with various cities scaled down to miniature around it, while the rocky

quasi-divine stature in the form of this colossal self-portrait, Nero is symbolically struck down by Jove’s punishment and reduced to ashes. As Pollini (2012: 161 n. 111) suggests, it may have formed a model or pendant for the colossal statue placed in the entrance of the Golden House.

³³⁰ Tacitus remarks on the ingenious design of the landscape, which derived its impact from the imitation of wilderness and the impact of extensive open spaces (Tac. *Ann.* 15. 42. 1). Typically uncharitable, Tacitus does not praise the cleverness and presumed economy of this approach, but attributes it to a supremely decadent boredom with mere gemstones and precious metals: in the cramped central zone of ancient Rome, open space was perhaps the ultimate luxury.

³³¹ Suet. *Ner.* 31.1-2; Tac. *Ann.* 15. 42 ; see also Champlin (2003) 200-202.

waterfalls and variation between tended ground and artificial wilderness suggest 150
mountains, rivers, and stretches of inhabited and uninhabited land.³³²

Nor is the overall layout the only feature of the house which seems to invoke Ovid's doomed charioteer. A drawing of an elaborate mural (now lost) discovered in excavations of the Golden House depicts Phaethon standing before his father at the moment when the Sun grants his son's wish, possibly designed with Ovid's description of the scene in mind.³³³ In Champlin's view, the depiction of Phaethon's moment of triumph in Nero's new home offers an endorsement, even after the fire, of Phaethon's status not as an incendiary failure, but as a chosen successor and exemplar of sublime ambition.³³⁴ Growing up amid the politics of imperial succession, and intensively schooled in the literature and theater of the day, Nero was perhaps more likely than most to have recognized himself and his imperial rivals in the unstable successor evoked by Ovid, Manilius, and Vergil's doomed solar charioteers. Tiberius' remarks on the Phaethon-esque future of Caligula, if known to Nero, would have rendered the implicit message of the poetry grimly explicit. Additionally, Heslin identifies from several types of evidence the possibility that Augustus' famed solar calendar on the Campus Martius may have wandered off course by Nero's time. If the shadow no longer was hitting its appointed

³³² Pliny also tells of a temple to the Fortune of Sejanus, built to house an ancient statue of Fortuna which had evidently been salvaged from the flames, which used a newly discovered Cappadocian stone, yellow-white and so brilliantly translucent the temple needed no further illumination; Plin. *NH* 36.136; see also Champlin (2003) 129.

³³³ Castagna in Gazich, ed. (2000) 36 n. 11.

³³⁴ Champlin (2003) 306 n. 37, with bibliography. Bergmann points out that Nero's planned colossal statue of himself as Sol may have conveyed a similar message: a gem thought to represent its original design clearly shows the attributes of a globe in the figure's hand, supported by a rudder. Both items are of course traditional symbols of statesmanship, but the globe in particular may offer a strong visual cue for the kind of perspectival shift that the Golden House was engineered to achieve: as we enter past the massive Nero with the tiny earth in his palm, we realize that the estate before us, too, is imaginable as a miniature earth, confidently kept in hand by the ruler-god. Bergmann (1993) 5-6 and 14-16; Bergmann (1998) 123-230.

marks, it would have provided, as Heslin comments, “a vivid visual representation of 151 a world out of joint.” The erroneous position of the meridian’s shadow, as Heslin further argues, “could thus have been read as a visual representation of the sun swerving from its path, as happened in the myth of Phaethon, a story that exemplified the dangers of an unfit son succeeding to his father’s position.”³³⁵

Altogether, we have the very strong likelihood that Phaethon’s name was on the tip of many tongues whenever a crisis of succession appeared imminent (which was to say, constantly). An original and characteristically provocative way for Nero to address these aspersions while simultaneously draining them of their power would be to appropriate them, taking ownership of the claims and altering their message. The conception of Phaethon promoted by Nero and his supporters is likely to have been a semi-divine being who can, in self-aware fashion, acknowledge the risks of his ambition and avert them through his superior faculties. In Champlin’s view, Nero’s endorsement of Phaethon in his post-64 imagery and in the work of Neronian authors is primarily of value in confirming the overwhelmingly aesthetic nature of Nero’s attachment to solar imagery, with little or no implied ideological message.³³⁶ While this may be true when strictly limited to Nero’s own treatment of the topic, the references to Phaethon, once put

³³⁵ Heslin (2007) 19-20. Heslin’s arguments concerning the design of the “Horologium” are not in this case related to the validity of his arguments for the “wandering” of the shadow in the later Julio-Claudian era. These conclusions draw to some extent on Pliny, *NH* 2.182-7, 6.211-18, 7.212-15, 18.326-33 and 36.71-3 a; as listed in Heslin (2007) 4, n. 14-5. The ideological dimensions of Pliny’s work, discussed briefly in Heslin’s article, are treated more fully here in Chapter 3.

³³⁶ Nero’s apparent mania for amber may also suggest a subtle nod to the amber tears of Phaethon’s sisters: he dispatched a Roman knight to the Baltic to ensure sufficient supplies for an amber-bedecked day of games, and he also called the hair of his wife Poppaea “amber” (*succinos*), starting a trend for the color among Rome’s fashionable women. Champlin (2003) 134-135.

into play as an easy shorthand for the young ruler, could certainly invite other readings, some of them highly ideological in nature. 152

Overall, Nero's exceptional affinity for literature, and especially for long-format narrative poetry, almost inevitably brought him into contact with themes such as the fall of cities, doomed leaders, and catastrophic destructions. Urban conflagration, already highly politicized in roughly a century's worth of imperial literature, was more or less poised to "frame" Nero as the one to blame for the 64 destruction, regardless of his actual actions or intentions. If Nero's attested relationships with Seneca and Lucan are any indication, his interaction with the famous authors of his day was as close as it was contentious. The poet-actor-emperor nurtured competing desires: on the one hand to let more talented writers' work shed indirect glory on him, and other to rival their acclaim as literary creators. This volatile personal and political dynamic informs every aspect of how Nero's reign is remembered. In the literary discussions to follow, the prevalence of literary treatments linking Phaethon with Roman leadership become increasingly pointed, especially in the work of Lucan and of the younger Seneca, who was Lucan's uncle and Nero's tutor.³³⁷ Petronius' treatment of Nero-esque themes, while they do not specifically draw upon the figuration of Phaethon, touch on a number of aspects of Nero's reign which are also plentifully evident in Seneca and Lucan. These themes include imperial rhetoric of cosmic control; the blurring of the real and the literary in the anticipation of disaster; and of course, Nero's obsession with destruction narratives, a taste he apparently shared with the contemporary audience at large.

³³⁷ A point of contact discussed further in Champlin (2003) 134-135.

A little more than a century after the defining rupture of Rome's triumviral conflicts, but in all likelihood some years before the 64 destruction, Lucan began composing his *Bellum Civile*.³³⁸ Working in the inherently agonistic tradition of narrative epic, Lucan borrows many of the features employed by his predecessors to configure a nexus between leaders, fires, and cities. He overtly transfers them, however, to Rome and its recent history. In Lucan's narrative of the collapse of the Roman state into civil warfare, images of fire and metaphorically "inflammatory" language play a major role. They provide scope both for allusive manipulation of his epic predecessors and for a complex engagement with natural philosophical notions central to the thinking of his Neronian contemporaries. Among these doctrinal elements, Stoic *ekpyrosis* is especially prominent.

The poem centers on the conflict between Caesar and Pompey that ultimately generated the imperial system of government. Rome's resulting upheaval and the concomitant devastation of a war fought across the empire occupy the text of the books completed before Lucan's arrest and death in 65 CE.³³⁹ Amplifying the overall sense of crisis is a relentless series of narrative episodes, similes, and digressions suggesting the disintegration of physical and social boundaries. These recurrences of cosmic dissolution, along with the general liberality of allusions to Ovid throughout the poem, offer cues inviting us to see a Phaethon subtext in Lucan's poem of reckless leadership. This

³³⁸ An excellent biographical sketch has recently been provided by Fantham in Asso (ed.) (2011), with bibliography.

³³⁹ The state of completion of the *Bellum Civile* is not a major issue in this dissertation, but I do not, for the record, mean the phrase "books completed" to imply that I believe that Book 10 is complete, or that more books were not planned.

reading pays dividends at several later points in the epic, including the digression on 154 Phaethon in Book 2 and the post-Phaethonic wasteland of Libya in Book 9.

Furthermore, many scholars have recognized that fire comes to “symbolize Caesar’s destructive energy” throughout the epic.³⁴⁰ I discuss the possible repercussions of this characterization for the obliteration of Roman identity and memory through fires at several points in the epic, including the simile comparing the flight from Rome to a catastrophic fire in Book 1. Caesar’s characterization as an elemental destroyer also recurs in the *Bellum Civile*’s pervasive imagery of funeral pyres: imagined by Cato in Book 2, disturbingly conflated with Caesar’s very character in Book 7, and realized by the successive references in the text to the inadequate treatments of Pompey’s remains in Books 5 and 9.

Epic and *Ekpyrosis* in the *Bellum Civile*.

The narrator in the *Bellum Civile*’s proem professes that the carnage about to be set forth is a small price to pay for the establishment of the dynasty destined to produce its current emperor, Nero.³⁴¹ Yet the poem depicts a world of destruction without limit that precludes any satisfactory exchange, starting with its programmatic first (and longest) simile. Describing the collapse of the Roman state into civil warfare, the simile compares the dissolution of the old order to the universal conflagration that will one day engulf the world (1.72-80).

The simile equates the catastrophic destruction caused by earthly political strife with the disastrous clash of elements on a cosmic scale.

³⁴⁰ Tracy in Asso (ed.) (2011) 37.

³⁴¹ *BC* 1.33-8: *quod si non aliam venturo fata Neroni/ invenere viam... iam nihil, o superi, querimur; scelera ipsa nefasque/ hac mercede placent.*

..sic, cum conpage soluta
 saecula tot mundi suprema coegerit hora
 antiquum repetens iterum chaos, [omnia mixtis
 sidera sideribus concurrent] ignea pontum
 astra petent, tellus extendere litora nolet
 excutietque fretum, fratri contraria Phoebē
 ibit et obliquum bigas agitare per orbem
 indignata diem poscet sibi, totaque discors
 machina divolsi turbabit foedera mundi. (Luc. *BC* 1.72-80)

Just as when the structure is dissolved and the final hour closes out the long ages of the universe and seeks again the ancient chaos, stars ablaze will plummet into the sea, and the earth will refuse to stretch out the shore and will shake off the ocean. Phoebe, disdainingly to drive her two-horse chariot cross-ways across the sky, will go against her brother and demand the day for herself. The whole discordant machine will overturn the laws of a universe ripped apart (trans. Roche).³⁴²

In this striking passage, Lucan invokes the Stoic doctrine of *ekpyrosis* to describe the destruction of the Roman republican political system in terms that involve the very unmaking of the cosmos, and the collapse of the laws of nature.³⁴³

Much interpretive work focuses on the remarkable way in which Book 1's opening simile targets and inverts Vergil's comparison of natural and political strife in the first simile of the *Aeneid*.³⁴⁴ Paul Roche, building on the fundamental work of Michael Lapidge, points out the importance of understanding the generally positive and regenerative conception of *ekpyrosis* as treated in Stoic thought. Here, however, rather than the Vergilian image of a crisis solved, the simile at *BC* 1.72-80 presents an expansion and escalation of the disaster's scale.

³⁴² With Roche (2005: n. 22) I accept *excutiet* over *excipiet*: A. Hudson-Williams, 'Lucan 1.76-77', CR 2 (1952) 68f. argues for an emendation to the latter; L. A. Mackay, 'Lucan 1.76-77', CR 3 (1953) 145 for the former.

³⁴³ So Morford (2002) 188.

³⁴⁴ *Aeneid* 1.148-53; on which, see Ch. 1: 66ff. The points of comparison with Lucan are largely summed up by Roche (2005) 59. On Lucan's relationship to Vergil more generally, see Casali in Asso, ed. (2011).

Instead of a storm instigated and quelled by deities representing, respectively, 156 air and water, as in *Aeneid* 1's Juno and Neptune, the problem in Lucan's narrative is two dynasts, as equally matched as the world has yet seen. Both Caesar and Pompey claim divine support, neither willing to yield any sphere of influence to the other. The fire threatened by the torch-wielding crowd in Vergil's simile has become, in Lucan, a full-blown *ekpyrosis* beyond any human agency or control: one that will inevitably annihilate the universe. The Vergilian intertext offers a bleak outlook on the future in Lucan, but crucial nuances to the picture are available through further comparative work.

As the work of Lapidge and (more recently) Roche makes clear, the notion of Stoic *ekpyrosis* was tremendously popular in Roman thought during the early empire.³⁴⁵ Many of Seneca's most notable uses, however, make it clear that *ekpyrosis* is a welcome opportunity to do away with degraded life forms and begin a process of renewal. Roche, in summing up the attitudes apparent in the majority of Greek and Latin treatises on the topic, concludes that "conflagration is not merely or even primarily destruction, but palingenesis, rebirth and reconstitution," adding that it "confirms the rational, benevolent, and virtuous causative principle governing the universe."³⁴⁶ Are we, then, to read from

³⁴⁵ To name only the Latin sources: Roche (2005) cites, e.g. Seneca's *De Beneficiis*, *Epistles*, and *Dialogues*, as well as the *Astronomica* of Manilius (cf., e.g., *Sen. Ben.* 6.22.1, *Ep.* 91; *Dial.* 6.26.6, 11.1.2; *Man.* 1.247-54, 2.60-66, 804-07). On the importance of *ekpyrosis* to the mood and texture of Seneca drama, see Rosenmeyer (1989), especially Ch. 6: "Sickness, Portents, and Catastrophe."

³⁴⁶ Roche (2005) 61. Roche qualifies this view somewhat, basically insists on the generally positive light in which the phenomenon was viewed: "Everlasting recurrence was not universally accepted among stoics, and some (notably Diogenes of Babylon, Boethius of Sidon, and Panaetius) rejected the whole scheme of destruction and rebirth in favour of the indestructibility of the universe. Moreover the nature of the universe's rebirth was also debated with particular reference to what, exactly, was meant by the notion of 'the recurrence of the same things'. But the centrality and refutability of the doctrine as a whole, along with the fine print of everlasting recurrence are less important in this context than the inseparability of conflagration and the providential *palingenesis* that is its necessary sequel." Roche (2005) 62.

the invocation in the proem here an implied regeneration and return to order after the 157 triumviral chaos, understanding Julio-Claudian Rome as a new Golden Age? This would be too simple a reading.³⁴⁷

Instead, it seems possible that in the very act of imagining the implications of Lucan's simile, which demand recourse to knowledge of events outside the text's narrative (at least as it stands), the reader is drawn into the ideological debate at the heart of Lucan's project: does the current reality suggest that the violent past was worth the price? The answer is given in the poem's relentless un-making of everything that made Rome great, all of which, it is repeatedly emphasized, is irrecoverably lost.³⁴⁸ There are also strong formal and linguistic parallels suggesting an especially close affinity with Ovidian epic in the proem overall, and particularly in the link between Lucan's ekpyrotic simile and the Phaethon narrative in *Metamorphoses* 1-2, as I discuss further below.³⁴⁹ Finally number of formal parallels with the consolatory genre may further alert us to the poem's status as a meditation on the "death" of Rome (cf. 7.617, *inpendisse pudet lacrimas in funere mundi*), a point which will be echoed again in the many violations of death and burial practice. Notably, these include a number of botched, denied, or otherwise inadequate cremations, a recurring theme throughout the poem.

The popularity of *ekpyrosis*, which the proem evokes so centrally, in letters of consolation invite a reading of the proem (and, by extension, the whole epic) as a type of

³⁴⁷ Likewise, however, to insist that the message of regeneration is somehow to be excluded from Lucan's conception of *ekpyrosis*, perhaps with recourse to an imagined lost Stoic text which denies the post-apocalyptic recovery, would seem a counsel of despair, cf. Roche's (2005: 68-69) comments on Rosenmeyer. See also Rosenmeyer (1989) 149.

³⁴⁸ In Roche's (2005: 67-68) words, "in the act of rejection- in this moral repudiation of principate—Lucan's reader has already become politically implicated in the subject matter of the poem."

³⁴⁹ See Ch. 2, "Epic and Ekpyrosis in the *Bellum Civile*" (149-53).

shadow-consolation. Likewise, the reminder of once-great towns and buildings 158

brought low, another consolatory *topos*, a few lines earlier in Lucan's proem (*BC* 1.24-27) further calls to mind the famous consolations of the author's illustrious uncle.³⁵⁰

Lucan is on one level deeply engaged with contemporary authors, and on another with his epic predecessors: the broken buildings of his proem are also certainly meant to evoke Vergil's *altae moenia Romae*.³⁵¹ The cyclicity inherent to the conception of *ekpyrosis* suggests that no matter how total previous destructions have been, there is always a greater one looming nebulously in the future. Similarly, these lines suggest, the chaotic past of Rome offers no guarantee against another catastrophe. Rome's inevitable destruction (indeed, that of the cosmos) is asserted in explicit terms in the proem as a Stoic *ekpyrosis*. More specifically, the conflagration is tied to society's own moral decline: Rome becomes bloated with wealth and throws off the balance of the cosmos, touching off the sequence of annihilation.³⁵²

Lucan follows up his initial image of conflagration with reformulations in Book 2 (286-291): the Stoic Cato justifies his decision to fight Caesar with a reference to the

³⁵⁰ *BC* 1.24-27: *at nunc semirutis pendent quod moenia tectis/ urbibus Italiae lapsisque ingentia muris/ saxa iacent/ nulloque domus custode tenentur/ rarus et antiquis habitator in urbibus errat...*

³⁵¹ *Aen.* 1.7.

³⁵² Masters (1992: 98) (after Thompson and Bruère 1968:5) point out the emphasis on balance in this passage. Yet we should not that this is not the only "mechanistic" feature of the passage. Lapidge (1979: 359) argues: "Lucan is here describing the Stoic *ekpyrosis*, and probably has in mind images of the conflagration such as those in the writings of Seneca," suggesting further that "in this passage Lucan has consciously and carefully chosen terminology drawn from and informed by the Stoic cosmological tradition. Consider the *conpages* which dissolves at *ekpyrosis*. This word originally meant 'putting together' (con + pingo) and hence 'structure' or 'framework' (of a ship, for example)." In the first century A.D., however, the word was used by Stoic poets to denote the structure of the universe: Manilius at one point states that the world is restrained or reinforced by *aetheriis conpagibus* (2, 803) (so Lapidge 1979, loc. cit.). See also Sklenář (1999) and (2003).

eventual collapse of the cosmos.³⁵³ The vision voiced by Cato is “actualized” before 159 Pharsalus, when the destructive forces of civil war are again compared with the dissolution of cosmic bonds, which I discuss further below.³⁵⁴ First, however, I examine the theme of Phaethon, also raised in the proem, at later points in the epic. Phaethon is linked conceptually to *ekpyrosis* in texts from Plato’s *Timaeus* to Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, as well as to several of Seneca’s works (to be discussed further below). In Lucan’s text, a number of cues invite us initially to read in his invocation of Nero an allusion to Ovid’s Phaethon. Yet the early connection forged to Stoic doctrine in the *ekpyrosis* simile should caution us not to discount the importance of more recent contributions to the development of these themes.

Disastrously Ambitious: Lucan, Phaethon, and Nero.

Lucan’s figuration of Nero as an overly weighty Phaethon in the proem (*BC* 1.47-50) is a well-established feature of the text.³⁵⁵ In the preface, Nero’s deification is anticipated by the narrator: Nero is pictured taking over of the chariot of the sun in terms that cannot help but bring to mind the myth of Phaethon at the beginning of his ride. Ideologically, two readings seem available. Are we to imagine Nero succeeding brilliantly where Phaethon failed (*telluremque nihil mutato sole timentem/ igne vago lustrare iuuet, BC* 1.49-50), or failing just as he did?³⁵⁶ The passage’s polemical literary stance, however,

³⁵³ See Fantham (1992) *ad loc.* On Cato’s decision, see Bartsch (1998) 114-123 and Myers (2011) 405 and n. 28).

³⁵⁴ Myers 2011, 404.

³⁵⁵ Hinds (1987), 26-29; followed by Dewar (1994), 211 and Lovatt (2005), 38.

³⁵⁶ Whether to take the proem ironically or seriously is a famous crux of scholarship: Ahl (1976) 30; Dewar (1994) 199–211; and Grimal (1960) 299 have been particularly influential. The

seems clear. As Emma Gee characterizes the passage, “Lucan responds to Vergil’s 160 invocation of Octavian at the beginning of the *Georgics* and Ovid’s concluding prayer in the *Metamorphoses* by taking the language of cosmography and pushing it over the edge.”³⁵⁷ By exemplifying the potential of claims of catasterism to slide towards the ridiculous, Lucan’s proem may sidestep the necessity of drawing serious implications from the Phaethon figuration at all.³⁵⁸

Yet as the Phaethon theme develops in the epic’s later books, the gently ironic treatment in the proem looks increasingly threatening. Pinpointing Nero as the unwieldy balance-point of the universe, Lucan equates him with the geographically central position imagined for Rome, setting up an affinity between leader and city which will be problematized in later books. As successive leaders are mired in conflict in localities which seem to reflect their own essential natures,³⁵⁹ the suggestion of Nero’s affinity with Phaethon hints more strongly at the form Rome’s own doom is likely to assume. Lucan further indicates the importance of Phaethon to his project in Book 2, when his violent language of geography comes to a focal point in a long literary “map” with a 16-line description of the Eridanus (Po) River at its center:

*quoque magis nullum tellus se solvit in amnem
Eridanus fractas devolvit in aequora silvas
Hesperiamque exhaurit aquis. hunc fabula primum*

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choices and their implications are smartly delineated, with bibliography, in O’Hara (2007) 133-144.

³⁵⁷ Gee (2000) 188-89.

³⁵⁸ As Barchiesi (1997: 82) makes clear, we need not think that political *laudes* and playfulness are totally incompatible; cf. Gee (2000) 188.

³⁵⁹ Bexley, after Masters (1992), asserts that Nero’s role in the proem introduces Lucan’s preoccupation with the politics of space and one-man rule, arguing of 1.53–58: “The poet’s insistence that Nero’s prospective divinity claim a seat at heaven’s midpoint assigns corresponding positions and, by implication, corresponding roles to Rome and the emperor. Just as the deified Nero will be the focal point of all heavenly beings, so Rome is, by association, the pivot of the terrestrial globe” Bexley (2009).

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*populea fluvium ripas umbrasse corona,
 cumque diem pronum transverso limite ducens
 succendit Phaethon flagrantibus aethera loris,
 gurgitibus raptis penitus tellure perusta,
 hunc habuisse pares Phoebis ignibus undas. 415
 non minor hic Nilo, si non per plana iacentis
 Aegypti Libycas Nilus stagnaret harenas;
 non minor hic Histro... (BC 2. 410-18)*

...and there the Po, a river mightier than which the earth does not discharge, sweeps shattered forests down to sea and drains Italy of its waters. According to legend this was the first river whose banks were shaded by a ring of poplars; and when Phaethon drove the sun downwards, athwart its appointed course, and set aflame the sky with his burning reins, with rushing streams vanished and the earth burnt to the core, this river had currents equal to the sun's fire. This river would not lesser that the Nile would not be greater, if the Nile did not pool in the Libyan sands, along the flats of low-lying Egypt; nor would it be lesser than the Danube...

As Elaine Fantham astutely comments, the story of Phaethon's reckless handling of the solar chariot, endangering the cosmic order, forms an allusive facet of Lucan's larger portrayal of civil war as a kind of cosmic dissolution.³⁶⁰

Lucan recounts the Eridanus' size and power at some length, comparing it with the Nile and the lower Danube. Significantly, Lucan leaves out the role of Jupiter in checking Phaethon's progress, by default assigning this Italian river a vigorously active role in extinguishing Phaethon's fiery ride. The geography associated with Phaethon and his ride is thus given signal importance at an early stage in the epic. As Jennifer Thomas has shown, most of the sites listed in Phaethon's accidental rampage in *Metamorphoses* 2 appear at some point in the *Bellum Civile*. Most strikingly, in the catalogue of Pompey's troops in *Bellum Civile* 3.169-297, nineteen such place names occur, all but three in

³⁶⁰ Fantham (1992) 392-438.

identical or mirrored line positions.³⁶¹ As with the opening invocation of *ekpyrosis*, 162 this should alert us to Phaethon's ongoing importance to the work as a whole.

The greatest evocation of Phaethon's geography, however, comes late in the epic. In Book 9 Lucan's Stoic idealist Cato is marooned in the post-Phaethonic wasteland of Libya: the *ekpyrosis* threatened in the proem seems already to have happened here. According to Erica Bexley, the geography Lucan creates symbolizes contested power.³⁶² Bexley identifies three competing centers of power in Lucan's narrative, each associated through marked activity, as well as through a seemingly innate affinity, with each of the three major leaders. Delphi, archaic and exhausted, equates with Pompey; Pharsalus, violent and unstable, with Caesar; and the Libyan zone, an austere environment seemingly designed to test the limits of human endurance, with Cato. I would further argue for the significance, unmentioned by Bexley, of a geographic progression that takes us away from Phoebus' oracle at Delphi, now outdated and irrelevant, to a new site of prophecy in Ammon, in the middle of the swath of Phaethon's most lasting destruction: the deserts of Libya, the fractured geography of which Lucan describes extensively.

More generally, Lucan exploits the African weather as a metaphor for civil war.³⁶³

As Paolo Asso points out, the hostile geography of Libya at several points recalls the description of the thunderbolt at 1.151-7, the image that initiates the fire-tinged

³⁶¹ Thomas (2008) 89-90.

³⁶² Bexley (2009). Bexley (2009). See also Masters (1992) 150-78, arguing that Lucan's geography demonstrates that the upheaval of civil war includes a destabilization of geography. Bourgery (1928) lays fundamental groundwork in this line of thinking. Likewise, the importance of geographical symbolism is acknowledged implicitly by Henderson (1998: 189 on Lucan's "geophysical poetics"); Bartsch (1998) 13 on rivers and Rossi (2000: 579) who argues that Lucan creates a reversal of the *Aeneid's* progression from east to west. Thomas (2008) is presently the most extensive inquiry into the politics of space and topography in Lucan. See now also Pogorzelski (2011).

³⁶³ The storm which devastates Cato's troops as well as the poor local Garamantes is described as raging against its own people, bringing "more devastation than fire" (9.445-453).

characterization of Caesar evident throughout the poem.³⁶⁴ In this searing allegorical 163 environment, Cato's great failure is actually a product of his peculiar strength. As Behr argues, the central figures of calamity from *Aeneid* 2, "the serpent and the flame" lose their scorching power and are tamed."

Indeed, Cato is the one figure in Lucan's epic who seems authorized to activate the positive aspect of incendiary metaphor: in concluding his speech to his beleaguered troops in the Libyan desert, the narrator comments *sic ille paventes / incendit virtute animos et amore laborum* ("Thus he fired their spirits with courage and love of their struggles," *BC* 9.406–407).³⁶⁵ This line echoes the end of *Aeneid* 6, in which Anchises's spirit in the underworld encourages Aeneas to continue with his quest by showing him a parade of great Roman souls waiting to be born. Cato's harangue, however, is directed at an exhausted band of survivors, who continue with him down a "desert path" from which there is "no return" (*inreducem viam deserto limite carpit*, 9.408).³⁶⁶

As Leigh argues, Cato's march across the desert appears to hold little strategic value, and is instead constructed as an elaborate test of Roman *virtus* (*audax virtus*,

³⁶⁴ Asso in Asso (2011) 393.

³⁶⁵ In discussing Cato's role in Book 9, Behr (2007: 164) compares Cato to other doomed champions from Vergilian epic: Juturna, who unreservedly condemns the gods for their devious stratagems (*Aen.* 12.871–81 = *BC* 2 304–305); Dido, who is both victim and avenger; and Cleopatra, depicted on Aeneas's shield as surrounded by snakes (*Aen.* 8. 696–97 = *BC* 9.734–838).

³⁶⁶ *deserto limite* here perhaps echoes the *transverso limite* of Lucan's Phaethon at *BC* 2.412, as well as a fragment of his lost *Iliacon*, a simile comparing a lost referent to the fire of Phaethon's ride: (*Iliacon fr.* 6, in Lact. on *Theb.* 6.322: *Haud aliter raptum transverso limite caeli/ flammati Phaethonta poli videre deique/ cum vice mutata totis in montibus ardens/ terra dedit caelo lucem, naturaque versa...* Though Phaethon does not figure specifically in the mythological references Lucan makes to introduce the Libyan episode, Phaethon's role in Lucan's geography has already been established in Book 2, and the association with Nero in the proem of Book 1 remains striking. So, Phaethon is strongly emphasized in earlier in the poem (and, evidently, at least in one part of the *Iliacon*), as well as having been specifically invoked as the cause of Libya's aridity in Ovid, one of Lucan's major models. Thus, it seems reasonable to imagine that Phaethon's fiery legacy is invoked here.

9.302), which only a figure like Cato possesses the resolve to withstand. The rest of 164 his men can claim the privilege of dying free men (as Cato reminds them at 9.379), but this is a dubious privilege, at best.³⁶⁷ Cato, rendered uniquely impervious to heat, thirst, and of course, snakes by his Stoic *virtus*, does not realize he has led a less sturdy people into a political landscape from which no victory can be won.³⁶⁸ Cato's individual fortitude does not an army make, and he is not capable of overcoming the overwhelmingly destructive force of Lucan's Caesar.

Lucan's Caesar: the Incendiary Dynast.

The delight that Caesar takes in destruction informs a programmatic simile, which introduces him in Book 1:

qualiter expressum ventis per nubila fulmen
aetheris impulsu sonitu mundique fragore
emicuit rupitque diem populosque paventes
terrui obliqua praestringens lumina flamma:
in sua templa furit, nullaque exire vetante 155
materia magnamque cadens magnamque reuertens
dat stragem late sparsosque recolligit ignes.

Just as when lightning, forced out from the sky by winds, with a crack of stricken air and shaking of the earth, flashes forth and splits the day and terrorizes the cowering people, strafing their vision with slanting flame: [then] rages upon its own quarter of heaven, and with no matter to oppose it, both as it falls and when it retreats, it leaves great path of destruction, and [then] it regroups its scattered fires.

Caesar, the thunderbolt, is designed as the perfect weapon to topple Pompey, who, in the unusual twin simile to this one, is an aged oak, weighed down by its own history and

³⁶⁷ Leigh (2000); after Seo in Asso (ed.) (2011) 218-219.

³⁶⁸ This situational irony serves to undercut phenomenon (discussed in Seewald 2008: 391-410) of the passage's overall use of geographical and astrological knowledge to valorize Cato's character.

poised to fall.³⁶⁹ Cato's speech at 2.297, in which he resolves to enter the conflict, 165 further develops the connection between Caesar and fire imagery.

Cato likens his decision to go to war to the grief of a man forced to cremate his own son:

...ceum morte parentem
natorum orbatum longum producere funus
ad tumulos iubet ipse dolor, iuuat ignibus atris
inseruisse manus constructoque aggere busti 300
ipsum atras tenuisse faces, non ante revellar
exanimem quam te conplectar, Roma; tuumque
nomen, Libertas, et inanem persequar umbram.

Just as when grief itself commands a father, robbed of his sons by death, to lead the long funeral procession to the grave, and he is content to thrust his hands into the dark fires, and to hold the smoky torch where the lofty pyre rises: never shall I be ripped away before I embrace your lifeless body, Rome; and your name and empty shade, Freedom, I shall pursue.

Cato's own resistance to personal suffering, a highly Stoic virtue, is complicated here by the gesture of placing his hand in the fire. This act of overwhelming grief would appear to be anti-Stoic, but is valorized here as a patriotic virtue, albeit a futile one.³⁷⁰ Like Mucius Scaevola, he is happy to thrust his hand into the fire; in an unhappy reversal, the very situation makes clear that there are not, as Scaevola was once able to claim, throngs of like-minded Romans willing to do the same.

In this simile, the dark flames, which represent Caesar's forces of destruction, are fiercely but futilely resisted by Cato's persona of bereaved parent. Forced by necessity to

³⁶⁹ This pair of similes reworks the image made famous by Caesar and Pompey's contemporary Catullus, whose poem 64 (106-112) figures Theseus as the lightning bolt destroying an oak tree, which represents the Minotaur.

³⁷⁰ Seo (in Asso ed., 2011: 203-205) points out that Seneca in *de Ira* (3.13) and many other authors dwell on the loss of a child as the moment at which one can best display Stoic *virtus* through proper composure; this "inappropriate" metaphor clearly signals Cato's departure from Stoic orthodoxy, and thus Lucan's Cato directly confronts the idealized Cato of the historiographic tradition (Seo 2011: 204).

engage with Caesar's tactics and policies, Cato must resign himself to a loss of all he 166 values into the consuming fires; nevertheless he is compelled instinctively to raise his hand against them.³⁷¹ Lucan's Caesar is the character in the epic most closely associated with the "dark fire" that relentlessly consumes what is already doomed, reinforcing the futility of Cato's resolve to resist. Lucan later employs this imagery again, describing Rome's terrified anticipation of the "dark flames" with which they fear Caesar's forces will assault them, further suggesting the affinity between Caesar and the fire in the imagination of Lucan's Rome.

The comparison of Caesar to destructive elemental forces continues at 3.100-101: *namque ignibus atris creditur, ut captae, rapturus moenia Romae sparsurusque deos*, "for men believed that, as he would a captive city, he would destroy the walls of Rome with dark fires and scatter her gods" (see also 4.680-3, 7.240). His fiery properties are evidently transferable to his environment, and perhaps even the key to his success: Rosner-Siegel remarks on how the eyes of the people, dazzled with "slanting flame" in the simile at 1.154, are recalled in the slanting damming action of Caesar's troops (*in obliquum amnem*, 1.220), which enable him to cross the Rubicon.³⁷²

The association between Caesar and fire as forces of destruction is never more evident than in the aftermath of the Battle of Pharsalus, as Caesar is described as glorying in the carnage. Though he has already been likened in simile to the flames of lighting and to a funeral pyre, Caesar now paradoxically attempts to maximize the damage of the

³⁷¹ Behr (2007: 163) in discussing this passage, maps out the relationship between Cato and the elements in nuanced terms, remarking that Lucan's Cato fights against Caesar with the "fire of his emotions and the ice of his philosophical commitment."

³⁷² Rosner-Siegel (orig.1983) in Tesoriero (ed.) (2010) 187.

battle by denying the Pompeian dead the purifying ritual of cremation. Yet Lucan, in 167 a vivid direct address to Caesar as he surveys the wreckage, says:

*nil agis hac ira: tabesne cadavera solvat
an rogos, haud refert; placido natura receptat
cuncta sinu, finemque sui sibi corpora debent.
hos, Caesar, populos si nunc non usserit ignis,
uret cum terris, uret cum gurgite ponti.
communis mundo superest rogos ossibus astra
mixturus.* (BC 7.809-15)

You achieve nothing with your current wrath: whether decay or a pyre dissipates the corpses matters little. Nature takes all things into her tranquil embrace, and bodies owe their end to themselves. If fire will not burn these peoples now, Caesar, it will burn them along with the earth, along with the current of the sea. The common pyre of the universe is yet to come, which will blend the stars with our bones.

As in the proem, the Roman civil war is analogized with a cosmic event. Here, Caesar is presented as an agent of catastrophe that can only be rivaled by the final conflagration of *ekpyrosis* anticipated in the epic's proem.³⁷³ The recurring motif of the funeral pyre, which the simile in Cato's speech begins to articulate as a figure for the political catastrophe visited upon Rome by Caesar, here is magnified yet again into the final destruction of the universe. It appears, however, not as a Senecan image of consolation, designed to offer perspective (on which, more below) but as a final reproach to Caesar and his consuming desire for power. Elsewhere, however, the image of the pyre appears to advance another agenda.

Pyres and Prolepsis: Lucan's Commemorative Destructions.

³⁷³ So Morford (2002) 188.

Caesar, in the midst of a storm at sea that reprises the opening scene of the *Aeneid*,³⁷⁴ 168 shows a disregard for the circumstances of his own future corpse when he exclaims: “Let me lack a tomb and a pyre, so long as I am always feared and dreaded in every land!” (5.670-671).³⁷⁵ Famously, Caesar was in fact to have a highly unconventional version of both these honors. Caesar’s pronouncement, which reverses the storm-beset Aeneas’ wish that he had died at Troy, echoes and amplifies the epic’s recurring theme of flawed creations, inadequate funerals, and tombs denied.

In addition to the lack of burial rites implied in Book 2’s Phaethon episode, Lucan comments that Pompey’s massed army in Book 3 amounts to no more than a proleptic funeral cortege.³⁷⁶ This passage, describing Pompey’s supporters in their doomed multitudes, looks forward in poignant contrast to the conclusion of Pompey’s trajectory in the narrative. When Pompey’s decapitated corpse lies abandoned on the Egyptian shore, two characters will make thwarted attempts to offer him proper funeral honors. For Lucan, the lack of a proper burial for Pompey remains a historical scandal, and one which already had an epic pedigree in the famous allusion to Pompey’s headless corpse in *Aeneid* 2.³⁷⁷ In poetry, at least, the right can be wronged: Lucan creates a poetic monument to replace the one denied in his probable literary and historical models, again questioning and reversing the Vergilian narrative of successful recovery from disaster.³⁷⁸

³⁷⁴ The passage also reworks (via Vergil) the first appearance of Odysseus in the *Odyssey*; see Appendix 2 in Matthews (2008).

³⁷⁵ See the astute comments of Matthews *ad loc.* and at 5.668-71 on the general importance of pyres and burials in Lucan.

³⁷⁶ *BC* 3.290-2.

³⁷⁷ Points recently highlighted by Bernstein in Asso (ed.) (2011).

³⁷⁸ So Bernstein in Asso (ed.) (2011). For differing readings on the significance of Pompey and his death in Roman epic, see Behr (2007) 76-112; Sklenář (2003) 106-27; Narducci (1973); Bartsch (1998) 74-100; Feeney (1986); Rossi (2000).

The better-known of the two vignettes concerning Pompey's "pyres" is the 169 poignant episode in which Pompey's wife Cornelia comes to collect his belongings (BC 9.174-181). Yet a pendant passage with major ideological significance occurs almost in the moment of Pompey's death. As Pompey's headless corpse sinks beneath the waves of the Alexandrian shore, Cordus, a character with no other attestation in history, springs forward to rescue the body. Cordus, apostrophizing Fortune, laments the lack of ceremony attending the makeshift cremation on a stranger's abandoned pyre. He declares, however, that Pompey "asks no splendid burial, no incense, no loyal Roman shoulders to carry the father of his country, no funeral procession displaying mementos of former triumphs, no solemn music in the *fora*, no mourning army circling about the pyre and casting their arms in it."³⁷⁹ This list of honors includes a number of features known from accounts of Caesar's funeral, many of which, as noted above, were replicated in Augustus' funeral. Lucan's depiction of Cordus, a figure engaged in activity with incendiary overtones and possessed of a powerful interest in Pompey's proper commemoration, has larger implications for his overall project.³⁸⁰

Even if by coincidence there was a triumviral figure known to Lucan's audience with the uncommon name of Cordus, nothing, as Brennan argues, prevented Lucan from exploiting the coincidental echo of Cremutius Cordus' name here, creating a knowing and ironic reference to the fate of a more recent champion of anti-Caesarian memory.³⁸¹ Cremutius Cordus' works were cast upon a "pyre," as it were, by Tiberius in an attempt to control the transmission of memory from the triumviral period. As discussed above,

³⁷⁹ See BC 8.729-725. On the allusions to Caesar's funeral, see Ullmann (1921).

³⁸⁰ Brennan (1969); echoed by Fucecchi in Asso, ed. (2011) 255-6.

³⁸¹ Brennan (1969) 104.

the dissident Labienus, Cordus' predecessor in the chronicles of book-burning, 170 famously buried himself to avoid suffering the same consignment to oblivion as his works. Lucan, in turn, offers pride of place in his epic to burial descriptions pertaining to political actors whom the *princeps* would deny a place in history.³⁸²

Cordus' noble but empty act of commemoration signals Lucan's awareness of the fate of authors who wrote about the formation of the principate, or of the *princeps* himself, in insufficiently adulatory terms. Neil Bernstein observes that the list of honors denied to Pompey's corpse forms part of a patterned treatment of cremation in Lucan, which ultimately reads as an indictment of imperial deification ritual.³⁸³ Instead, Lucan offers pride of place in his epic to burial descriptions pertaining to those the *princeps* would deny a place in history. It also suggests a strong affinity for the work of Seneca, a noted influence at many points in the epic. Reading Seneca's *Consolatio ad Marciam* sharpens the sense of purpose latent in Lucan's more oblique set of references.

Seneca's *Consolatio ad Marciam*: Book-Burning, Memory, and Metaphor.

Lucan's proem subtly signals an affinity for the consolatory genre, employing such well-known feature as the meditation on the fate of once-great cities, the anticipation of a final universal destruction, and the avowal of a great loss (in this case, of Rome's republican liberties and countless lives) as a small price to pay for a greater game (as Lucan's proem

³⁸² So, too can we read the final iteration of the theme: Pompey's wife Cornelia comes to collect his belongings (*BC* 9.174-181). The emphasis on Pompey's honors, as represented by his honorific clothing, fits in with this interpretation: the external reminders of his distinction can be consumed by the Caesarian flame, but the memory and report live on and are again revived by Lucan's text.

³⁸³ Bernstein in Asso (ed.) (2011).

has it, the leadership of Nero). Yet this passage lacks the specificity of addressee and 171 the personal sense of loss that usually go along with a letter of consolation. By contrast, Seneca's consolation written to Cremutius Cordus' daughter thematizes the fiery destruction of Cordus' work, explicitly connecting the event with destructive urban fires at Rome, with the commemoration of the Pompeian cause, and, ultimately, with *ekpyrosis*. In the *Consolatio ad Marciam*, Seneca displays an early facility in exploiting parallels offered by fire to create unified compositions, as he blends learned allusion with Roman history and Stoic doctrine to commemorate and comment on the loss of one of the era's major dissident voices.

Early in the essay, Seneca commends Marcia's work in preserving and publishing what she could of her father's work, since much of it had burned (1.2-3, *magna illorum pars arserat*). Cremutius Cordus' writings stand alone as a monument to those wishing for an example of resistance to tyranny. They also point up the ultimate failure of those who tried to suppress him: these men, Seneca tells us, will not live on in memory: "not even for their crimes."³⁸⁴ Seneca further develops the theme of proper and improper forms of commemoration with recourse to various exempla from history, before returning to the topic of Marcia's father and his own stand against the violation of memory at 22.4-5:

Decernebatur illi statua in Pompei theatro ponenda, quod exustum Caesar reficiebat: exclamavit Cordus tunc uere theatrum perire. Quid ergo? non

³⁸⁴ Seneca celebrates the survival of the texts on two levels (*ad Marc.1.4*): *legitur, floret, in manus hominum, in pectora receptus vetustatem nullam timet; at illorum carnificum cito scelera quoque, quibus solis memoriam meruerunt, tacebuntur*, "He is now read, he lives: welcomed into the hands and hearts of men he fears no aging; but as for those butchers: even their crimes, the only things for which they deserve remembrance, will soon be heard of no more."

rumperetur supra cineres Cn. Pompei constitui Seianum et in monumentis maximi imperatoris consecrari perfidum militem? 172

[Sejanus] was being voted the honor of a statue, which was to be set up in the theater of Pompey, just then being restored by Tiberius after a fire. Whereupon Cordus exclaimed: “Now the theater is ruined indeed!” What! Was it not to burst with rage to think of a Sejanus planted upon the ashes of Gnaeus Pompey, a disloyal soldier hallowed by a statue in a memorial to one of the greatest generals?

Seneca’s anecdote revives not just Cremutius Cordus’ writings, but his living voice.

In commemorating Cordus’ remark, Seneca manages to give him the last word in his feud with Sejanus. Seneca resurrects the last great “Republican” historian as an almost divinized figure, able to speak and pass judgment from beyond the grave. The fiery consumption of Pompey’s legacy in the city’s physical space, not far from the Augustan funeral monuments of the Campus Martius, also again evokes the cremation at Rome that Pompey was denied, making the honorary statue of Sejanus erected “over Pompey’s ashes” (*supra cineres... Pompei*) in the restored theater a further violation of the triumvir’s memory.

In a text emphasizing the link between fire and leadership at Rome on so many levels, Seneca takes the opportunity to end the story the same way the world will end. Assuming the character of Marcia’s father, Seneca this time imagines an even more thoroughly divinized Cordus, speaking to Marcia from a celestial seat (26.1: *tanto elatiore, quanto est ipse sublimior*). Cordus reproaches her for her excessive melancholy at his loss. Seneca’s Cordus *redivivus* describes his existence on the immortal plane as free from the strife, secrecy, and paranoia of Tiberian Rome, the environment that made

his work so dangerous.³⁸⁵ The text ends with a lengthy description of the process of 173
destruction and regeneration:

Et cum tempus advenerit, quo se mundus renovaturus extinguat, viribus ista se suis caedent et sidera sideribus incurrent et omni flagrante materia uno igni quicquid nunc ex disposito lucet ardebit. Nos quoque felices animae et aeterna sortitae, cum deo visum erit iterum ista moliri, labentibus cunctis et ipsae parva ruinae ingentis accessio in antiqua elementa vertemur.

And when the time comes for the world to be blotted out in order that it may begin its life anew, these things will destroy themselves by their own power, and stars will clash with stars, and all the fiery matter of the world that now shines in orderly array will blaze up in a common conflagration...we, too, amid the falling universe, shall be added as a tiny fraction to this mighty destruction, and shall be changed again into our former elements (*ad Marc.* 26.6-7).

Thought to have been written in the 40's CE, before Seneca's ascendancy as Nero's tutor and writer, the *ad Marciam* suggests the centrality of dissident speech and ekpyrotic theory to his thinking from an early date. Seneca's language and imagery here, linking the demise free expression and ideological competition in the Roman state with fires in the urban landscape, with ekpyrosis, and with the commemoration of past conflicts also provides important forerunner and possible model for Lucan's patterned treatment of the same motifs in the *Bellum Civile*. In the next section, I explore the ways in which Seneca exploits the mythological trope of Phaethon's disastrous ambition to similar ends,

³⁸⁵ His life's work now seems a trivial thing, in comparison to the array of countless ages now open to his view. Similarly, she should take comfort from anticipation of the fate common that awaits us all: a universal destruction, including earthquake, plague and flood, will ultimately end fire, which "in huge conflagration will scorch and burn all mortal things" (*ignibus vastis torrebit incendetque mortalia*, 26.6); *ad Marc.* 26.4: *Quid dicam nulla hic arma mutuis furere concursibus nec classes classibus frangi nec parricidia aut fingi aut cogitari nec fora litibus strepere dies perpetuos, nihil in obscuro, detectas mentes et aperta praecordia et in publico medioque uitam et omnis aevi prospectum venientiumque?* "What need to explain that here are no rival armies rage in contest, no fleets shattering each other, no parricides are here, not imagined or contemplated, no forums ring with strife in endless days, nothing here done in secret, but minds are open, hearts revealed, our lives are transparent to the public, while every age and all that is yet to come, visible to us?"

bending its contours and merging elements of history and natural philosophy to create 174 strikingly new ethical lessons and aesthetic paradoxes.

Seneca's Phaethon: a Running Commentary.

The sum of Seneca's interactions with the Phaethon myth, in conjunction with the evidence offered by anecdotes of Nero's behavior and decorative programs, suggest at the very least a vogue for the subject in contemporary Rome. Yet Phaethon's apparent aesthetic and philosophical appeal should not blind us to the ideological impact his story carried in this period. An overview Seneca's engagement with the theme of Phaethon suggests a specific trajectory from valorization of Phaethon's early ambition to a subtly pessimistic view, which seems to evoke the soured relationship between Seneca and Nero.

Seneca's *de Vita Beata*, usually dated to around 58 CE, presents an imaginary philosopher who dies before achieving virtue, but defends himself against detractors using terms which implicitly work to rehabilitate Phaethon's character.³⁸⁶ Seneca's philosopher in *de Vita Beata* presents himself not as an ethical failure, but a victim of his situation, lifting a line from Ovid: *etiam si non tenuerit/magnis tamen excidit ausis* (VB 20.5 = *Met.* 2.328).³⁸⁷ The use of Phaethon's epitaph to illustrate the importance of a good

³⁸⁶ Motto (2009: 120) characterizes the date as 58-59, "at the close of the *Quinquennium Neronis* (54-59), a period when Seneca, curbing the excesses of the young Emperor Nero, administered the affairs of Rome with equity and clemency." Seneca may nevertheless have been writing with an eye towards clearing his name to Nero after the charges leveled against him by the *delator* Suillius. On difficulties of establishing the date see Rudich (1997) 88-89 and 288 n. 168. Even the broadest chronologies (e.g. Wilson 2010: introduction) place it between 55-62 CE, which still works well enough for our purposes.

³⁸⁷ Ker (2009) 123. Seneca further emphasizes the heroic aspect of Ovid's Phaethon in this passage of *VB*, characterizing those who attack the philosophical path as "creatures of the night"

man's pursuit of *virtus*, at first blush a questionable endorsement, illustrates an important function of Senecan thought which may also help explain Nero's apparent willingness to invite comparison with Phaethon. 175

Seneca, working in the Stoic tradition of exemplarity, is skilled in the use of tragic/heroic figures as illustrations both of misplaced values and of ideal behavior.³⁸⁸ Rather, in *VB* Seneca appeals, as James Ker argues, "to the grandiosity of Phaethon's celestial ambitions, however unfulfilled, to glorify the philosopher's discerning quest for virtue."³⁸⁹ The kind of refined distinction that Ker identifies here is a characteristically Stoic method of intertextual appropriation. Yet this procedure also neatly sums up what seems to have been at stake for Nero, supremely ambitious as both leader and poet, in the heroic "appropriations" he brought into the "text" of his life.

Perhaps the best-known Senecan evocation of Phaethon comes in his essay *de Providentia*. In the text generally, Seneca argues that a good man can suffer no evils: adversities come our way only to test and strengthen *virtus*. A good man will seek out these challenges, climbing high and persevering through difficulties (*Prov.* 5.10). At this

(*nocturna animalia*), whose "weak eyes dread the sun" (*solem lumina aegra formidant*, 20.6). This use of "moral chiaroscuro" is a recurring theme of Seneca's work, but it also seems to have been the acknowledged aesthetic mode of his age. This metaphorical elaboration of sun and shadow works its way not only into literary treatments, but also into Nero's apparent obsession with light effects, reflective surfaces, and solar imagery in his spectacles and architecture.

³⁸⁸As Ker (2009: 123-124) assesses this instance, it is not that Seneca tries to hide that fact of Phaethon's failure (as if that were possible): when writing in the tragic genre, Seneca is "happy enough to recognize the more traditional assessment of Phaethon's career." Ker further notes that Medea (*Sen. Med.* 599-602) describes her late uncle's daring (using the same term, *ausus*) as the fatal factor in his irrational and catastrophic violation of natural boundaries. Rather, in *VB* Seneca appeals "to the grandiosity of Phaethon's celestial ambitions, however, unfulfilled, to glorify the philosopher's discerning quest for virtue."

³⁸⁹Ker (2009) 123: this mode of distinction, which we also see at work in Seneca's treatment of our other incendiary leader, Dido, "is partly a means to heroize the philosopher through the connotations of the original scenario, but it also heroizes him through testing and proving his ability as a discerning reader."

point Seneca's divine narrator quotes Phoebus' warning to his son Phaethon that 176 driving his chariot across the sky is frightening even to a god (*Met.* 2. 63-69). Seneca then interrupts the god's speech with a brief prose dialogue: a youth protests to an unnamed advisor that, like Seneca's *bonus vir*, he eagerly seeks out a challenge (*Prov.* 5.11). The advisor responds with Phoebus' speech in Ovid (*Met.* 2.79-81). Thereafter, Seneca develops the exchange between the advisor and boy in an overtly Ovidian fashion. The boy insists the chariot be harnessed: he wishes to go where even the sun is afraid.

The extended way in which Seneca quotes from the 366 lines of Ovid's Phaethon episode indicates that he is not employing Ovid's account as a mere rhetorical decoration.³⁹⁰ They come close to the end of a long engagement with the myth and its meaning, which, curiously, begins with the epitaph (*VB*) and ends with the journey's inception (*Prov*). The relationship between the ambitious charioteer-manqué and his more cautious advisor strikes a more wistful and ironic note than the celebratory endorsement of Phaethon's ambitions in the *VB*. More precisely, the positive lesson it is possible to extract from the story of Phaethon's ride still obtains. Yet it is now so deeply implicated in Seneca's failed attempts to guide Nero's progress that Phaethon is, as it were, tarred with Nero's brush.

The initial appeal of Phaethon's ambition is further suggested in Seneca's approving quotation in his *Natural Questions* of lines from a lost work by his friend

³⁹⁰ Emily Batinski presented some of these conclusions at the 2007 meeting of the Classical Association of the Midwest and South (*non vidi*), for which an abstract is available online.

Vagellius, about whom little else is known.³⁹¹ The first line usually attributed to 177

Vagellius, *tollimus ingentes animos et maxima parvo/ tempore molimur* (3.3), “we lift minds up to greatness and strive for great accomplishments in little time,” is offered in support of a larger expression of anxiety over the sense that his days are numbered as he retreats from public and family responsibilities to concentrate on his philosophical work.³⁹² If *NQ* 3.3 seems to signal Seneca’s departure from an active role as Nero’s advisor, the inspirational quotation it offers may also work as a final exhortation to the young ruler, urging him to apply himself to his role as leader with an appreciation of the energy and potential his youth affords him.³⁹³ The undeniable sense of risk inherent in Phaethon’s image, however it is deployed, would only enhance Seneca’s larger message on the unpredictability of life. This seems again to be the message in the evocation of the Phaethon myth at another point in the *Natural Questions*.

Seneca quotes a line from Ovid to illustrate the effect of the flood he imagines will one day wipe out the world in a single day, offering a famous image of Ovidian

³⁹¹ Williams offers discussion with bibliography on the possible identifications of Seneca’s Vagellius. Williams (2012) 32 and n. 38. Most editions of fragments of Latin poets place the verse under Vagellius’ authorship. The attribution is probable, but not certain (see Büchner 1982 and Blänsdorf 1995). *NQ* 6.2.9 is the main argument for attributing this fragment, since Seneca, quoting a line from Vagellius by name, refers to the source as *illo incluto carmine*, with the same term (*inclutus*) we see used in *NQ* 3 to refer to the poet himself. Cf. Dahlmann (1977) 76-77.

³⁹² Tellingly, Seneca later clarifies (as an afterthought) that they do not apply to him, and instead reflect his sentiments as they would have been, had he only started writing the *Naturales Quaestiones* as a young man. If we are correct in thinking that Vagellius’ poem was the source of this quotation, it seems possible that the Neronian revival of the Phaethon myth involved this apparently acclaimed piece of work (described in *VB* 6.2.9 as the verse of a *poeta inclutus*, but also as a personal friend of Seneca’s, making him at least roughly contemporary with Nero’s years). Seneca’s quotation of it here may have been an attempt to capitalize on the possibly quite current popularity of the poem and its theme, especially in a moment at which he and his work were seen as vulnerable to criticism.

³⁹³ As Williams (2012: 32) elaborates, the shifting perceptions of time which characterize the passage as a whole are rendered all the more poignant if, in the line’s original context, Phaethon is preparing for his one-day career in the solar chariot.

disaster to elaborate his vision of the flood to come: *NQ* 3.27.13 *ergo insularum modo*¹⁷⁸ *eminent* “*montes et sparsas Cycladas augent,*” *ut ait ille poetarum ingeniosissimus egregie*..., “Thus, the mountains pop up like islands, and ‘increase the count of the Cyclades,’ as that most gifted of poets expresses it, inimitably...”³⁹⁴ As Williams points out, however, unlike the Ovidian passages Seneca quotes next, this first image comes from the poet’s description of the results of Phaethon’s scorching ride (*Met.* 2.26.4), rather than from the flood narrative in *Met.* 1.³⁹⁵

The potentially brief span of time between ascent to power and collapse again seems to be the point behind Seneca’s additional use of a quotation he attributes to Vagellius. Underlining the urgency that disasters like the Pompeii earthquake of 62/63 should impart to our understanding of daily existence, he offers the apparently well-known line: (*NQ* 6.2.9) *si . . . cadendum est, / e caelo cecidisse velim* “if fall we must, I’d like to have fallen from Heaven.”³⁹⁶ Like the sly swapping-in of a Phaethon image in his flood narrative, it hints at a parity between this current catastrophe and one from the

³⁹⁴ *NQ* 27.1: *Sed monet me locus, ut quaeram, cum fatalis dies diluvii venerit...*

³⁹⁵ Williams’ (2012: 129-130) suggestion here is persuasive: the evocation of Ovidian conflagration in a flood scene is incongruous, “unless he evokes the Ovidian scene partly with irony, partly as a subtle means of signaling that the cataclysm and conflagration are parallel agents of destruction.” The connection drawn between the future flood Seneca imagines and the mythic flood which Ovid presents as the divinely justified punishment of a morally dissipated population allows Seneca “gently to impute to nature the role of moral arbiter without compromising the rationalizing focus” of the *NQ* as a whole.

³⁹⁶ Seneca strengthens this impression with his other notable quotation here, from *Aeneid* 2: *inter ignes et hostem stupentibus dictum est: “una salus victis nullam sperare salutem”*, “for those gawping between flames and foes, the saying goes: ‘the only safety when conquered is hoping for no safety.’” The context here, of course, is Aeneas’ desperate exhortation to a small, doomed band of survivors as they prepare to rush back into the flames of Troy. As Williams (2012: 230) argues, both quotations, in different ways, allow Seneca to address the importance of accomplishing as much as one can, in recognition of the arbitrary timing of death and disaster. See also Williams (2012) 22 and 31-3)

mythic past.³⁹⁷ As was argued in Chapter 1, Ovid's treatment of the Phaethon myth 179 already incorporated a strong ideological element. Now, at a time when actual disasters were shaking the confidence of the Roman population, an evocation of Phaethon and his grandiose ambitions begins to take on a threatening tone.

Seneca may also be evoking the literary legacy of the Phaethon myth when he describes viewing world from on high and seeing great nations shrunk down to pinpoints.³⁹⁸ This is a theme to which Seneca alludes directly in the first book of the *Natural Questions* (NQ 1. 8-9):

[8] Non potest ante contemnere porticus, et lacunaria ebore fulgentia, et tonsiles silvas, et derivata in domos flumina, quam totum circumeat mundum, et terrarum orbem superne despiciens angustum, et magna ex parte opertum mari, etiam qua exstat, late squalidum, et aut ustum aut rigentem. Sibi ipse ait: Hoc est illud punctum quod inter tot gentes ferro et igni diuiditur? [9] O quam ridiculi sunt mortalium termini!

[The mind] cannot despise colonnades and coffered ceilings gleaming with ivory, and manicured forests and rivers diverted into houses until it has toured the entire universe, and gazed down from on high at the tiny earth: covered by sea, for the most part, and even when it does surface, basically it's uncultivated, either burnt or frozen. It says to itself: 'This is the famous dot that is divided up among so many nations by sword and fire! [9] How absurd are mortals' boundaries!

Seneca constructs for readers a sublime vision of a world in microcosm, a view whose referent is afforded only to those who follow a cosmic trajectory through the sky. Moreover, the passage's opening line, scoffing at artificial wildernesses created in private homes, is highly evocative of the design values we know to have dominated the

³⁹⁷ It also, more clearly than the line of Ovid it seems to gloss (already appropriated in *de Vita Beata: etiam si non tenuerit/ magnis tamen excidit ausis*, VB 20.5 = *Met.* 2.328), points toward the precipitous end of such lofty aspirations: rather than the euphemistic talk of the grandeur of goals "unreached" (*etiam si non tenuerit*) from the opening clause of Ovid's epitaph, we have in Seneca (via Vagellius) the stark inevitability of the fall (*si...cadendum est*).

³⁹⁸ See Hine (2006); Dahlmann (1977) details the history of cosmic sublimity as it applies particularly to Vagellius.

construction of the Golden House.³⁹⁹ The sense of vertical sublimity, the obsession 180
with light effects, the microcosmic world, and the solar stylings: all bring to mind
Nero's attempts after the Great Fire to figure himself as solar charioteer, perpetually at
the euphoric apex of his career, the whole world beneath his gaze and no end in sight.⁴⁰⁰
Seneca's work, however, points again and again to the inevitable fall of all things.

Elsewhere in the *Natural Questions*, Seneca offers multiple quotations featuring
the themes of Phaethon as well as of fiery destruction.⁴⁰¹ Through repeated adumbrations
of the Phaethon myth, Seneca thus creates a context for the inference that the vision he
offers us in the preface at *NQ* 1. 8-9 is through the eyes of a Phaethon. The myth of
Phaethon emphasizes the inherently precarious nature of extreme privilege, and
graphically illustrates the consequence of overweening ambition. Even if not originally
designed to target Nero, these ideas would easily have lent themselves to such readings
after the events of 64. One Senecan text, however, invites reading not just as an evocative
set of ideas well positioned to take on new resonance after the fire and Nero's demise, but
as a specific reaction to the Great Fire itself.

³⁹⁹ Uncertainties of dating prevent us from viewing Seneca's description of elaborate
wonderworks in private homes as a comment on the Golden House *per se*. At the very least,
though, it provides a startling preview of the vision the house seems to have presented, complete
with artificial forests, elaborately paneled ceilings, and elaborate water features intended to evoke
the vision of a world in miniature. Nero's predilection for iconoclasm might even take such an
argument as an implicit challenge, to create in exactly the medium Seneca dismisses, the superior
(but supposedly unattainable), vision laid out in the *NQ*.

⁴⁰⁰ See also Seneca's Letter 115: Seneca objects when gods are, like humans, given to excessive
luxury in their surroundings: *Accedunt deinde carmina poetarum, quae adfectibus nostris facem
subdant, quibus divitiae velut unicum vitae decus ornamentumque laudantur...* "regia Solis erat
sublimibus alta columnis/ clara micante auro," (Sen. *Ep.* 115.12-13).

⁴⁰¹ The *Natural Questions* extensively discuss fire, describing it at one point as the dominant force
of the cosmos: *dicimus enim ignem esse qui occupet mundum et in se cuncta conuertat*, "it seizes
control of the world and turns everything into itself" (*NQ* 3.13.1), a description that seems
suggestively similar to the charges leveled against Nero and his Golden House in the wake of 64.

Seneca, in *Epistulae Morales* 91, takes as his starting point the news of a fire which has just destroyed the provincial capital of Lugdunum (modern Lyon), an event which most scholars agree occurred only a few months after the Great Fire of Rome.⁴⁰² A profusion of literary references and allusions to Augustus, Nero's predecessor and major model in statesmanship and city-building, provides us with even stronger and more specific cues to read Letter 91 as a veiled comment on the destruction of Nero's capital.⁴⁰³ Seneca intertwines the already-classic status of the Augustan cultural legacy with reflections on the fall of other great cities to suggest the inevitable doom of Neronian Rome.

Previous scholarship has already suggested that Letter 91 exaggerates the impact of the Lugdunum fire to a scale that more accurately describes Rome's. Gareth Williams even notes that modern archaeological efforts have yet to uncover a trace of any destruction at Lyon datable to this period.⁴⁰⁴ In Letter 91, Lugdunum, and by association Rome, are only pinpoints on a giant continuum of societies tipped into chaos by their own success. Seneca begins by creating a suggestive slippage in terminology referring to Lugdunum as a *colonia*, and comparable cities as *civitates*, and *oppida*, in turn. Thereafter, Seneca largely abandons specific connections to Lugdunum, instead meditating on the public disaster of an unnamed *urbs*:

⁴⁰² Suetonius tells us this fire occurred a scant month after the traditional date of Rome's own 64 conflagration, though the date is somewhat contested. The issues surrounding the date have most recently and thoroughly been discussed by Griffin (2012) 95-7.

⁴⁰³ Seneca's letters are notable in their avoidance of current events or specific ties to Rome which might help us situate them more firmly in a dating framework: in the repressive atmosphere of Neronian literature, this obscurity was probably both deliberate and necessary.

⁴⁰⁴ This does not mean that none will be found, but suggests that Seneca may have been reaching for the cosmic significance he ascribes to the event.

Ep. 91. 1-2: *Liberalis noster nunc tristis est nuntiato incendio quo Lugdunensis colonia exusta est; movere hic casus quemlibet posset, nedum hominem patriae suae amantissimum. Quae res effecit ut firmitatem animi sui quaerat, quam videlicet ad ea quae timeri posse putabat exercuit. Hoc vero tam inopinatum malum et paene inauditum non miror si sine metu fuit, cum esset sine exemplo; multas enim civitates incendium vexavit, nullam abstulit. Nam etiam ubi hostili manu in tecta ignis inmissus est, multis locis deficit, et quamvis subinde excitetur, raro tamen sic cuncta depascitur ut nihil ferro relinquat. Terrarum quoque vix umquam tam gravis et perniciosus fuit motus ut tota oppida everteret. Numquam denique tam infestum ulli exarsit incendium ut nihil alteri superesset incendio. [2] Tot pulcherrima opera, quae singula inlustrare urbes singulas possent, una nox stravit, et in tanta pace quantum ne bello quidem timeri potest accidit. Quis hoc credat? ubique armis quiescentibus, cum toto orbe terrarum diffusa securitas sit, Lugudunum, quod ostendebatur in Gallia, quaeritur. Omnibus fortuna quos publice adflixit quod passuri erant timere permisit; nulla res magna non aliquod habuit ruinae suae spatium: in hac una nox interfuit inter urbem maximam et nullam. Denique diutius illam tibi perisse quam perit narro.*

Our friend Liberalis is depressed just now over news of the fire in which the colony of Lugdunum was burned to the ground. This calamity would upset anyone, let alone a man so much in love with his homeland. Such an incident has served to make him go in search of strength in his own character, which, clearly, he has trained for the situations that he thought might invite fear. In the case of this evil -- so unexpected - practically unheard of -- if it lacked prior alarm, I'm not surprised: it was without model. Fire, indeed, has harassed many societies, but none has it annihilated. For even when enemy hands hurl fire upon roofs, in many places it fails, and however much thereafter stirred up, it rarely eats up all, leaving nothing to the sword. An earthquake, too, has scarcely ever been so serious and damaging that it overthrew towns altogether. Never, to sum up, has there blazed a conflagration so aggressive (in any city) that nothing survived for the next. [2] So many buildings, most beautiful, any single one of which would bring fame to a single city: one night leveled them; and in such peaceful conditions, an event on a scale that can't even be feared in time of war. Who would believe it? Everywhere, weapons at rest; when peace prevails throughout the world, Lyon, given pride of position in Gaul, is missing! To all those whom Fortuna has assailed at large, she has at least permitted them to fear what they would undergo. No great state has had no measure at all of anticipation before its collapse; here, a solitary night stood between a city at its greatest, and a non-city. In short, it's taking me longer to tell you about the destruction than the destruction actually took.

The city at 91.2 is a megalopolis of fabulous proportions, its devastation rivaling that of Troy or Carthage: So many buildings, most beautiful, any single one of which would bring fame to a single city: one night leveled them. He continues, emphasizing the

peaceful conditions which seem to recall the *Pax Augusta* that Nero had hoped to 183
replicate: In time of such peace an event has taken place worse than men can possibly
fear even in time of war. “Who would believe it? When weapons are everywhere at rest
and when peace prevails throughout the world...”

Seneca continues to emphasize the massive civic magnitude of the event,
commenting that no “great state” (*res magna*) had ever before been denied some warning
period before its ruin, yet “this one night” had made the difference between *urbem*
maximam, “a city at its greatest/ the greatest city” and [*urbem*] *nullam*, “no city at all.”
Seneca’s rhetoric seems markedly more appropriate to the situation of Rome, which
surely had faced losses dwarfing those of Lugdunum. Seneca himself seems to
acknowledge as much at 91.10, conceding that although Lugdunum was rich and
exceptional, nevertheless it was “set upon a single hill, and not a very big one.” This
aside has little relevance other than its power to evoke Rome’s seven hills.

The far greater destruction recently visited upon Rome is thus subtly and
gradually brought into focus. The claim at 91.1 that the event at Lugdunum was *sine*
exemplo, without a model, is thus rendered not false, but ironic. Seneca continues at 91.6:
quidquid longa series multis laboribus, multa deum indulgentia struxit, id unus dies
spargit ac dissipat, “whatever a long sequence of years has built, with much struggle and
much divine bounty, a single day scatters and squanders.” The language is Vergilian in its
connotations of *labor*, while the repetition of *multa...multa* echoes the *Aeneid*’s iconic
poem. Along with the references to divine favor implicitly evoking the exceptionalist
rhetoric of Roman identity formation, this technique of citation moves the discussion still
closer to Rome.

gnomic, even sententious statement: *incrementa lente exeunt, festinatur in damnum*, an unmistakable echo of the oxymoron Augustus is alleged to have lived by: *speude bradeôs*, i.e. *festina...lente*.⁴⁰⁵ Here, however, Seneca implies that the gains accomplished by the *labores* of Aeneas and Augustus, his self-styled successor, are now rushing into a final, Trojan-esque ruin. Augustus' "slow hustle," a model for city-building as much as for stable government, is now inverted into a heedless race to destruction.

Seneca nods to earlier figurations of urban fire as analogues to civil war and foreign invasion, suggesting obliquely that the fire of 64 is a condemnation not so much of Nero's character, as of the nature of dynastic rule. At 91.5 he remarks: "absent an enemy, we suffer things such as enemies would inflict, and as for causes of disaster, if others fail, excessive Prosperity (*nimia...felicitas*) finds them for herself." Much as Lucan would do more famously in the opening lines of his poem on the Civil War, Seneca seems to call attention to the collapsing distinction between internal and external threats. In this context, Seneca's quotation of a noted dissident from the Augustan era becomes undeniably pointed at 91.13: *Timagenes, felicitati urbis inimicus, aiebat Romae sibi incendia ob hoc unum dolori esse, quod sciret meliora surrectura quam arsissent* (Timagenes, who had a grudge against Rome and her prosperity, used to say that the only reason he grieved when conflagrations occurred in Rome was his knowledge that better buildings would arise than those which had gone down in the flames). The reference to a Phoenix-like re-emergence can be productively compared to earlier representations of

⁴⁰⁵ *speude bradeôs*: Suet. *Aug.* 25; Augustus as Nero's model in Sen. *Clem.*: overview in Braund (2009) 61-64.

Rome, vis-à-vis Troy and the Gallic Sack, which can be traced back to the very earliest stages of Latin literature. 185

It is with a critical eye, however, that we should read the letter's one really good (i.e. dreadful) fire pun (*Ep.* 91.13.1):

Haec ergo atque eiusmodi solacia admoveo Liberali nostro incredibili quodam patriae suae amore flagranti, quae fortasse consumpta est ut in melius excitaretur.

So these thoughts, and similar consoling ideas are what I'm encouraging for Liberalis, aflame with what you might call an unbelievable love of his homeland, which as chance may have it has burned only so it might be spurred on to greater stature.

The disfavor with which Seneca's Timagenes views this rhetoric should give us pause: new structures will rise, Seneca seems implicitly to ask whether they should. The relative freedom with which the curmudgeonly Timagenes apparently aired his views also invites pointed comparison with the repression of Neronian Rome, of which Seneca barely dares whisper in his letters. Furthermore, Timagenes here presents an attractive analogue for Seneca's earlier characterization of Cremutius Cordus, whose bitter quip was also inspired by a post-conflagration reconstruction effort.

Coming on the heels of the Timagenes anecdote, it seems clear Seneca's remark at 91.10 that Lugdunum was magnificent "but then again, occupied only one hill, and not such a large one" (*civitas arsit opulenta ornamentumque provinciarum quibus et inserta erat et excepta, uni tamen inposita et huic non latissimo monti*) has little relevance other than to evoke Rome's famous seven hills. Likewise, the reference near the letter's end to the founding of Lugdunum as a Roman colony only a century earlier ostensibly returns us to our context of the provincial capital. Yet the emphasis on the century since Lugdunum was founded also perhaps calls to mind the rough century that had passed between the

collapse of the republic in the 40's BCE and the present day under Nero. As he tells 186 us at 91.14: "For it's only the hundredth year since this colony was founded, not even the outer limit of the human lifespan" (*nam huic coloniae ab origine sua centesimus annus est, aetas ne homini quidem extrema*). Finally, Seneca marvels at the dramatic shock of total destruction in a "single day" (*id unus dies*), further developing the theme of time's acceleration and collapse in times of crisis.

This motif of destruction wrought in a single day had of course been used from Greek tragedy onward to suggest the caprice of Fortune. In this context, however, it should evoke the conception of Stoic *ekpyrosis*, a notion central to the ideological and philosophical debates that played out at the end of the republic and birth of the principate.⁴⁰⁶ Seneca thus alludes to the destruction wrought by Ovid's Phaethon simultaneously with Lucretius' prediction of cosmic dissolution. Yet in contrast to the abstract and mythological registers of his models, Seneca is talking now about a day that is upon us; indeed, it has already happened. This recontextualizes more famous treatments of *ekpyrosis* back into a more firmly Stoic framework. Seneca is pulling the terms in which he has always referenced destruction out of mythic and cosmic realms, and asserting their relevance to the here and now.

So to sum up before moving on: as I have argued, in Seneca's Letter 91 a number of literary references and allusions to Augustus as Nero's model are embedded within

⁴⁰⁶ Specifically, Seneca here seems to create an allusion back to Lucretius who famously argues that the world will perish because it is mortal, and that this will happen in a single day. The reworking of the concept here draws a "triangular allusion" to another famous appropriation of this line in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Jupiter's decision to wipe out the world with flood rather than fire is based on the god's allusive "recollection" of the Lucretian prediction that a fiery conflagration would come at a later stage: namely, Phaethon's destructive tour through the cosmos in *Met.* 2. See Ch. 1, "Flood, Phoebus and Phaethon: Après moi, l'incendie?" (87-99).

suggestive meditations on the limitations of human power, and in particular of human leaders. In Letter 91, Lugdunum, and by association Rome and other great cities, are only pinpoints on a giant continuum of societies tipped into chaos by their own success. The events of 64 may simply have made Nero into a magnet for Latin literature's considerable legacy of material linking incendiary events with political catastrophe. The Neronian destruction thus created a near-irresistible opportunity to fuse literary allusion and cultural memory, and this impulse is what we see in the work of Seneca examined here.

My reading of Letter 91 reveals how Seneca intertwines the already-classic status of the Augustan cultural legacy with reflections on the fall of other great cities. These references are admittedly somewhat oblique, but this is to be expected. The paranoid and repressive atmosphere of life at the capital created serious constraints on any direct comment on events at Rome. As I argue in the next chapter, in his famous account of the 64 fire Tacitus likewise mixes recognizable Vergilian reminiscences in with the memory of ancient monuments of Roman history, which are being obliterated, as it were, "before our very eyes." Before turning to the Tacitean treatment, however, let us consider the insights offered by a third and final Neronian source: Petronius, whose theatricality and allusivity likewise lend themselves to readings as a commentary on life and death in Nero's Rome, as well as an a variety of literary predecessors.

Playing with Fire: Petronius and Satirizing Disaster.

Petronius' two long-format poems from the *Satyricon* are both thought to suggest a comment on or reaction to Lucan's work. They are also suggestively inflammatory in content, as Eumolpus sings first of the destruction of Troy (*Sat.* 89), a performance

widely thought to mirror Nero's own as Rome burned,⁴⁰⁷ and then of the Civil War 188 (*Sat.* 119-24.1).⁴⁰⁸ While the former has been noted for its possible relationship to Nero's *Troica* and Seneca's Trojan-themed tragedies, the latter poem appears to be a lampoon of the criticisms that may have been leveled at Lucan's style and the *Bellum Civile's* radical departure from the epic tradition.

Both poems are key thresholds negotiating different styles of representation in the work.⁴⁰⁹ The first poem, on the fall of Troy, is particularly notable for Eumolpus' fixation with constructing close equivalencies between the metaphorical and the real, which "display a fascination with reiteration and likeness in retelling the story of the fall of Troy."⁴¹⁰ Nero also confronted the literary past when he composed on the theme of Troy, and as Tacitus tells us, a major feature of his rumored song as he watched the Great Fire was his likening of ancient disaster to the current one. Parallels also appear available between Nero and Eumolpus: both could be characterized as walking compendiums of misapprehended myth and enthusiastic performers of extemporaneous verse.⁴¹¹ These parallels become even more apparent in Eumolpus' next grand poetic venture, which seems to pit Eumolpus' "Nero-esque" style against Lucan's recent epic innovations.

The taste for traditional epic, *per ambages deorumque ministeria et fabulosum sententiarum tormentum* ("riddled with mystery, divine agency, and myth"), is

⁴⁰⁷ See Connors (1998) 84-100, esp. 85-92.

⁴⁰⁸ Most definitively argued by Connors (1998) 100-102, where the large bibliography on the issue is ably brought into focus. The relationship between Lucan, Petronius, and the omnipresent place of civil war in the Roman psyche is well treated by Rimell (2009).

⁴⁰⁹ Most clearly articulated by Connors (1998) As Connors (1998: 84) argues, Petronius establishes the faulty perceptions of Eumolpus before the poem begins, as Eumolpus and Encolpius' misinterpretations of traditional myths represented in the picture gallery (83.4-5) "reveal their preoccupations and concerns when they put art into words."

⁴¹⁰ Connors (1998) 91-93.

⁴¹¹ Smith in Paschalis et. al. (eds.) (2009), 192-93. In my opinion it is better see Eumolpus, as well as Trimalchio, as parodies of Nero-imitators rather than as direct satires of Nero himself.

ventriloquized through the persona of Eumolpus, an inveterate hack who first holds 189
forth at length about the proper composition of a civil war epic, then treats his
companions to a 294-line sample of his own handling of the subject. As Matthew Leigh
comments, its execution is “determinedly, indeed fatally, conventional.”⁴¹² Schmeling
further elaborates the point, arguing that Eumolpus’ epic is not a parody of Lucan, but a
mockery of the popular taste for divine machinery in epic.⁴¹³ Yet within Eumolpus’
supposedly absurd attempt at epic, we may also see here an elaboration of one of Seneca
and Lucan’s most salient points concerning the cause of Rome’s latest set of catastrophes.

The figure who initiates Rome’s sequence of civil destruction is not the expected
Fury-type, like, Tisiphone or Discordia, or even an Olympian with a grudge, like Juno.
Instead, Fortuna herself, the source of Rome’s excessive prosperity, has come to regret
her gifts. When her father Pluto requests her assistance in destroying Rome, she replies:

*O genitor, cui Cocyti penetralia parent,
si modo vera mihi fas est impune profari,
vota tibi cedent; nec enim minor ira rebellat
pectore in hoc leviorque exurit flamma medullas.
Omnia, quae tribui Romanis arcibus, odi
muneribusque meis irascor. Destruet istas
idem, qui posuit, moles deus. Et mihi cordi
quippe cremare viros et sanguine pascere luxum.
Cerno equidem gemina iam stratos morte Philippos
Thessaliaeque rogos et funera gentis Hiberæ.*

O Father, whom Hell’s inmost depths obey, if I may safely speak out the truth,
your wishes will be granted. For wrath rises up in my heart no less, no lighter is
the flame searing my marrows. Everything I have granted to Rome’s citadels, I
have come to hate; I am furious over the favors I have done them. But the same

⁴¹² To quote Leigh in full: “Eumolpus covers approximately the same body of material as the first book of the *Pharsalia*, but in such a manner as to erase all that is most heretical about Lucan. Gods, in particular, abound, and there are speeches from Dis, Fortune, and Discordia; the mode is Vergilian, if not Ennian, and its execution determinedly, indeed fatally, conventional.” Leigh in Marincola (ed.), (2007) 489.

⁴¹³ Schmeling in Damon et al. (eds.) (2002) 159.

god who built that cursed power will bring it down. It will be my heart's 190
delight to cremate men and to feast lavishly on blood. I even see Philippi
already strewn with double death, Thessalian pyres blazing, and funerals for the
Iberian people.

The speech, shot through with incendiary language (*exurit, flamma, cremare, rogos*) seems to figure Fortuna as a wronged Dido-figure, aflame with rage over the misuse of gifts too readily bestowed upon Rome and its leaders. The result, Fortuna promises, will be fire and destruction, played out (as in Dido's "revenge" during the Punic Wars) across the map and against an entire empire. Moreover, it seems to echo Lucan's famous comments on Rome's excessive good fortune leading to its failure at *BC* 1.72-74 and 1.82-84,⁴¹⁴ as well as Seneca's comment in at *Ep.* 91.5: "absent an enemy, we suffer things such as enemies would inflict, and as for causes of disaster, if others fail, excessive Prosperity (*nimia felicitas*) finds them for herself."⁴¹⁵ Overall, Petronius' lengthy mock-epic poems introduce themes of societal discord and urban conflagration into the *Satyricon's* largely lighthearted, episodic prose narrative, revealing Petronius' interest in satirizing the Neronian period's popular obsession with the interplay between literary destructions and Roman history. This gesture takes on potentially serious implications later in the highly theatrical *Cena Trimalchionis*.

Trimalchio, the wealthy freedman who is hosting a Nero-esque dining extravaganza attended by the narrator, has been showing off to his guests the costly shroud, perfumes, etc., assembled for his own planned funeral, and expounds at length on his elaborate plans for cremation. This fire-infused fantasy becomes the impetus for a

⁴¹⁴ *BC* 1.70-72 *invida fatorum series summisque negatum/ stare diu nimioque graves sub pondere lapsus/ nec se Roma ferens...*; *BC* 1.82-84: *nec gentibus ullis/commodat in populum terrae pelagique potentem/ invidiam Fortuna suam*.

⁴¹⁵ See above, 184-5.

thorough blurring of the lines dividing illusion from reality, as “real” *vigiles* burst in 191 on the party to extinguish the imaginary fire.

Ibat res ad summam nauseam, cum Trimalchio ebrietate turpissima gravis novum acroama, cornicines, in triclinium iussit adduci, fultusque cervicalibus multis extendit se super torum extremum et: “Fingite me, inquit, mortuum esse. Dicite aliquid belli.” Consonuere cornicines funebri strepitu. Unus praecipue servus libitinarii illius, qui inter hos honestissimus erat, tam valde intonuit, ut totam concitaret viciniam. Itaque vigiles, qui custodiebant vicinam regionem, rati ardere Trimalchionis domum, effregerunt ianuam subito et cum aqua securibusque tumultuari suo iure coeperunt. Nos occasionem opportunissimam nacti Agamemnoni verba dedimus, raptimque tam plane quam ex incendio fugimus.

Things were really reaching a peak of disgust, when Trimalchio, who, by the way, was oppressed with a most filthy drunkenness, ordered in the cornet players for our further jollity and supported by numerous cushions, he stretched himself out at full length on the couch. “Imagine,” he says, “that I’m dead. Play something pretty!” The cornet players obliged with a funereal commotion, and one of them especially, a slave of that undertaker fellow, the worthiest of the lot, played so mightily that he roused the whole neighborhood. So the watchmen, who had charge of the district, thinking Trimalchio’s house was on fire, burst in the door, and surged in, like they do, with axes and water ready. Taking advantage of such an opportune moment we gave the word to Agamemnon and we bolted flat-out, quite as if there had been a real fire to run from.

The *vigiles*’ interruption creates a comic end to Trimalchio’s funeral rehearsal and allows some of his guests to escape the tedious event. Trimalchio’s “rescue” by the fire brigade also simulates his own “resurrection,” as Erasmo notes.⁴¹⁶ Niall Slater reads the episode, “his imagined creation brings out the fire brigade.”⁴¹⁷ The whole episode is highly reminiscent of a moment Suetonius records: during one of Nero’s performances, when he appeared in costume, bound in chains as the title character in *Hercules Furens*, a newly recruited soldier gauchely rushed to his aid.⁴¹⁸ All in all, in this episode, grandiose

⁴¹⁶ Erasmo (2008) 22.

⁴¹⁷ Slater (1990) 86, cf. Bartsch (1994) 198.

⁴¹⁸ Suet. *Ner.* 21.3; discussed in Bartsch (1994) 47-49. It also seems to echo the scene’s extended conflation of myth and reality, recalling the moment when Trimalchio’s garbled version of the

Trimalchio's own vision turns on him when his audience cannot tell fiction from reality; his performance slowly becomes real to the degree that it could trap its guests when they try to escape his "fatal charade."⁴¹⁹ As Shadi Bartsch concludes, "what do we have here but a Trimalchio/Nero, blender of the real and the theatrical in an alembic of violence?"⁴²⁰ Given the uncertainties of assigning secure dates to this text, it is impossible to insist that Petronius' work was written entirely or even partly after the fire of 64. Yet the evident awareness of cultural hostility towards the work of Lucan, who was charged with treason and put to death in 65, as well as the suggestive performance of a song on Troy's destruction do point towards a post-64 composition. At this point, these themes, as well as the paranoia of the *vigiles* who burst in on the party, would have become prominent in popular culture and thus tempting targets for satire.

These readings of Petronius serve to confirm, much as Manilius did for the Augustan authors, the prevalence and power of the images exploited by Seneca and Lucan. It would be too naïve, given Petronius' sophistication as a stylist and satirist, to insist that these texts are meant to convey a direct critique of Nero's politics or of his poetics.⁴²¹ Rather, they show the ubiquity of certain modes of thought and expression in

Trojan Horse story (Sat. 52.2: in Trimalchio's version, Daedalus is the mastermind) is doubled when Daedalus, Trimalchio's clever chef, brings out his sausage-stuffed *porcus Troianus* (Sat. 49.9-10); on myth in this episode see Schmeling (2002) 162.

⁴¹⁹ Bartsch (1994) 199.

⁴²⁰ Bartsch (1994) 199. Nero's other theatrically inspired antics included staging a *scaena* to frame a messenger from Agrippina for a plot against the *princeps* (Tac. *Ann.* 14.7.6; Galtier 2011, 644–645), and of course, the booby-trapped boat he devised for his first attempt to kill Agrippina, which used a collapsing boat mechanism he had seen at a spectacle. A related impulse is evident in the apparently Neronian innovation of re-staging of Afranius' *Incendium* with sets actually aflame: see above, 143-5.

⁴²¹ As Schmeling (2011: *ad loc*) dryly remarks, open mockery of the *princeps* would not have been very good for the author's health.

this period, and both the desperate energy and the unfeigned enthusiasm with which 193 Nero's public reached out for attitudes and figurations they saw as reflective of their leader's tastes and proclivities. In Petronius, these attitudes and gestures are warped through the lens of the fantastical world his characters construct and inhabit: indeed, this may be the text's most telling comment on Neronian culture. Nonetheless Petronius provides strong indirect evidence of an obsession with destruction narratives and funeral pageantry, as well as the taste for twisted adaptations of Augustan epic poetry in an ideologically volatile climate (and the inevitable backlash to such innovations). Finally, the interruption of the *vigiles* functions on several levels: all at once, it seems to mock the period's pervasive atmosphere of paranoia, to provide a striking iterations of the way in which perception "becomes" reality, and to remind us of the very real terror of fire that haunted the days and nights of ancient urbanites. Thus the *Satyricon* confirms and strengthens the impressions gathered from this chapter's readings of Nero's biography, Lucan's poetry, and Seneca's prose.

Conclusion:

Whether or not Nero planned the Great Fire, in its aftermath he may well have realized at least some of the singular role he would come to play in Rome's tradition of literary conflagration. Yet he could not have anticipated the developments this pattern would take after he met the end, fittingly, to which he had consigned so many of his contemporaries. Forced into suicide, Nero's famously cryptic last words, *qualis artifex pereo*, "what an artist I am in my death" (Suet. *Ner.* 49.1), reflect his commitment even at the end to linking the real and the fantastic. Likewise, the Great Fire and Nero's death definitively

altered the majestic, forward-looking narrative of Rome's rise from Troy's ashes that 194 Augustan poets had endeavored to construct.⁴²²

As the last of the Julio-Claudian emperors, Nero represented the end of a lineage of leaders at Rome who traced their ancestry back to Trojan Aeneas, survivor of his city's fiery demise. We need not see specific references to the Neronian conflagration in Lucan's surviving work, or in Senecan texts apart from Letter 91, nor date them to after the 64 fire to see that intimations of destruction were imminent perhaps even from the beginning of Nero's reign. In fact, assigning a pre-64 date to this material only strengthens the case that Roman authors were in some sense programmed to see the fire as confirmation of, and further provocation to, such readings.

By contrast, the cues in Seneca's Letter 91 strongly invite interpretation as a veiled comment on Rome's Great Fire. Seneca's use of the already-classic status of the Augustan cultural legacy, as well as meditations on the fall of other great cities, together suggest the inevitable doom of Neronian Rome. Letter 91 thus elaborates a complex relationship between the past and the present, in which antiquity serves as an index not of permanent legacy, but of the ephemerality of human power. Whether or not Nero really sang of Troy while Rome burned, the authors around him certainly used a rich literary heritage to mythologize the self-destruction of Nero and his city.

Finally, this chapter cannot end without acknowledging the loss of Lucan's *de Incendio Urbis*, a work easily imagined as the ultimate literary expression of the fraught relationship between leaders and fires at Rome. Lucan, thoroughly engaged with the poetics of violent disruption, possessed of a notably strong appetite for literary

⁴²² Libby (2011) 209.

destruction – “a taste for nothingness,” to borrow Sklenár’s apt phrase – confronted 195 Rome’s most memorable catastrophe in the final year of his life. In Statius’ *Silvae* 2.7, written a generation later, the muse Calliope appears to Lucan at his birth. Cradling the infant, she catalogues the works that will win him acclaim before his untimely death on Nero’s orders. This list includes Lucan’s narrative of the fire (*Silvae* 2.7.60-61) *dices culminibus Remi vagantis / infandos domini nocentis ignes*, (“you will speak of the abominable flames ranging over Rome’s rooftops: her guilty master’s [doing]”). Either Lucan or Statius clearly thought of Nero as responsible for the conflagration, and as Ahl shows, it is actually quite likely that Statius is here echoing the content of the *de Incendio* itself.⁴²³

It is certainly tempting to speculate about what he would have done with inspiration as powerful as a catastrophe of truly legendary proportions and a disenchantment with Nero strong enough to propel him into a conspiracy to assassinate the emperor in 65. Lucan’s lost composition on the Fire of 64, a work may well have combined Rome’s rich heritage of literary destruction with the trauma of its recent collective experience in a particularly volatile fashion. In light of scanty evidence, however, we can only despair.⁴²⁴ Both Tacitus and Suetonius tend to regard the conflict between Lucan and Nero as a literary feud. Statius’ poem shows, however, that in retrospect Lucan’s opposition to Nero had great ideological power, and that Lucan’s

⁴²³ Ahl (1971).

⁴²⁴ The work is often argued to have been so open in its criticism of Nero’s role in the events of 64 CE as to have contributed to the poet’s fall from favor and death by decree in the following year, but it is hard to push the argument too far: surely the conspiracy alone would have been sufficient provocation? On *De Incendio Urbis* generally: Ahl (1971) and (1976) 333-353; on the debated nature of work, see van Dam (1984) 480-481. See also Champlin (2003) 319-320 n. 396.

poetry was easily read after his death as a reflection of the anti-Neronian sentiments 196 that had ultimately cost him his life.

The range of surviving texts under examination in this chapter suggest the depth of Rome's anxiety about its eventual downfall, and the intensity with which it remembered prior destructions of cultural significance. Thus, Neronian literature yielded a definitive turning point in the discourse of leaders and fires at Rome. Before 64, plentiful evidence suggests that leaders and conflagrations existed in innate tension and affinity with each other, effectively "framing" Nero for the crime of 64 regardless of the facts. After 64, however, to talk about fire *was* to talk about Nero, and *vice versa*. Certain suggestive images and narratives laid out by Neronian authors invite particularly compelling re-readings and ideological implications when considered in hindsight after the actual conflagration of 64. In the next chapter, a range of works from different periods and genres will present a showcase of outcomes from the collision between the long pedigree of pre-Neronian literary conflagrations, and the newly minted historical narratives from Nero's incendiary reign.

CHAPTER THREE. From the Ashes: Post-Neronian Rome and Literary Memory.

Introduction:

Chapter 1 examined the ways in which fires, already highly politicized in the late republic, possessed demonstrable ideological value in the rhetoric and literature of the Augustan period. Chapter 2 extended these findings into the later Julio-Claudian era, showing how the Fire of 64 and Nero's response to it represented predictable outcomes of the ideological and literary climate in which they occurred. This chapter widens its scope to show a range of different formats and perspectives in which the 64 fire worked its way into the linked ideological, aesthetic, and commemorative cultures of Rome in the two dynastic periods following the collapse of the Julio-Claudians.

Nero and the 64 fire were inheritors to a discourse on fire and leadership that provided the authors commemorating Nero and his reign with a flexible set of conceptual and allusive materials for representing a major fire as the ultimate failure in leadership, and *vice versa*. Nero's rumored responsibility for the fire seems to have generated a field of contested aetiologies: some of these specifically link Nero to the 64 catastrophe, while others associate him with conflagration on a broader level. The texts examined in this chapter present Nero and the Great Fire in retrospect: in different ways, each appears to forge connections between Nero, the events of 64, and fire in general, creating a set of variable links and causalities between these elements. The Domitianic altars known as the *Arae Incendii Neroniani* present an often-overlooked example of the ways in which the memory of 64 remained a potent tool for shaping public opinion some twenty years after the fact. Likewise, the fire is revisited in the historical drama the *Octavia* as well as in

Tacitus' historical account of the Neronian era, the *Annals*. The Nero known to us 198 from scandalous report is a semi-mythic figure, notorious for his alleged arson of the city, as well as his rumored performance of a *Troica* as he watched Rome burn. These features of Nero's legend are evoked indirectly in the *Octavia*, while in Tacitus' account directly addresses the rumors, embedding them within a larger program of condemnation of Nero and his reign.

Physically and politically, post-Neronian Rome was a city of ruins, remainders, and survivors. The Augustan rhetoric of *Roma aeterna*, hinging on notions of destruction and rebirth, underwent its own metamorphosis when Nero's suicide ended the dynasty Augustus has established. Scattered citywide, the physical reminders of Nero, his fire, and his fall gave potency to this shift.⁴²⁵ The text of Martial's *Epigram 5.7* presents Rome as a phoenix rising from the ashes:

*Qualiter Assyrios renouant incendia nidos,
una decem quotiens saecula vixit avis,
taliter exuta est veterem nova Roma senectam
et sumpsit voltus praesidis ipsa sui.
Iam, precor, oblitus notae, Vulcane, querelae, 5
parce: sumus Martis turba, sed et Veneris;
parce, pater: sic Lemniacis lasciva catenis
ignoscat coniunx et patienter amet.*

Just as fires renew Assyrian nests, every time one bird has lived ten ages, so the new Rome has shed her previous agedness, and she has taken on the face of her new ruler. Now, I pray, Vulcan, forget your familiar grievances, and spare us: we are the throng of Mars, but also of Venus. Spare us, Father: thus may your lustful spouse forgive your Lemnian shackles, and enduringly love you.

The epigram begins with the image of Rome as a phoenix, rising from the ashes of its former self. The poem has long been identified as a reference to the city's restoration

⁴²⁵ On the many monuments dedicated by or to Nero that continued to stand with his name intact or conspicuously removed, see Flower (2006: Chapter 8); on his posthumous popularity, see Champlin (2003: Chapter 1).

after the fire of 80.⁴²⁶ Yet in a broader sense, it can be read as a reflection of Rome's 199 post-Neronian transformation, in which Julio-Claudian notions of identity, eternity and the leader's privileged relationship with the gods are all acknowledged and adjusted. The Julian emphasis on the ruling family's descent from Mars and Venus is hinted at, but Martial proposes this heritage as the entire city's, and furthermore hints that the punishments Vulcan had leveled on the city in the past must now be forgiven. The poem's broader themes of renewed accord between the gods and Rome, intimately connected with the physical rebuilding of the cityscape, were pervasive features of the Flavian agenda.

At the same time, authors of the period were intent on building into their new literary efforts a pervasive set of images and narratives designed to recollect Nero. Martial's contemporary, the poet Statius commemorates his persecution of his political opponents, his suppression of literary rivals, and his alleged responsibility for the fire, all in the context of a poem praising Lucan, Nero's onetime admirer turned bitter opponent. Altogether, in the late first and early second centuries CE, literary authors continued to develop the traditions linking leaders and fiery destruction. While previously these tropes largely had evoked the memory of the civil wars of the first century BCE, in this period they were newly charged with the power to evoke Nero, 64, and the collapse of the Julio-Claudian dynasty. The texts examined in this chapter vary widely in genre, state of evidence, and date.⁴²⁷ In lieu of the extended historical overviews that prefaced the last

⁴²⁶ For further elaboration on the themes of restoration and renewals, see especially Evans (2003a and b). See Evans (2008: 12) and Manorlaki (2012: 203-5) on the Phoenix. For the place of this theme in late 1st century thought and writing, see Tanner (1991: esp. 2697 n. 48).

⁴²⁷ The anti-Neronian drama *Octavia*, our lone surviving example of historical drama, is of vigorously contested date and unknown authorship, is thought by many scholars have been

two chapters, the half-century span of this material, encompassing multiple coups and 200 two major dynastic lines, will be discussed only briefly in this section's preface. Specific historical factors relevant to each of the texts examined are detailed in their respective sections.

While the fire of 64 seems to have occupied a dominant position in the Rome's lineage of memorable catastrophes, the damage wrought by the competing armies of Galba, Otho, Vitellius and Vespasian in 68-69 was also considerable. Visual cues throughout Flavian Rome reinforced the impact of this destruction: deliberately orchestrated reminders of Nero's reign stood in pointed contrast to new monuments celebrating Flavian renewal, while plots of land destroyed in 64 apparently continued to lie in wasted states until well into Vespasian's reign.⁴²⁸ Vespasian and his successors claimed to offer redemption from the damage of 64-69 CE and protection from future threats: not just "Nero's" fire, but the entire sequence of collapse, civil conflict and successive coups which had followed it.

Flavian efforts to assassinate Nero's character have long taken pride of place in our understanding of Nero and his legacy. In some sense all of Flavian Rome was a monument to the fire, and to the associated damage that (as hostile post-Neronian rhetoric would have it) Nero's depravity had wrought upon Rome. The Flavians sought not just to remind the public of the disaster Rome had suffered under Nero's auspices, but to divert public attention from the destruction that had followed Nero's death, in which Vespasian,

composed as early as the brief reign of Galba, thus pre-dating the Flavian propaganda efforts. The inscriptions associated with the little-studied monuments known as the *Arae Incendii Neroniani* can be dated broadly within the latter half of Domitian's reign, but a number of questions remain open about their text, as well as about their intended function and distribution around the city.

⁴²⁸ Suet. *Vesp.* 8.5.1.

his sons, and their supporters were deeply implicated. Then too, Rome was not 201
entirely able to leave its vision of apocalyptic collapse in the Neronian past. Catastrophic
incidents including the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 CE and a fire at Rome in 80 nearly as
damaging as the 64 conflagration, continued remind the population of its vulnerability to
disaster.

The fire of 80, which destroyed an extensive swathe of the city, was followed
closely by a devastating plague in the city. Moreover, the glorious Flavian restoration of
the Capitol after the depredations of 69 had now been completely obliterated, reversing
the message of progress and recovery that Flavian leadership had no doubt hoped to
project.⁴²⁹ The emperor Titus, upon hearing the news of the fire ravaging the city, is said
to have announced “I am ruined.”⁴³⁰ This statement might be only an eloquently succinct
personalization of the disaster, meant to stand in pointed contrast to Nero’s rumored
poetic outpouring during the height of the 64 destruction. Then again, it may perhaps
suggest a recognition that the aggressive campaign of post-Neronian propaganda
asserting Nero’s culpability for the fire of 64 could easily circle around now and attach to
him. Titus indeed died shortly thereafter in September of 81, leaving Domitian the
unenviable task of again restoring Rome and reassuring the people of his dynasty’s
stability.⁴³¹ That his reign lasted sixteen years marked largely by growth and prosperity is
a tribute to the often-maligned emperor’s administrative competence and vision as an
urban planner. Yet finally, Domitian too succumbed to the plotting of disaffected

⁴²⁹ Mattingly (1930: xlix) comments, e.g., that the coinage of 71 CE represents “the considered
commentary of the new government on the troubled chapter of history that had just closed.”

⁴³⁰ *I am ruined*: Suet. *Tit.*3.4.

⁴³¹ Suet. *Tit.*11.1.; Dio 66.19.

members of his own inner circle, leaving a highly monumentalized city and a 202
complex urban bureaucracy in place to support his successors.

As a necessary component of their own survival, Nerva, Trajan, and Hadrian prioritized the city's security as a way of connecting with a population over whom they had little prior claim. As Penelope Davies has pointed out, the symbolism of the phoenix may have become especially prominent in the adoptive emperors' iconography because the myth suggests the way in which emperors who did not claim genetic paternity of an heir was nevertheless eternally regenerated in his successors, just as the phoenix was reborn out of its predecessor's ashes, a king of birds, sacred to the sun, and a symbol of resurrection.⁴³² Significantly, evidence suggests that under these emperors too, Rome suffered large-scale fires, and that the measures laid out by Nero (later reiterated under Domitian) seem to have formed the template for much of the rebuilding they did.

So, as with Nero post-64, Vespasian post-68/69, and Domitian post-80/81, the imprint Trajan and Hadrian left on the city seems to have been predicated on the sudden availability of land following fires or other upheavals. Thus, the Rome that was taking shape before the eyes of Tacitus and Suetonius, the writers most influential in constructing our vision of Nero, was in many ways a realization of Nero's own vision of the city. Tacitus, whose work will occupy the bulk of this chapter, shows the full impact of this textual and cultural history, constructing proleptic and metonymic relationships

⁴³² Davies (2004:95-97) offers, e.g. coins such as the Hadrianic "accession" coins of 117-8 CE (*RIC* 2 343 no. 27, pl. XII no. 220). On the Phoenix in imperial Rome generally, see Tac. *Ann.* 6.28; Sage suggests this passage may actually be designed to mock the Hadrianic promotion of this motif. See also Kantorowicz (1957). Van den Broek (1972) 233-303; Martin (1974) 23-6; Festugière (1941).

between Nero and the 64 destruction that extend far beyond his treatment of the fire 203
itself.⁴³³

The strength of the literary tradition linking failed rulers with urban conflagration, combined with the still-visible impact of the 64 destruction, made fire the obvious weapon of choice for any writer wishing to cast Nero and his reign in a negative light. Yet within this framework, authors working under different sets of cultural and generic pressures found varying ways to use this material to advance their own agendas. The inscriptions of the so-called *Arae Incendii Neroniani*, dedicated some twenty years after the fire, seem concerned with renewing the memory of Nero and the destruction of 64 as a foil for Domitian's own efforts as a city-builder, religious reformer, and restorer of order.

In the years between the demise of the republic and the death of Nero, power and public attention had shifted from an array of competing leaders and prominent families onto the more tightly focused, and eminently dramatic, ensemble of the emperor and his attendant figures.⁴³⁴ The *Octavia*, a dramatic reworking of recent imperial history as revenge tragedy, uniquely and inventively recasts the fire as Nero's revenge upon the population of Rome for their riotous resistance to his repudiation of his dynastic bride.⁴³⁵

The *Octavia* also echoes of the type of theatrical "image realization" around the threat of

⁴³³ We should keep in mind, however, the potential that this discourse in Tacitus possessed to comment on the Trajanic and Hadrianic Rome of Tacitus' intended audience.

⁴³⁴ As Boyle observes, the Julio-Claudian era transformed "the inherent performativity of Roman public life into the defining mode of the age." Boyle (2008) xxii. Then, too, as Griffith observes in his seminal article on the *Oresteia*, the genre of tragedy as conceived at Athens is overwhelmingly focused on the concerns of ruling families: "brilliant elite adventures, dynastic plotting, and divinely assisted catastrophes and rescues" (Griffith 1995 [=2011], 180). It is perhaps unsurprising, therefore that they also seem to form the fabric of imperial self-fashioning.

⁴³⁵ As Boyle observes, at one level "*Octavia* is a political reading of Senecan tragedy," in which political themes apparent in Seneca only at the subtexual level, are "unearthed and displayed." Boyle (2008), lxvii.

fire seen in Petronius' *Cena Trimalchionis*.⁴³⁶ The play's array of fire-related metaphors and images at first appears easy to ignore as jejune, clichéd, and largely sub-Vergilian (by way of Seneca). At the play's climax, however, these images dovetail spectacularly into the torch-wielding confrontation between leader and people. This dramatic scene, in turn, becomes the provocation which leads the *Octavia's* Nero to plan his city's incendiary destruction: Nero, as unable to control then Roman populace as he is to master his own passions, plans to "lay siege" to his own city in revenge for the civil uprising they mount against him. Finally, Tacitus, in a strategy reminiscent of the patterns established in the epic poetry examined in chapters 1 and 2, as well as in the *Octavia*, figures various leadership personalities as metaphorically incendiary. The portrayal of the emperors as virtual besiegers of Rome throughout the *Annals* creates a powerful anticipatory device for the 64 fire. In Tacitus, however, the proleptic imagery of conflagration works to make a larger case against the Roman principate as an inherently pernicious and destructive entity.

***Octavia*: Dress Rehearsal for Destruction.**

This section explores the *Octavia's* capacity, unique in Rome's surviving literature, to dramatize Rome's recent past, and considers its possibly important role in shaping the reception of the fire of 64. The text of the *Octavia* is informed both by its complex literary pedigree and its audience's presumed awareness (or indeed, personal experience)

⁴³⁶ Generic boundaries should not preclude us from finding connections between texts. Behr (2007) makes similar use of tragic evidence in her study of Lucan, citing Setaioli (1985) and Dingel (1974) (on Seneca's tragedy as a negation of poetry's didactic power). Other observations about poetry and theater flagged by Behr and also relevant here are Rosenmeyer (1989) 39–43; Fantham (1982) 19–34; Russell (1974).

of Rome's conflagration and the chaos of 68-69.⁴³⁷ The play targets the disaster of 64 205 with particular energy, offering an aetiology for the fire presented nowhere else: in a play generally obsessed with revenge obtained, denied or rejected, the greatest vengeance is to be Nero's plan to destroy Rome in retribution for its short-lived popular resistance to his repudiation of Octavia, his stepsister and dynastic bride.

The text of the *Octavia* suggests how thoroughly conflated (or conflatable) Nero's entire reign was with the central event of the fire. Lucan's new, nihilistic poetics of leadership are in plentiful evidence: as in Lucan's epic, the *Octavia's* most compelling character is the bloodthirsty, amoral ruler, and the text's action serves as a dramatization of his reckless pursuit of his personal goals at the expense of those around him.⁴³⁸ The pointed reversals of Vergilian and Ovidian material likewise recall Lucan's ironic program of allusion to the Augustan literary legacy. Seneca, meanwhile, becomes a character trapped in self-quotation, as the *Octavia's* Seneca appeals to the audience's

⁴³⁷ In discussing this play's allusivity, my focus on Rome's history of civil conflict and urban disaster warrants primary attention to correspondences with non-dramatic texts. Following Harrison (2003) and Donovan (2011:9), I will not devote extensive discussion to the play's many Senecan intertexts, which constitute a number Harrison (2003:116) calls "too sizable to be accidental and too often remarked in scholarly literature to bear repeating here." Nevertheless, the *Octavia's* Seneca persistently echoes his historical counterpart at several points. I note some of these instance here, drawing on my discussion of Seneca from Chapter 2, because they have significant implications for the metaliterary and historical awareness of the *Octavia's* characters. On the *Octavia's* many Senecan citations, and on its relationship to Greek and Roman drama in general, see Ladek (1909); Runchina (1964); Bruckner (1976) 129, 132-3; Whitman (1978) *ad loc*; Calder (1983) 193-5; Tarrant (1985) 121; Williams (1994a) 191; Chaumartin (1999) 175; Stärk (2000) 230-1; Manuwald (2002 and 2003); Wilson (2003a); Ferri (2003) *ad loc*; Boyle (2008) *ad loc*.

⁴³⁸ In both Lucan's *Bellum Civile* and the *Octavia*, sympathetic characters are powerless to resist the forces bent on their destruction or are simply deluded about the risks of the world they inhabit. Additional evidence of a Senecan/Lucanesque sensibility is the play's apparent disregard for the divine mechanisms which affect traditional epic and tragedy: although the play's characters, notably Octavia, express a positive view of Claudius and his reign, the divinization Claudius appears to have failed: the late *princeps* instead is represented as occupying the underworld in a state of eternal conflict with his spouse and murderess, Agrippina.

memory of the historical Seneca's life and work. Similarly, the *Octavia's* pervasive 206 metaphorical use of fire imagery exploits its audience's presumed awareness of the catastrophic fire that would occur two years after the play's dramatic date. Thus, the play represents a newly charged response to the long literary tradition in epic and history linking leaders proleptically and metonymically with the destruction of their cities. Additionally, the work's generic categorization as a drama, whether or not it was ever performed, may have made it an especially potent vehicle for a Neronian narrative.

On the one hand, according to the internal and highly historical logic of this play, the events surrounding Nero's divorce of Octavia and his marriage to his pregnant mistress, Poppaea, create a new aetiology for the fire: Nero plans the fire as revenge against the people who show their loyalty to his murdered stepfather, the late emperor Claudius, when they protest his treatment of Octavia, Claudius' daughter. On the other, the *Octavia* offers an extended engagement with the images of inevitable cosmic dissolution and universal conflagration embraced by Seneca and Lucan, as well as with presentiments of inevitable dynastic failure evoked in the Phaethon narratives of Vergil, Ovid, and Manilius. The sense of dread expressed by the *Octavia's* characters onstage over their present situations is often mirrored and amplified by portents of disasters beyond the play's temporal scope.⁴³⁹ The 64 fire, as Harriet Flower points out, would have been a more obviously momentous period in which to present Nero as Rome's

⁴³⁹ The pervasive fears felt and projected by the *Octavia's* various characters have led Smith to label the play "a study in fear." Smith (2003) 417. In fact, each of the play's major characters serves in and of him/herself as a signifier of later catastrophe. Octavia is only the first to appear of a series of characters doomed to a ghastly end after the play's conclusion: then come Seneca, Poppaea, Nero himself, and (by implication) the populace of Rome, upon whom Nero vows incendiary retribution for their opposition to his repudiation of Octavia.

figurative attacker.⁴⁴⁰ Instead, however, it looms just outside the frame, perhaps all the more present for its absence. Set two years in advance of the fire, the final twist of Nero's planned destruction of the city is nevertheless the Octavia's *pièce de résistance*.

The play's status as a performance piece allows for a particularly evocative strategy of image elaboration, illustrating the power of incendiary metaphor in this context. In the action of the *Octavia*, a description or metaphor implanted in a character's speech at one point in the play can re-emerge as a "realized" action or event at a later point.⁴⁴¹ The power of this technique of "image realization" is heightened in historical drama: to the actualized images delivered within the internal structure of the play, we can add the audience's familiarity with the historical record of events destined to take place after the conclusion of the events dramatized on stage, as well as the likely representation (in staged performances) of sites, statues and other monuments familiar to their eyes.⁴⁴² In the case of the *Octavia*'s Neronian court, we can add to this context the still-fresh memory of Rome's recently "performed" past, a period within living memory for even the latest of the play's posited dates.⁴⁴³

⁴⁴⁰ Flower (2006) 206.

⁴⁴¹ Boyle remarks on the pronounced formal cyclicality of the play's images and motifs, which are also characteristic of Senecan drama: Boyle (2008) lx-lxi. Kragelund's fundamental study highlights the issue of the *Octavia*'s "prophetic" imagery, bringing the ideological aspect of this strategy to the forefront: Kragelund (1982). The strategy is, of course, not exclusive to the realm of drama: the last chapter explored the impact of Petronius' fictional narrative of Trimalchio's dinner, in which the host's performance of his own mock cremation spectacle bring in the fire brigade "for real." See Ch. 2, 185ff.

⁴⁴² I speak here in generalities which can be speculated to hold true for any of the lost historical dramas. These conventions would inform the way the *Octavia* was read, irrespective of whether or not it was actually staged. See particularly Smith (2003) on the *Octavia*'s frequent referencing of images, statuary and tombs at Rome. I would add to Smith's comments the possibility that a staged production would have found a way to incorporate scenery that recognizably re-created sites in Rome that had in fact been lost in the fire.

⁴⁴³ Even the latest of the plausible dates suggested for the play put it only perhaps twenty-five years away from Nero's demise, well within living memory for at least a segment of the

lone example of Roman historical drama, a performance tradition which generally worked to celebrate the accomplishments of distinguished leaders, into what genre can this hero-less work, with its damning portrayal of the last Julio-Claudian, properly be classified? Was it written under Galba?⁴⁴⁴ Vespasian?⁴⁴⁵ Domitian?⁴⁴⁶ Was it ever performed, and if so, publicly or privately? All these questions continue to provoke lively debate, but the more limited objective here is to consider the play's triangulation between the personal flaws of Nero, the range of incendiary metaphors it uses to illustrate his collapsing dynasty, and the emphatic foreshadowing of fire of 64.⁴⁴⁷

population. An efficient and balanced airing of the big questions is presented Boyle (2006) 221 ff.; see also Boyle (2008) xiii-xi; Goldberg (2003); Ferri (2003) 1-30; Wilson (2003a).

⁴⁴⁴ Galba's games are proposed by Kragelund; Wiseman (1998: 10-23) influentially presented an imaginative re-telling of the performance, and more recently (2008) again re-asserts a Galban date, further suggesting it was one of a "concert" of anti-Julio-Claudian performances, perhaps of dissident material suppressed under Nero. I consider the Galban date, complete with a stages performance, to be the most exciting of the options. This seems to be the time when Nero's vilification would have been most potent, and when the current leadership would have benefited the most from unleashing the torrent of anti-Neronian sentiment that had built up among Rome's literary elite. In any case, much of the text that can be read without recourse to its specific performance and/or publication context, and the play's exact date matters little for the overall framework of my analysis here.

⁴⁴⁵ Boyle (2008) lxvi; (2003) 48; Smith (2003) 427. Donovan (2011) seems to follow this line of argument, speculating that the play "may well be an early exemplar" of the Flavian literary tradition condemning Nero. Even were a Flavian date admitted for *Octavia* a number of qualifications must set the work well outside the mainstream. An early Flavian date would not drastically alter any of the conclusions made in this dissertation. The strong influence of Seneca and Lucan, however, as well as the apparently bleak outlook on the future, suggest a literary context and ideological stance somewhat at odds with the overall trajectory of Flavian literature. A date as late as the one proposed by Ferri (2003: 5-30) who argues for the influence of Statius, would make the author of the *Octavia* an extraordinary stylistic and ideological retronaut, but in the absence of further evidence I do not insist on any specific date for the play.

⁴⁴⁶ Ferri (2003) 5-30.

⁴⁴⁷ The inherent performativity of the *Octavia* informs every aspect of its construction, whether or not it was ever staged or intended to be, and I therefore will use the language of "staging," "voice," and "audience" in this discussion without necessarily subscribing to the arguments positing a specific staging of the play.

dynastic bride, laments the loss of her father Claudius and anticipates her own imminent destruction as Nero plots to divorce her and install Poppaea, pregnant with his potential heir, as Rome's empress. While Octavia's early speeches and dialogue focus on her own imminent doom, her language works to foreshadow specific moments to come in the drama, as other characters reiterate and elaborate upon the doomed empress' intimations of catastrophe. Eventually this cycle culminates in nearly-realized conflagration onstage, a signifier of an unrealized past in which Nero's excesses would have been curtailed before the catastrophic events of 64 and after.

The Blasted Universe and the Shattered Dynasty: *Ekpyrosis* in the *Octavia*.

Octavia's opening speech swiftly links the concepts of Nero, fire, and dynastic succession to intimations of large-scale disaster. Octavia, alone in her chamber, awaits the impending dawn. This situation echoes the opening soliloquies of several of Seneca's tragedies, but her elaboration on the point seems to evoke the pervasive solar imagery of Nero's reign.⁴⁴⁸ The young empress acknowledges that within a family as marked by violence as hers, "light is more hateful than darkness" (*lux est tenebris invisae magis*, 20), signaling right away that the normally positive associations of sun and dawn are inverted here: recalled by implication are Nero's apparent obsession with light effects and nocturnal living, of which the Golden House would become the fullest expression.⁴⁴⁹

⁴⁴⁸ We might also recall that Nero was supposedly born "just as the sun rose, so that he was touched by its rays almost before he could be laid upon the ground" (Suet. *Ner.* 6.1). On the ideological freight of Octavia's invocation of imperial virtues here, see Wilson (2003b).

⁴⁴⁹ *surgit Titan radiante comal mundoque diem reddit clarum* ("and the Sun/Titan with his radiate-crowned head returns bright day to the world, 2-4). Boyle (2008: 96) and Ferri (2003: *ad loc*) both comment here on the parallels with Senecan tragedies opening at dawn: Boyle further notes the parallels in Nero's coinage and statuary: "even her sun is an icon of Nero." Boyle

Octavia later violently rejects her nurse's suggestion that Nero might yet tire 210 of Poppaea and learn to love her in an *adynaton* with numerous poetic flourishes:

Lungentur ante saeva sideribus freta/ et ignis undae, Tartaro tristi polus...quam cum scelesti coniugis mente impia mens nostra (221-6): "Sooner will the raging sea be joined with the stars, and fire with water, heaven's vault with tearful Tartarus...than the unholy heart of a wicked spouse will [be joined] with mine..." Reversing the classic image of opposites conjoined by desire as in the union of Mars and Venus, this speech instead looks forward to the moment in which opposing forces will cause the universe to implode. The image also recalls the similar rejections found in Senecan tragedy but also hints at the intimations of the world's end as outlined in Seneca's natural philosophy and as presented in the proem of Lucan's epic.⁴⁵⁰

The passage is comparable in its unsettling vision of future "unity" to Lucan's comparison of Rome's descent into civil war (and thus, to one-man rule) to Stoic *ekpyrosis* at *BC* 1.73–80, which (as Sklenář puts it) "reversed the significance of *ekpyrosis*, transmuting it into a terrifying vision of the fire at the end of time (*suprema hora*)."⁴⁵¹ Lucan's language here, as we have seen, itself finds parallels in Seneca's Letter 91, a work in all likelihood written in the aftermath of the great fire of Rome and explicitly concerned with urban disaster and cosmic collapse. Octavia's *adynaton* thus reminds us of the literary fascination with *ekpyrosis* in the years leading up to the fire, perhaps self-consciously so: in his introductory speech, the play's Seneca quotes

(2008) *ad loc.* On the night/day reversals of Nero's reign, see e.g. Tac. *Ann.* 16.18 (of Petronius) "...illi dies per somnum, nox officiis et oblectamentis vitae transigebatur..." "his days he passed in sleep, his nights in the business and pleasures of life."

⁴⁵⁰ Seneca: e.g. *NQ* 3.29, *Marc.* 26.6-7, *Ben.* 6.22.1. Lucan: *BC* 1.72-80, as well e.g. 7.812-19 (Caesar as a "human *ekpyrosis*").

⁴⁵¹ Sklenář (2003) 6. See Ch. 2, 149ff.

“himself” (that is, the historical Seneca’s written work) in an Ovidian-inflected 211
soliloquy on the imminent doom he sees approaching, and Nero too borrows an image of
ekpyrosis, apparently from Lucan, in his exchange with Seneca.

Seneca’s soliloquy at the start of the play’s second act opens with a complaint that
he has been beguiled by Fortune (*Oct.* 377-80), a figure the historical Seneca frequently
counsels his readers to resist, into returning to the imperial court.⁴⁵² He ruefully
comments, in a passage that allusively suggests his character’s engagement with
Manilius’ astronomical work, that it used to delight him to look upon the sun, the greatest
of Nature’s creations (*Oct.* 385-90).⁴⁵³ By implication, we can understand that to Seneca,
as to Octavia, sunlight (and perhaps Nero’s solar imagery) now seems a threatening
force. Seneca further renews the apocalyptic rhetoric in terms reminiscent of Nigidius
Figulus’ Age of Apollo, invoking the notion of *ekpyrosis* and renewal as if to suggest the
clock has finally run out on Augustus’ *aureum saeculum*:⁴⁵⁴

*qui si senescit, tantus in caecum chaos
casurus iterum, tunc adest mundo dies
supremus ille, qui premat genus impium
caeli ruina, rursus ut stirpem novam
generet renascens melior, ut quondam tulit
iuvenis, tenente regna Saturno poli. (Oct. 391-6)*

If it [=the vault of heaven] is growing old, so much so that it verges again on
blind chaos, then that must mean the final day is here, a day which will
overwhelm an unholy race with a cosmic catastrophe, so that it [=the world] may
again, reborn and improved, create new stock, as it once did in its early days,
when Saturn held the dominion of the sky.⁴⁵⁵

⁴⁵² Ferri (2003) *ad loc.*; cf. Bruckner (1976) 33.

⁴⁵³ Allusions to Manilius: cf. *Oct.* 387-8, *solis et cursus sacros.../ mundique motus, sortis alternae vices*. See also Ferri *ad loc.*

⁴⁵⁴ On this point more generally, see Kragelund (2000) 503-4 and n. 59.

⁴⁵⁵ On the manuscript problems in this section, see Ferri *ad loc.* With Ferri, I accept *tunc* over *nunc* as the more likely correlative particle in the apodosis of a conditional sentence, but as my

Cosmology and *ekpyrosis* as presented by Manilius' prediction of a civic/cosmic catastrophe, Vergilian urban crisis, and Ovid's extended mythic cycle of disaster and recovery are all implicated in Seneca's opening speech. The reference to the collapse of the heavens (*caeli ruina*), as Ferri points out, echoes the *Aeneid*'s language at 1.129, where the phrase describes the storm about to overwhelm the Trojan fleet. This catastrophe, as we have seen, is likened in simile to an urban riot.⁴⁵⁶ Finally, the reference to the reign of Saturn (*Oct.* 396) introduces a lengthy passage on the degenerating ages of man (*Oct.* 397-434) heavily indebted Ovid's myth of ages (*Met.* 1. 89-150), an account that itself precedes and anticipates the catastrophic cycle of flood and fire (*Met.* 1.253-2.400). Seneca's speech seems also to recuperate the pre-Lucan conception of *ekpyrosis* as an opportunity for regrowth and renewal, suggesting at once the historical Seneca's commitment to Stoic doctrine, and the post-Neronian political renewal perhaps envisioned by the playwright.

Seneca's recap of *Metamorphoses* 1 also breaks off, significantly, at Nero's entrance (*Oct.* 435-6). Nero, then, is appointed by implication as the vehicle of the apocalyptic sequence with which Ovid's narrative continues. The ensuing exchange between Nero and Seneca puts Augustan models of statesmanship, as well as previous models of epic, into competition with each other. Specifically, they echo the four imperial virtues of Augustus (*Oct.* 440-4). In the debate that follows, Seneca's language recalls the

translation shows, this does not preclude reading a certain immediacy into the present tense of this condition.

⁴⁵⁶ On the storm/riot simile: see Ch. 1, 66ff. On *caeli ruina*: see Ferri (2003) *ad loc.* I would add the phrase seems to originate with the hypothetical *ekpyrosis* Lucretius envisions at the end of *DRN* 1, a passage which, like *Oct.* 391-6 also mentions "blind" chaos: [*ne*]... *omnis/ inter permixtas rerum caelique ruinas/ corpora solventes abeat per inane profundum,/ temporis ut puncto nihil extet reliquiarum/ desertum praeter spatium et primordia caeca.*

opening of Vergil's *Aeneid* (*Oct.* 479-51) and Nero's the first lines of Lucan's *Bellum Civile* (*Oct.* 518).⁴⁵⁷ In metapoetic terms, then, Seneca tries to offer model of recovery and stabilization after crisis, while Nero insistently focuses on the renewal of conflict.

Recalling the havoc of the triumviral period, Nero says "the world was blasted by the might of leaders," (*Oct.* 518: *concussus orbis viribus magnis ducum*), a clear echo of Lucan's opening lines of the *Bellum Civile* (*BC* 1.5: *certatum totis concussi viribus orbis*).⁴⁵⁸ This line's specific identification with Lucan is generally undisputed, and for Nero to "steal" a line from his poetic rival to make a point about ruthless competition seems paradoxically apropos. Moreover, for an audience well-versed in Lucan's opening lines, such a direct citation of the his poem's fifth line might also trigger the memory of the lines that follow in his proem. Lucan's description of Nero as a potential Phaethon, whose "flame-bearing chariot" and "wandering fire" need not alarm the world (*BC* 1.48-50), and his programmatic first simile, imagining civil conflict as an anticipation of a universe blasted apart by universal conflagration (*BC* 1.72-80) would seem prescient in post-Neronian retrospect.

We also see an emergent historical tension in the revival of Augustan references. Phaethon's unsuccessful attempt to succeed his father, already heavily freighted with the history of potential heirs suspiciously eliminated, found a resounding historical representation in the spectacular demise of Nero, a proud charioteer and solar-imagery enthusiast who notoriously oversaw his city's fiery destruction. Likewise, the notion of

⁴⁵⁷ The four virtues are invoked both in lexical terms and by the order in which they present the virtues, looking back to Augustus' *clupeus virtutis*, his *Res Gestae*, and other Augustan texts. See Boyle (2008) *ad loc.* Donovan (2011: 20-40) offers detailed analysis; see also Wilson (2003b).

⁴⁵⁸ Tac. *Hist.* 1.16.3, *concussi orbis*, is similarly argued to quote Lucan in a context of civil strife: so Joseph (2012: 45 n.51).

global wars settled by the establishment of a new and permanent peace under Julio- 214

Claudian rule now found new meaning as poignant reminders of unfulfilled hope:

Augustus's initial vision of *pax* and *princeps* was now irrevocably tinged with the awareness of his dynasty's inglorious end.

The idea that civil wars were generally identifiable with universal conflagration and the world's implosion is in fact fairly heavily promoted in early imperial literature, as Ferri points out.⁴⁵⁹ In adapting Lucan's line introducing the war between Caesar and Pompey to a description of the later wars between Augustus and his rivals, *Octavia's* Nero seems align the recurrence of civil war with an endless cycle of destruction and rebirth.⁴⁶⁰ As was noted in Chapter 2, examples from Neronian literature with highly suggestive fire imagery cannot be definitively identified as post-64, yet we see here strong evidence of the ways in which the images promoted by earlier authors, particularly Seneca and Lucan, could be re-read in the wake of the fire and Nero's fall. Thus, the textual lineage represented in *Octavia* has acquired a new layer of perspective, giving much of its source material a strong sense of unintended prescience and dramatic irony that advance the play's ideological agenda.

Retrospective Visionaries: Agrippina and Dido in the *Octavia*.

In the section above, I discuss how *Octavia's* opening speech, with subtly prophetic qualities as well as with a profusion of incendiary metaphors, later seems to have predicted the Ghost of Agrippina, who appears torch in hand. Light, "more hateful than

⁴⁵⁹ Ferri (2003) *ad loc.*

⁴⁶⁰ Further examples of Nero's quotation of civil war poetry to counter Seneca's more "optimistic" quotations of Augustan rhetoric are presented in Donovan (2011): 60-90; esp. 70-6 on Manilius. The additional potential intertexts with Manilius and Seneca, far from diluting the power of the more overt allusion to Lucan, only reinforce the *Octavia's* characterization of Nero as a figure with a natural affinity for fiery disaster.

darkness” (*Oct.* 20) to Octavia in the play’s opening lines, is further conflated with 215 negative memory and willed destruction. Octavia remembers her late stepmother/mother-in-law Agrippina as a grim Fury (*tristis Erinys*, *Oct.* 22) who lit the marriage chamber with the flames of the underworld (*Stygios ignes*, *Oct.* 24). As Octavia voices them, the words seem no more than the stock description one might employ against any female persecutor, and the conflation of wedding flames and funeral pyre is hardly new; yet they perfectly anticipate the actual form that Agrippina will take when her ghost arrives, straight from Tartarus, for the “vile wedding” (*thalamis scelestis*) of Nero and Poppaea at 593ff. The self-described “avenging fury” (*ultrix Erinys*, 619) brandishes her Stygian torch (*Stygiam...facem*, 594) no longer as a figure of speech, but in, as it were, the flesh.

In retrospect, Octavia has become a skewed, unwitting prophetess. The speech of Agrippina’s ghost in the *Octavia* is a *tour de force*, echoing and amplifying the initial set of images in a fashion that is at once more explicitly historically oriented and more obviously prophetic than Octavia’s first lines:

*Tellure rupta Tartaro gressum extuli,
Stygiam cruenta praeferens dextra facem
thalamis scelestis: nubat his flammis meo
Poppaea nato iuncta, quas vindex manus
dolorque matris vertet ad tristes rogos.* (*Oct.* 593-7)

I’ve split the earth to make my way from Hell, bearing the deathly torch in my gory hand, the better to light this obscene union: let Poppaea wed my son by the light of these flames – an avenging hand and a mother’s pain will turn it into tearful pyres.

Agrippina’s opening words echo Octavia’s earlier description of her as a fury bearing “Stygian” torches to light the bridal chamber, even again conflating the funeral pyre (this time, for Poppaea’s imminent demise rather than Claudius’ past one) with the marriage

flames.⁴⁶¹ Moreover, the intensity of the Ghost's desire for revenge against Nero, and 216 the violent agency of her emergence from the realm of the dead may even suggest some influence over events to come, making the speech perhaps as much a curse as it is a prophecy. The Ghost's speech begins by rehearsing well-known events from the years leading up to the play's dramatic date of 62. The perspective soon moves, however into the play's "future": again demanding to be read not just in the light of the character's past at the time of the play's action, but in the increasingly alarming shadow of the future ahead of the play's conclusion.⁴⁶² The Ghost's shift in temporal perspective moves us into a prophetic "future": one which the post-Neronian audience would presumably know themselves to have been witnesses to and participants in.⁴⁶³

In terms of its retrospective relationship to Roman history, as well as its collocation of images and lexical cues, our closest surviving parallel to the speech is not

⁴⁶¹ Additionally, Octavia's wish (134-136) that her father would rise to her aid, or else "open up the Stygian depths with a rupture in the earth (*tellure rupta*), so I can hurtle down headfirst," is echoed in Agrippina's opening salvo at 593: *tellure rupta Tartaro gressum extuli*. Boyle (2008: 218) contrasts the appearances of ghosts in Seneca's *Thyestes* and *Tantalus*, in which apparitions are "dragged" or "hurled" back from beyond merely to prophesy the plots of their plays, with the Agrippina's ghost here, who blasts out from hell by her own "violent agency," and whose speech looks beyond the plot of dramatized time and prophesies the plot of history.

⁴⁶² The speech's overall historicizing thrust emerges early, with references to the initial attempt on Agrippina's life, the "death ship" (*funesta...puppis*) at 601. The Ghost also brings up the defacement, following her execution of inscriptions and statues representing the empress around the empire (609-613); the widespread suspicion that she assassinated her husband to clear Nero's path to the throne is here expressed indirectly by the Ghost of Claudius himself, who is hounding her in the underworld (614-617).

⁴⁶³ Though prophetic speeches are a notable feature of Senecan drama, the loss of all other Roman historical dramas prevents us from full gauging the significance or relative commonness of the device which the *Octavia's* author employs here. Boyle notes Cicero's reference (*Sest.* 126) to the appearance of a "historical" ghost in Pacuvius' lost *Iliona*, but this play surely dealt with Rome's mythic foundation narrative, rather than re-animating the recently deceased ruling family – the effect could hardly have been the same.

from tragedy.⁴⁶⁴ Rather, the *Aeneid's* Dido, a character with marked tragic characteristics, seems to be explicitly invoked in the scene. Formal parallels include their status as once-supreme female rulers (of Rome and Carthage, respectively), fallen from grace; their regret at having placed the men they see as responsible for their undoing (Nero, Aeneas) on the seat of power; and most of all, their avowed hostility towards these figures, a hatred which survives from beyond the grave. This hatred, which forms the basis for their eerily accurate prophecies, gives these speeches a level of agency that moves them beyond mere prophecy, and into the realm of a curse.⁴⁶⁵

Programmatically allusive language reinforces the parallels between Dido's last words and the Ghost of Agrippina's speech.⁴⁶⁶ In particular, the dead empress' description of her torchbearing return as the advent of a *vindex manus*, an "avenging hand" clearly suggests that she, like Dido, considers her death a wrongful one. She describes her shade as "unavenged" a few lines later (*manibus...adhuc inultis*, 599-600). The statements echo Dido's pronouncement that she was to "die unavenged" (*moriemur inultae*, *Aen.* 4.659) spoken literally upon the bed Dido shared with Aeneas, which has become her pyre, as well as her earlier promise to pursue Aeneas from beyond the grave with "dark flames" (*atris ignibus*, *Aen.* 3.384). Less active in her pursuit of revenge than Agrippina with her *vindex manus*, Dido merely wishes for an avenger (*ultor*, *Aen.* 4.625);

⁴⁶⁴ From which, only the Ghost of Darius in Aeschylus' *Persians* performs a similar maneuver, and with some amount of unwillingness; see Boyle (2008) 218.

⁴⁶⁵ The bibliography on Dido as a figure of tragedy is especially enormous. Without rehearsing it all: for parallels with Euripides' *Medea*, Mastronarde (2002) gives a good overview. On Euripides, Apollonius, and Vergil, see Collard (1975).

⁴⁶⁶ At lines 610-613, Agrippina's Ghost represents the power which Nero now wields to destroy and defame her as having been bestowed by her own "fruitless love" (*infelix amor*), and in the speeches line describes herself as "a blight on [her] kin (*infelix*)," sentiment and turns of phrase which, spoken by a doomed female with dynastic ambitions, seem to target Vergil's Dido, *infelix* many times over, as a model in a pointed fashion; cf. *Aen.* 1.749, 2.67, 2.450, 2.527 (*infelix animi Phoenissa*), 2.596, 6.456 (Aeneas addresses Dido's ghost).

yet her ringing declaration of eternal hostility between Carthage and Rome forms the 218 aetiology for the historical narrative of the Punic wars, an event that would come to pass long after the action of the *Aeneid* has come to a close.

Likewise, Agrippina's Ghost speaks of her plans to wreak havoc in the future, imagining a day that Nero will meet with misfortunes surpassing her own. In the historical framework surrounding each of their speeches, then, Dido and Agrippina transcend the stock imagery characterizing them as "wronged women."⁴⁶⁷ The vengeful speech of Agrippina's Ghost derives much of its impact from its allusive relationship to Dido's final speeches in *Aeneid* 4, and the power both speeches possessed to evoke real moments of catastrophe ahead for Rome and its leaders. Taken together, the anticipatory history modeled in the speeches of the *Aeneid*'s doomed Punic queen and the *Octavia*'s revenant Roman empress create a powerful case for the wealth of connections forged in the early imperial period between myth, history, disaster and leadership at Rome. Although Agrippina's Ghost offers a number of visual and verbal cues suggesting her incendiary tendencies, the future misfortunes she outlines for Nero do not include the fire itself. In this respect, *Octavia*'s Nero also performs a narrative function similar to that of the *Aeneid*'s Dido. Descriptions of both characters as consumed by the flames of desire gain unusual potency from the famous destructions soon befall them and their cities.⁴⁶⁸

⁴⁶⁷ Dido's vengeance upon Italy in the form of Hannibal is prefigured by Dido's witness: the nurse Barce at 4.632 is presumably to be recognized as an ancestress of Hannibal's clan, the Barcides. Reading the speech of Agrippina's ghost against Dido's speech, especially with Dido's conjunction of *ultor/Barce*, Kragelund's suggestion (dismissed by Smith and unremarked upon by Boyle and Ferri) that the Ghost of Agrippina's reference to a *vindex manus* might similarly signify the revolt of Vindex might merit reconsideration. See Kragelund 1988, 506; as Smith even points out, Suetonius mentions the Roman audience's specific sensitivity to the word *vindex* during Nero's final year (*Nero* 45.2). Smith (2003) 392 n. 3.

⁴⁶⁸ As Donovan (2011: n. 98) acknowledges, her discussion of Agrippina's Ghost draws extensively on a presentation I gave at a 2009 LatinFest on the *Octavia* at NYU. Donovan's

Allusions to the fire emerge gradually, as references to Phaethon, to the fall of Troy, 219 and broader appeals to the *urbs capta* motif so popular in late republican invective triangulate around Nero and his characterization in the play.

Phaethon, Troy, and the *Urbs Capta* in the *Octavia's* Rome.

Chapter 1 established that the solar imagery and references to Caesar as *extinctus* at the end of *Georgics* 1 alert us to the subtextual figuration of Caesar's successor as a possible Phaethon.⁴⁶⁹ The prominence of Phaethon in the literary response to Rome's recurring crises of succession was further developed in Chapter 2. Here, combined with Octavia's opening nod to the imminent arrival of the sun, the crisis of succession referenced in Octavia's address to her "snuffed-out" father (also, technically, a "Caesar") alerts us from the start to the play's underlying preoccupation with dynastic succession and the risks it poses to Rome's stability.

Octavia's opening speech, which describes the torches that lit her wedding as "Stygian" (*Oct.* 24), leads directly into to her recollection of her father Claudius, whom she says Agrippina "snuffed out" (*extinxit*, 25). She seems here to echo the dismay Vergil expresses at the worldwide chaos following Caesar's demise in *Georgics* 1 (*extincto...Caesare*, 1.466), an impression reinforced by the similar moment of grief for a lost leader Octavia is recalling here, and by the reiteration of the term in reference to the violent deaths of several other members of the Julian line: Octavia describes herself as *semper fratris extincti memor*, "always keeping [her] snuffed-out brother [Britannicus] in

discussion, however, focuses more on shared models for the characterizations of Octavia and Agrippina, while mine considers more of the narratological aspects of this speech.

⁴⁶⁹ See Chapter 1, 62ff.

mind” at 226.⁴⁷⁰ The martial tone and global reach of Octavia’s initial references to 220 the *extinctus* Claudius’ conquest of Britain (*totus...orbis/ ultra Oceanum, 25-26; Britanni terga dedere/ ducibus nostris ignoti*) further develop the passage’s allusive relationship to the moment of anxiety about Rome’s future distilled in the *Georgics*’ description of a world poised for total war.⁴⁷¹

In another nod to the previous century’s crises of succession, Octavia’s prayer that Nero meet a grim end blends with her recollection of a recent comet:

*utinam nefandi principis dirum caput
obruere flammis caelitum rector paret,
qui saepe terras fulmine infesto quatit
mentesque nostras ignibus terret sacris
novisque monstris; vidimus caelo iubar
ardens cometen pandere infaustam facem,
qua plaustra tardus noctis alterna vice
regit Bootes, frigore Arctoo rigens:
en ipse diro spiritu saevi ducis
polluitur aether, gentibus clades novas
minantur astra, quas regit dux impius. (Oct. 227-37)*

If only the guide of heaven would make take action to overwhelm the dreadful head of this unspeakable *princeps* with flames! Often does he [Jupiter] shake the earth with his threatening thunder and terrifies our minds with sacred fires and strange prodigies. We saw glow, a comet blazing in the sky, reveal its ill-boded torch, where slow Bootes, stiff with Arctic frost, guides his wagon over night’s alternating course. Look how the very upper air is tainted by the savage leader’s disastrous exhalation! Stars threaten new catastrophes for nations ruled by an unholy leader.

Though a number of parallels to Senecan drama are clear in these lines, the speech unmistakably identifies Nero as another Phaethon, incorporating tropes familiar from

⁴⁷⁰ Additionally, Octavia later (266) describes her mother Messalina’s bedchamber execution as the work of a Fury, who “snuffed out the stolen bridal torches in blood” (*raptasque thalamis sanguine extinxit faces*), leaving Octavia, lone survivor of her nuclear family as *extincta luctu*, “snuffed out by grief” (268). The speech of Agrippina’s ghost at 615-15 again applies to the term to Claudius (*extinctus...coniunx*).

⁴⁷¹ See Chapter 1, 62ff.

Ovid: death at the hands of Jupiter's thunderbolt, a comet streaking through the heavens, and a near-collision with the slow-moving Bootes.⁴⁷² The reading offered in Chapter 1 of Ovid's Phaethon as a failed successor now carries the additional freight of Lucan's figuration of Nero as Phaethon in the proem of the *Bellum Civile*.⁴⁷³ Here, however, Octavia's words also evoke actual events from Nero's reign that could now be re-evaluated as portents suggesting his affinity for fiery destruction.

The wish that Jupiter's lightning might "overwhelm" the head of Nero seems to presage an apparently well-known minor calamity from the period: Tacitus tells us that in 63 CE, shortly after the dramatic date of the *Octavia*, lightning struck the newly built gymnasium of Nero, burning it to the ground and melting a statue of Nero into "a shapeless mass of bronze."⁴⁷⁴ Additionally, in 60 CE a comet had appeared in the sky, visible for some six months according to the historical Seneca.⁴⁷⁵ Given the traditional associations of comets with a transition in leadership, this particular comet became cemented in later tradition as an early sign of Nero's impending doom. Octavia, in invoking the language of a historical witness (*vidimus*) in this precise form and context, suggests a parity between the Romans of the Neronian period and those who had once

⁴⁷² Cf. Ovid, *Met.* 2.176-7: *te quoque turbatum memorant fugisse, Boote, / quamuis tardus eras et te tua plaustra tenebant*. Ferri (2003, *ad loc.*), mentions a possible allusion to Phaethon, at *Oct.* 808-9 (discussed below, 216), and clearly sees the intertexts with the Ovidian myth of ages at *Oct.* 396ff., but here mentions only various parallels from Senecan drama.

⁴⁷³ As discussed in Ch. 1, 87ff. and Ch. 2, 154ff.

⁴⁷⁴ Tac. *Ann.* 15.22.2: *gymnasium ictu fulminis conflagravit effigiesque in eo Neronis ad informe aes liquefacta*). Ironically, Nero himself will later echo Octavia's words in issuing Octavia's death warrant (861): [*sc. ira mea*] *caedem sororis poscit et dirum caput*, "my wrath demands my sister's slaughter and her dreadful head." Both Nero's line and Octavia's earlier wish at 227-8 recall the similarly fratricidal wishes expressed by Atreus in Sen. *Thy.* 243-4: *profare, dirum qua caput mactem uia*.

⁴⁷⁵ Sen. *NQ* 7.17.2, 7.21.3-4, and 7.29.3; cf. also Plin. *HN*.2.92; Suet. *Ner.* 36; Tac. *Ann.* 14.22.1.

seen portents surrounding the death of a previous Caesar.⁴⁷⁶ Octavia's wish for the 222
portent to fulfill itself via an elaboration of the Phaethon theme fuses literary and
historical memory, inviting us to remember not only the literary Phaethon as evoked by
Ovid, Vergil, Manilius, Seneca, and Lucan, but also the historical crises in which each of
these references were embedded.⁴⁷⁷

The incendiary theme, and with it the allusive presence of Phaethon, re-emerges
at the play's climax, in words that reframe Octavia's initial wish for Jupiter to overwhelm
Nero with flames (*obruere flammis*, 228) as a nearly-realized event. The populace, angry
over Nero's rejection of Octavia, has surrounded the palace, preparing to put it to the
torch (*saepire flammis principis sedem parant*, 801). The chorus, Nero's sycophantic but
presumably highly educated courtiers, pronounce these efforts futile (*Oct.* 806-810) in a
passage laced with learned allusions:

*Quid fera frustra bella movetis?
invicta gerit tela Cupido:
flammis vestros obruet ignes
quis extinxit fulmina saepe*

⁴⁷⁶ As pointed out by Donovan (2011) 171-3. Donovan argues for the verb form *vidimus* here as an "Alexandrian footnote" directing the reader to recall specifically civil-war-themed lines from Horace and Vergil. Horace also had anticipated a coming apocalypse marked by new terrors (*nova monstra*, Hor. *Carm.* 1.2.6). Octavia's reference to the comet now recalls both the historical comet of 60 CE, and the terrors that Horace's Rome "saw" the gods imposing on Rome in times gone by, such as the famous flood narrative in Ode 1.2: *vidimus flavom Tiberim retortis/litore Etrusco violenter undis/ ire deiectum monumenta regis*, Hor. *Carm.* 1.2.13-15). Horace's Ode 1.2, as has long been recognized, looks back to and reworks Vergil's account of the death of Julius Caesar at the end of *Georgics* 1; see, e.g., Thomas (1988) *ad Geo.* 501-2; Nisbet and Hubbard *ad Carm.* 1.2.13 (after Donovan 2011: 172 n. 49). I would add to these examples Anchises' statement at *Aen.* 2. 642-3: *satis una superque/ vidimus excidia et captae superavimus urbi*. Donovan rightfully emphasizes the retrospective nature of such interpretations, which seem to have reinterpreted the comets as omens of doom after Nero's fall. For comets signaling the end of a reign, especially in the Flavian literary tradition, see Valerius Flaccus, *Arg.* 6.608, *Stat. Theb.* 1.708, and *Sil. Pun.* 8.636-7.

⁴⁷⁷ Octavia here seems to echo the language of Senecan drama, specifically one likewise concerned with the slaughter of family members: *Herc. Fur.* 858-60, *qualis est vobis animus remota/ luce cum maestus sibi quisque sensit/obrutum tota caput esse terra?*

captumque Iouem caelo traxit.
Laesi tristes dabit poenas
sanguine vestro;
non est patiens fervidus irae
facilisque regi:
ille ferocem iussit Achillem
pulsare lyram,
fregit Danaos, fregit Atriden,
regna evertit Priami, claras
diruit urbes.
et nunc animus quid ferat horret
vis immitis violenta dei. (Oct. 806-19)

Why this wild, pointless hostility? Cupid carries invincible arms; he'll overwhelm your fires with his flames, with which he has often snuffed out Jupiter's lightning, and dragged him captive from the sky. Wounded, you will pay a grievous price in your own blood; [Cupid] is a seether, not tolerant in his wrath or easily managed: it was he who commanded fierce Achilles to strike the lyre, who broke the Greeks, who broke Agamemnon; he who overturned Priam's territories and destroyed famous cities. And the mind now shudders at what the ungentle god's destructive force may bring.

As Ferri observes, the phrase *flammis...extinxit fulmina* "may owe something to [Ovid's] *Met.* 2.313 *saevos compescuit ignis ignes*, where Phaethon is struck by the thunderbolt" of Jove.⁴⁷⁸ The word *extinxit* now echoes not just Vergil's *extincto...Caesare* from *Georgics* 1, but the play's own multiple references to Claudius as *extinctus*.

Jupiter's Phaethon-smiting lightning here, as in Octavia's original wish (*Oct.* 227-8), represents the righteous punishment of Nero, now given imminent potentiality at the hands of the torch-wielding populace. The courtiers, however, counter this Ovidian allusion with another: Cupid's "flames" (*ignes*) become the referent for Nero's passion for Poppaea, which is to spur him to action against the crowd and overwhelm their efforts with superior force. Here, as elsewhere in the play, we see a clear set of allusions

⁴⁷⁸ Ferri (2003) *ad loc.* The pleonastic grouping of *flamma*, *obruere*, and *ignis* are also reminiscent of Juno's command to Aeolus to "sink the sunken ships" (*submersas obrue puppes*, *Aen.* 1.69), replacing water with fire as the overwhelming element.

comparing Rome to a besieged city under attack from Nero, as well as a

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complementary set of comparisons between Rome and Troy, mother city of the Roman people and home of Aeneas, founder of the Julian line. Likewise, Octavia's speech alluding to Phaethon, which the chorus' reference to Jupiter's thunderbolt recalls, has appealed to our memory of Phaethon's role in Roman literature addressing crises of succession and catastrophic damage to the landscape.

Significantly, the chorus (*Oct.* 809-19) reprises not only Octavia's wish for Jupiter's retribution in the play's first scene, but also its own earlier reference to Troy and its fall. Shortly before the interruption caused by the mob's approach, the chorus of courtiers is celebrating Poppaea's legendary beauty by comparing her to Helen:

*Formam Sparte iactet alumnae
licet et Phrygius praemia pastor,
vincet vultus haec Tyndaridos,
qui moverunt horrida bella
Phrygiaeque solo regna dedere.* (*Oct.* 773-77)

Granted, Sparta may pride itself on its nursling's beauty, and the Trojan shepherd on his prize; yet she [Poppaea] will conquer Helen's face: a face that moved horrific wars and brought the Trojan monarchy low.

The chorus here employs markedly Vergilian language to describe wars provoked by Helen's beauty, including the memorable phrase *horrida bella*, the theme of the provocative *pastor*, and the suggestion of Trojan conflict renewed and intensified in its Roman/Italian iteration.⁴⁷⁹ The chorus' multiple engagements with the tale of Troy's fall

⁴⁷⁹ Donovan (2011) mentions the *Aeneid* narrator's own preface to the Italian conflicts of *Aeneid* 7-12 (*dicam horrida bella*, *Aen.* 7.41). I see a multivalent reference in the lines: *moverunt horrida bella* also recalls both the prophecy of the Sibyl in *Aeneid* 6. 86-7 (*bella, horrida bella...cerno*) and the description of war breaking out in at *Georgics* 1. 509: *hinc mouet Euphrates, illinc Germania bellum*. Likewise, Donovan (2011: 241) identifies the description of Paris as a "Trojan shepherd" as an echo of Amata's fears that Aeneas has come as a second Paris to steal Lavinia,

reflect the play's strategy of presenting moments from Rome's legendary and 225 historical past that resonate with its imperial present. Helen's lovely face, which led to the conflict that left Troy in ashes, is now surpassed by Poppaea's beauty; by implication, the destruction that awaits Rome must be understood as equally surpassing.⁴⁸⁰

Literary memory of late republican invective and historiographical civil-war narrative is invoked throughout the play to characterize Nero's relationship with his people: the image of Rome as under siege, on the verge of realizing the literary *topos* of the captured city (*urbs capta*).⁴⁸¹ It is the crowd that has Nero surrounded in this scene, and in fact the language of the messenger who alerts the court to the danger has already explicitly described the palace as besieged, and addressed Nero as the military commander (*dux*) charged with defending the occupants.⁴⁸² In response, Nero paradoxically recasts himself as the besieging party. Soon, Nero tells us, Rome's dwellings will fall to his flames (*mox tecta flammis concidant urbis meis*, *Oct.* 831).⁴⁸³

and igniting a second Trojan war: (*Aen.* 7. 363-4) *at non sic Phrygius penetrat Lacedaemona pastor, / Ledaemque Helenam Troianas vexit ad urbes?*). The original "Trojan shepherd" however, was Paris: however, the central role of the Vergilian corpus in the later literary tradition perhaps makes it likely that the *Aeneid* should be seen as the primary intertext here. Kragelund (2005: 85) suggests that that these lines would also remind the audience of Nero's rumored performance of his composition on the Fall of Troy as Rome burned in 64. Kragelund further suggests that the Nero-as-Paris theme advanced in these lines may reference the historical Nero's own *Troica*, which is reported to have presented Paris in a positive, even heroic light. See further discussion in this chapter: 256-7. On Aeneas as Trojan *pastor*: see Ch. 1, 71-3.

⁴⁸⁰ For the sinister implications of the chorus' Trojan allusions, see Smith (2003) 419-22 and Kragelund (2005) 81. Sullivan (1985: 68) suggests that the danger of Poppaea's beauty constitutes a form of dramatic irony of which the chorus is not implicitly aware, but this reading seems too naïve in denying the chorus an understanding of their own language and its own logical implications; so Donovan (2011: 238 n. 12).

⁴⁸¹ As Donovan (2011: 138 n. 82) further comments, *urbs capta* motif "typically also included the rhetorical positioning of one's political opponent as *hostis*, a rhetoric which we have seen extensively deployed throughout the *Octavia*."

⁴⁸² Cf. the messenger speech at *Oct.* 780-85.

⁴⁸³ Donovan (2011: 140) takes these lines as an incendiary threat against Rome's city walls. This, however, seems less likely than an anticipation of the destruction of homes in the fire of 64. The

surrounded by a torch-wielding mob no longer faces them down and restores order to the city; instead, he plans to escalate the violence and quell dissent with an assault that will overwhelm his own people.⁴⁸⁴ The prefect's comments further remind us of the Vergilian intertext: he suggests, perversely, that Nero's anger will temper the people (*tua temperet nos ira, non noster timor*, *Oct.* 858), recalling Vergil's initial description of Aeolus as a powerful statesman who subdues rage in his people (*mollitque animos et temperat iras*, *Aen.*1.57).⁴⁸⁵ Nero, by contrast, has just proposed to subdue Rome's people with fire and famine: flames, mass destruction, foul deprivation, and hunger, he says, will crush a "criminal populace" (*ignes, ruinae noxium populum premant/ turpisque egestas, saeva cum luctu fames*, *Oct.* 832-3).

Nero continues his speech, predicting that the people will learn to obey their *princeps* when they are shattered by punishments (*fracta per poenas metul parere discet*

trope of flames flooding homes (*tecta*, cf. OLD *tectum* 2) and bringing about collapses was such a stock feature of the *urbs capta* motif as to come first in Quintilian's list of items the term evokes: (8.68.1). One of the oldest and most influential uses in Latin poetry, however, was probably Ennius' *Andromacha* (92-9 Vahlen, as quoted at Cic. *Sest.* 120): *o pater, o patria, o Priami domus/ saeptum altisono cardine templum/ uidi ego te adstante ope barbarical tectis caelatis laqueatis/ auro ebore instructam regifice/haec omnia vidi inflammari/ Priamo ui vitam evitari/ Iouis aram sanguine turpari*. As Fowler (1990) reminds, us, this fragment is already quoted at *Aen.* 1.175, describing Dido's opulent banquet halls in terms that suggest the fate they will one day share with Troy.

⁴⁸⁴ On the riot/statesman simile in *Aeneid* 1: see Chapter 1, 68-71. Donovan (2011: 117 and 142-3) identifies several moments in the text of the *Octavia* that echo this simile. For example, Nero describes how the madness of his rivals seizes his people and drives them to rebel against him (*furor/ armat ministros sceleris*, *Oct.* 465-6, cf. *furor arma ministrat*, *Aen.*1.150); the allusions reappear during the confrontation with the mob, but as Donovan points out, the positive characteristics associated with the statesman (most importantly, *pietas*) in the *Aeneid*'s first simile are pointedly assigned to the prefect, and not to Nero.

⁴⁸⁵ Donovan (2011) notes the parallels at *Oct.* 858 with *Aen.*1.57 but does not mention the contrast between Aeolus in *Aeneid* and Nero at *Oct.* 832. Aeolus, while perhaps not a perfect model of Roman leadership, controls his unruly subjects by means of binding agreements and a deft touch with the reins of power (*Aen.*1.62-3: *...qui foedere certol et premere et laxas sciret dare iussus habenas*); Nero reaches instead for fire and collapse (*Oct.* 832: *ignes, ruinae...premant*) as his means of control.

principis nutu sui, *Oct.* 842-3). Asked by his prefect what punishment should be dealt 227 out immediately to the crowd, Nero replies cryptically that the punishment must be left for him alone to execute; asked to elaborate, he says it will be one which “no age will blot out from memory,” (*aetas nulla quam famae eximat*, *Oct.* 857).⁴⁸⁶ With these lines, however, the audience’s historical memory of the fire falls subject to radical revision: no longer is Nero’s arson the product of his grandiose desire to rebuild the city to his liking, or to re-create the spectacle of Troy’s destruction: instead, it is the direct product of civil dissent and confrontation between leader and population.

Ignes, Ruinae: Conclusions from the Octavia.

The dramatic structure of tragedy gives the poet of the *Octavia* license to epitomize all of Nero’s reign (and, in a sense, all of Julio-Claudian history) in this apparently short-lived instance of popular resistance in period otherwise characterized by remarkable accord between Nero and his people.⁴⁸⁷ The mob’s threat to torch Nero’s palace, and Nero’s retaliatory threat to punish them with fire and famine, becomes powerful anticipatory referents for the fire of 64, an event still in the future of the play’s dramatic date.

Uniquely in the Neronian tradition, this confrontation between leader and populace is even constructed as the aetiological origin of Nero’s alleged arson of the city.

⁴⁸⁶ The line has been noted for its explicit metapoetic engagement with Vergil’s epitaph for Nisus and Euryalus. *Aen.* 9.447: **nulla** dies umquam **memori** vos **eximet** **aevo**. As Donovan (2011: 143, n. 90) remarks that this may be Nero’s self-conscious citation of Vergil as a rival master-poet of Julian history, or “the *Octavia* poet’s use of Vergil to further his own metapoetic ends.” Nero’s aggressive and paradoxical quotation of a range of authors should perhaps encourage us to view the former option as the more likely of the two, but Donovan rightly points out that either way it speaks to poetry’s power to preserve historical memory. Here, however, I suggest that the allusion may actually also constitute a nod to the rumor Nero’s wish to burn Rome in imitation of Trojan-themed poetry.

⁴⁸⁷ Donovan (2011) 146.

larger role in the drama, and that the playwright thought that the situation in 62, with flashbacks to the murder of Agrippina in 59, would be most compelling and damaging for Nero.”⁴⁸⁸ She posits that the playwright centers the drama around one of very few moments in which Nero and the people stood in conflict (and one which no other source records as particularly prolonged or intense).⁴⁸⁹ The play, as Flower argues, play recasts the Roman populace, Nero’s ardent supporters throughout his reign, as figures of opposition, suggesting that Nero had truly deserved their resistance all along. Without countervailing Flower’s larger point at all, I submit that far from downplaying the fire of 64, the play implicates Nero in the disaster to come at every turn. In so doing, the *Octavia* constructs Nero as an overdetermined agent of destruction. His character is driven by larger cosmic and historical forces to bring Rome to the brink of oblivion.

As a historical actor this Nero responds (as perhaps he must) to popular resistance with an incendiary assault that looms in the play’s near future, much as it does in the presumed audience’s recent past. The short-lived opposition of the populace is poignantly re-imagined as a lost opportunity to rid the city of Nero and his minions before they could do their worst. Yet in a truly ironic twist, this very gesture is the provocation that precipitates Nero’s deliberate arson. In contrast to Tacitus’ account, which attributes the people’s dissent to the fact that they were “less inhibited, and exposed to fewer dangers than others because of their lowly status,” the narrative in the *Octavia* actually suggests

⁴⁸⁸ Flower (2006) 206.

⁴⁸⁹ Cf. Tac. *Ann.* 14.60-2. Suetonius says only that there was public disapproval of the divorce (*sed improbane divortium populo*, Suet. *Ner.* 35.2). The epitome of Dio on this topic (Dio 62.13.1) is admittedly abbreviated by its nature, but records only the resistance of Burrus.

by implication that this single moment of futile resistance cost the people of Rome 229 everything.

Imagery in the *Octavia* thus constructs a network of poetic foreshadowing, raising the specter of Rome's conflagration to come and Nero's downfall in the same terms and images that the characters use to express their own fears, resentments and desires at almost every turn. The play's consistent intertwining of the fictional world of myth and literature with the events of Nero's reign performs several literary feats at once. Blending recent history with literary allusion, the *Octavia* commemorates Nero's own apparent penchant for self-mythologization; constructs the emperor and his inner circle as proleptic avatars of fiery destruction; and dramatizes the eventual conflagration of 64 as the outcome of conflict between the ruler and the ruled. As we will see, these are devices Tacitus too seems to employ – if not in imitation of the *Octavia per se*, then in service of very similar goals. Before turning to the Tacitean Nero, however, let us examine a lesser-known, and perhaps even more surprising text that, like the *Octavia*, seems to revive the memory of Nero for a specific ideological purpose.

Neronianis Temporibus: Nero and the 64 Fire in Rome's Monumental Landscape.

Ara(e) Incendii Neroniani is the modern Latinism⁴⁹⁰ invented to refer to a presumed set of monuments dedicated to Vulcan by Domitian, in fulfillment of a vow, some time between 83 and 96 CE. The title, then, is a somewhat misleading one, placing the focus on the historical moment of the 64 fire as referenced in the text of the dedicatory inscriptions (to

⁴⁹⁰ Also referred to as the “*Arae Incendii Neronis*” (e.g. Platner-Ashby, 30). The divergence highlights the problematic practice, rightfully castigated by Haselberger et al. (2002) 24 and Purcell, *JRA* 8 (1995) 362 of minting such neo-Latinisms for topographic entries.

be discussed at length below), rather than crediting Domitian as the actual dedicator, 230 or even Vulcan as the true object of worship. My own text will refer to these altars simply as the *Arae* for the sake of convenience; I propose, however, that the structures would be more accurately described as “Altars of Vulcan,” a title which would avoid the misleading impression that the altars are attested by any Latin name in the written sources. In this section I discuss what can be reconstructed about the physical nature of the monuments from the scant surviving evidence, then move on to explore the implications of the text of the inscription(s) associated with the *Arae*.

All three known inscriptions clearly state that the altars are intended for sacrifices on the day of the *Volcanalia*, an ancient holiday honoring Vulcan, the Roman god of fires and forges. The message of the monuments is most clearly evident in the epigraphic text, in which propitiation of Vulcan, the memory of the 64 fire, and continued anxiety about the threat of fire at Rome are prominent features. The actual inscriptions from which our three examples of the epigraphic text are derived are all now lost; the documentary evidence relating to their discoveries is old, discontinuous, and fragmentary.⁴⁹¹ A brief review of the context for each of the inscriptions will provide background for the treatment of the text, which is of primary interest here.

⁴⁹¹ Our first example is known only from Mazocchi’s 1521 compendium of epigraphic material at Rome, and seems already at that point to have been removed from its original context, so no usable conclusions may be drawn from it about the associated structure. The discovery in 1618 of a second example, on the slope of the Aventine at the edge of the area where the superstructure of the Circus Maximus once stood, was documented in enough detail to suggest strong parallels with the text of the inscription that was found nearby. The third example found on the Quirinal underwent two phases of discovery: a seventeenth-century letter preserves discusses the inscription and provides a copy of the text, while the altar itself was excavated and documented in the late 19th century. Further discussion of the finds associated with the altars, and scholarship discussing them is provided in Appendix (A).

The 19th century discovery of an altar in *situ* on the Quirinal is the only site 231 excavated to archaeological standards and best conveys the impact of the monument's physical dimensions. Three steps ran some 35 meters along the contemporary street edge, which lead to a travertine paving about a meter below the top step; the final step down was set with obelisk-shaped cippi standing almost 2 meters high. Within this stretch of sunken paving lay an island of steps leading up to a structure interpreted as the travertine core of a massive altar, measuring some 6.25m wide by 3.25m deep, and over a meter and a half high without its posited marble facing or upper cyma. Elements discovered on the Quirinal proved strikingly consistent with the description in earlier sources of the setting of an inscription recorded near the Circus Maximus, at the edge of the Aventine Hill.

To sum up before moving on to the epigraphic text in detail, the form of the monument on the Quirinal, as detailed above, was presumably closely echoed by that of its previously discovered twin, the 1618 find at the foot of the Aventine; both site included dedicatory inscriptions with nearly identical texts. The earliest example of the text is from an apparently distinct third inscription, found (not necessarily *in situ*) in the Vatican plain and recorded by the sixteenth-century antiquarian Giacomo Mazzocchi (Jacobus Mazochius). Lacking further context, we cannot say definitively that this example represents a third monument, as opposed to being simply an additional element of either the Quirinal or the Aventine monuments.⁴⁹² Overall, the altar project,

⁴⁹² Though the Mazochian example may indeed suggest a third site on Vatican plain, I am not willing to insist on it.

unmentioned in literary sources,⁴⁹³ is perhaps small in comparison to massive 232

interventions on the urban landscape of the era such as the Flavian Amphitheater. It appears nevertheless to have occupied a number of conspicuous urban frontages, and so would have invited the attention of viewers at various points around the city; there was a message to be conveyed, as the narrative offered by the inscriptions will make clear.

Altars of Vulcan: Text and Memory.

The text offered below is that of *CIL* VI 826 = 30837(b) = *ILS* 4914, from the inscribed cippus found on the Via del Quirinale in the 17th century; it appears to be the most complete of the three:

Haec area intra hancce definitionem cipporum clausa veribus et ara quae est inferius dedicata est ab Imp Caesare Domitiano Aug	5
Germanico ex voto suscepto quod diu erat neglectum nec redditum incendiorum arcendorum causa quando urbs per novem dies	10
arsit Neronianis temporibus hac lege dedicata est ne cui liceat intra hos terminos aedificium exstruere manere negotiari arborem ponere	15
aliudve quid serere et ut praetor cui haec regio sorti obvenerit sacrum faciat aliusve quis magistratus Volcanalibus (ante diem) X K Septembres 20 omnibus annis vitulo robeo et verre r(obeo) fac[tis] precationibus infra scriptam aedi[] K Sept ianist []	

⁴⁹³ See Appendix (A) for a review of the (dubious) identifications of the structure. For the identification with the *pila Tiburtina* mentioned by Martial see below and Appendix (A).

[] dari[] quae s 25
 quod Im(perator) Caesar Domitianus
 Aug Germanicus Pont Max
 constituit q[]
 fieri

‘[1] This area, within this boundary of cippi enclosed with spikes, and the altar which is below, has been dedicated by [5] the Emperor Caesar Domitian Augustus Germanicus, from a vow undertaken, which was long neglected and not fulfilled, for the sake of repelling fires, [9-10] when the city burned for nine days in the time of Nero. By this law it is dedicated, that it is not allowed within these confines for anyone to build a structure, settle/loiter, [15] conduct business, place a tree, or plant anything, and that the praetor to whom this region has come by lot, or some other magistrate, shall make a sacrifice [20] on the Volcanalia, the 23rd of August, in all years of a red calf and a (red) hog, with prayers made [the fragments of lines 23-25 will be discussed below]...[26] which as chief pontiff the Emperor Caesar Domitian Augustus has established...(q?) (there shall be??)...’⁴⁹⁴

The creation of an *area*, with set boundaries indicated by markers, as well as the implication of a localized cult practice to ward off fire, all are reminiscent of the dedications to Stata Mater discussed in Chapter 1. The concern over encroachment on public space and the emphasis on cult practice in response to recent catastrophe in the city are both reminiscent of the measures Nero is reported to have taken after the Great Fire, as discussed in Chapter 2. Yet as Robert Palmer emphasizes, the concern on Domitian’s part to improve the life of the city in response to the events of the Neronian period, some twenty years after the fire, suggests the lasting impact that of the Neronian fire upon the city’s memory.⁴⁹⁵ Whether the design of the space and the injunctions keeping the precinct open were Domitian’s or Nero’s, Nero evidently played an

⁴⁹⁴ Significant differences between the variants of the inscription, as well as the history of scholarship on the monuments, are discussed in Appendix (A).

⁴⁹⁵ Palmer, R.E.A: unpublished notes on Rome’s sacred landscape (generously provided by Harriet Flower).

important role in the origination of the project, and Domitian's text seems to foreground Nero in a deliberate fashion.

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Chapter Two discusses Nero's active role in the aftermath of the 64 destruction, in which propitiation of the gods was a high priority. The extraordinary measures Tacitus records, including consultation of the Sibylline books, special lustrations, and supplications are consistent with the idea of building a monumental altar or altars. On a physical level, both Tacitus and Suetonius' extended descriptions of Nero's redesign for the city include extensive measures in the building codes for preventing further fires from spreading rapidly, an idea codified in legal texts with a gerundival phrase, *incendia arcenda*, very like that employed in the inscription.⁴⁹⁶ Additionally, if Nero met his end before the time at which the vow required fulfillment, it would help explain how it came to be "long neglected and not fulfilled." As for the evocative phrase *Neronianis temporibus*, the text seems to be more concerned with associating Nero with the event, than with pinpointing a significant date. This may be in part because the date was such common knowledge, but it also seems to bespeak an elevated interest in bringing Nero into comparison with Domitian as a leader. Equally, with the entire period of Nero's reign as the temporal setting, the nine-day conflagration seems to become the defining event of the era. This type of metonymic association between Nero's disregard for the public and the 64 fire was one that post-Neronian leadership, and especially the Flavian emperors, encouraged through a variety of sources.

⁴⁹⁶ *Just. Digest.* 1.15.1.pr.2, 9.2.49.1.3, 43.24.7.4.2. See also Suet. *Cl.*25.2.8 on the establishment of *vigiles* at Puteoli and Ostia under Claudius: *Puteolis et Ostiae singulas cohortes ad arcendos incendiorum casus collocavit.*

As we have seen, Statius asserts the responsibility of Nero for the 64 disaster 235 in evoking Lucan's *de Incendio Urbis* at *Silvae* 2.7, written during the later years of Domitian's reign.⁴⁹⁷ Additionally, the *Octavia*, which possibly dates as early as the reign of Galba, displays a similar impulse throughout, using a profusion of metaphorical language suggesting fire, the eerie prophecy of destruction delivered by Agrippina's ghost, and finally an alternate aetiology of Nero's plan to burn the city in retribution for popular resistance to his divorce of Octavia. The *Octavia* reframes Nero's entire reign as a period of conflict and anticipated destruction, much as the *Arae* now seem to redefine it in terms of the fire. Martial's poems indirectly reference the 64 fire: his celebration of the rededicated space of the Colosseum makes much of Nero's inappropriate response to the destruction of the city, which Flavian generosity has now redeemed.⁴⁹⁸

Significantly, the inscription of the *Arae* does not accuse Nero of starting the fire. Moreover, it may actually provide an indirect endorsement of his legitimacy as an emperor, authorizing him as the initiator of the original vow that Domitian now fulfills.⁴⁹⁹ Only two scenarios, can plausibly explain Domitian's claim to fulfill to a vow "long neglected and not fulfilled," dating from the "Neronian" time when "the city burned for nine days." In the first scenario, Nero (or the Senate, acting so much under Nero's control that it amounts to the same thing) undertakes the vow during or immediately after the fire, in the hopes of averting another such catastrophe; Domitian, a noted religious revivalist, takes power in the wake of the disastrous fire of 80, and the altars are finally dedicated. In the second, Domitian, coming to power in the wake of 80, feels a need to

⁴⁹⁷ See above at Ch. 2: 194-6.

⁴⁹⁸ Most memorably at *Lib. Spect.* 2; on which Coleman (2006) *ad loc.* is presently best.

⁴⁹⁹ The different processes by which the vow may have taken place are discussed in detail in Appendix (A).

distinguish himself and his efforts at rebuilding from those of Nero, and claims to 236 fulfill a (fictional) vow. The latter option is attractive since it allows Domitian to suggest at once that the fire of 80 was a reprisal for an unfulfilled debt to Vulcan, and to settle the debt in a grand style. Yet the inscription references events too well-known to allow such an audacious fabrication in any comfort, so the former option is probably the most credible. The alleged vow of altars during the Neronian crisis seems to retroject a Flavian claim on the past, but Domitian is unlikely to have invented a vow with no basis in reality. However violent and surreal the Flavian vituperation of Nero's memory became, the claims with the best chance of sticking would always be those reflecting some accepted fact or widespread opinion. Either way, it is hard to see how the Domitianic public would have imagined the initiator of the "long-neglected" vow of 64 to be anyone other than Nero.

Thus, the inscription suggests that Domitian was less interested in aggressively enforcing any memory sanctions against Nero than in selectively using his memory to attract attention to his own projects and imperial identity. If we can accept the narrative that emerges from the examination of the text above, we have two distinct attempts on the part of two different emperors to position themselves as leaders in response to the threat of urban disaster. Initially we see Nero in the chaotic aftermath of the fire, seeking a religious solution to complement his well-documented building measures: this attempt, however, was evidently was not carried to completion. Next, we have Domitian exploiting this narrative some twenty years later; his reasons for doing so require further elaboration. The idea that Domitian's concern for Vulcan is a response to the disastrous

fire of 80 has been suggested previously.⁵⁰⁰ This fire consumed much of the Campus Martius, as well as the recently rebuilt Capitol and what remained of Nero's Golden House on the Palatine. This was followed closely by a devastating plague in the city, and the emperor Titus' untimely death. In the wake of these new horrors, Domitian came to power. His efforts at rebuilding the areas damaged in the fire of 80 left a city substantially rebuilt in his image.⁵⁰¹ Towards this end, he made extraordinary efforts not only in the city's structural renewal, but also in the realm of religious revival. Domitian reinstated a number of archaic religious customs and cultivated a notable personal devotion to Minerva, in addition to expanding and redefining the imperial cult. Moreover, in rebuilding after the fire of 80, placed his own stamp on Rome's most sacred areas.⁵⁰² Notably, Domitian's Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus on the Capitoline hill replaced the one only just rebuilt by Vespasian and Titus after it burned down in the urban warfare of 69.⁵⁰³

The Domitianic renewal of the vow may find company in the text of Martial's *Epigram 5.7*, discussed above.⁵⁰⁴ The striking figuration of Rome as a phoenix rising from the ashes has long been identified as a reference to the city's restoration after the fire of 80. Palmer connects this poem's prayer addressed to Vulcan with the *Arae*

⁵⁰⁰ Darwall-Smith (1996).

⁵⁰¹ Palmer (1976); see also the tables in Jones (1992: 79-96).

⁵⁰² For Domitian's building program, see MacDonald (1982) 47-74; Jones (1992); Darwall-Smith (1996). For Domitian's "innovative conservatism" in religious matters, see Jones 1992 (70-79); Southern (1997); D'Ambra (1993).

⁵⁰³ For the Capitoline restoration, see especially Wiseman (1978) and Wardle (1996). The Flavian temple of Peace, which notably included peperino walls to protect it against fire, also had a complex and multifaceted ideological significance; see Noreña (2003, esp. 30-31) for the role of Peace in Vespasian's coinage, architecture, and ideology in the years 69-71; cf. Darwall-Smith (1996) 55-68.

⁵⁰⁴ See above, 198-200.

inscription's mention of *precationes*.⁵⁰⁵ Martial often composed poems alluding to the 238 dedication of imperial building projects, and was a resident of the Quirinal, making frequent mention of landmarks there. Therefore, Palmer suggests that we might assign the year 88 as the dedication date for the *Arae* (based on *Ep.* 5.7's possible reference to the Secular Games of that year), an idea that seems highly plausible, although a number of other dates have been proposed.⁵⁰⁶ In a larger sense, however, the poem's themes of religious renewal, intimately connected with the physical rebuilding of the cityscape, were a pervasive feature of Domitian's agenda throughout his reign.

Site-specific veneration of deities credited with protection of fire had long occurred through dedications at local shrines to *Stata Mater*, while ancient shrines like the *Volcanal* and the Temple of the Nymphs for centuries had been the focus of citywide propitiation on the day of the *Volcanalia*.⁵⁰⁷ The Domitianic *Arae*, however, represent a new phenomenon. They elevate the status of dedications *incendiorum arcendorum causa* from the localized level to a matter of imperial concern, with an architecturally and rhetorically unified program of monuments dispersed around the city. They re-configure

⁵⁰⁵ Palmer (unpublished notes).

⁵⁰⁶ The *pila tiburtina* mentioned as a landmark of the Quirinal by Martial (*Ep.* 7.62) is suggested by Rodríguez Almeida ("Ara Incendii Neroniani" in *LTUR* 1993) as a reference to the *Ara* found *in situ* on the *Alta Semita*; Rodríguez Almeida further argues that *Ep.* 7.62's concern with boundaries and street frontages echoes the language of the inscription associated with the *Arae*, and on this basis posits a dedication date in conjunction with Domitian's edict of 92 forbidding the encroachment of shops and services upon streets in Rome. Cline (2009) has recently proposed that the altars may have been dedicated in conjunction with Domitian's public celebration of the *Ara Pacis* in 86 CE. For further discussion, see appendix (A).

⁵⁰⁷ On *Stata Mater*: see above at Ch. 1, 49-50. For lustration in conjunction with *Stata Mater*, see *CIL* 6. 766.

the very ancient holiday of the Volcanalia to include a new ritual prompted by, and so 239 in some sense commemorative of, the destruction of 64.⁵⁰⁸

Ultimately it is in the capacity of Rome's rebuilder and protector that Domitian seems to be inviting specific comparison with Nero in the inscriptions of the *Arae*. Veneration of Vulcan offered a crucial nexus of these two roles, presenting firstly a threat to be warded off, and failing that, an opportunity to rebuild and provide in a time of crisis. Gerard Capdeville, in his synthetic study of Vulcan, identifies an early mythic association between Vulcan and the rulers of Rome, as well as a particular obsession with the god at Rome and Ostia (significantly, where most of Rome's food supply was stored), which began only in the early Empire.⁵⁰⁹ Along with the grain supply, the role of the *princeps* as Rome's symbolic protector was crucial to imperial self fashioning. In the imperial period Rome did not fear foreign armies, but rather the destructions wrought by civil conflict and conflagration, claiming a role as the city's protector from these forces was a major source of political capital.⁵¹⁰

The site of one of the *Arae* on the Quirinal, well outside the posited destruction zone of the 64 fire itself, is significant in this light.⁵¹¹ Whether Nero chose the location of the altar on the Quirinal or Domitian did, its proximity to the temple of Quirinus, a tutelary deity with martial associations (and the deified form of Rome's first king) is surely a significant choice. Placing an altar so close to the seat of Rome's symbolic warrior-king, then, serves to forge a link between the leader's ancient role as a military

⁵⁰⁸ On the Volcanalia: Varro, *LL*. 6.20; Festus 276, 3 (Lindsay). On the Volcanalia as a substitution rite, see Turcan (2001) 77.

⁵⁰⁹ Capdeville (1995) 7-95, esp. 15-16, and 418.

⁵¹⁰ See introduction and Chapter 1, 31-50.

⁵¹¹ On the boundaries of the 64 fire: see Appendix (A).

protector and the current emphasis on his ability to maintain the city's security 240
through urban management and fire prevention. Domitian, even if he did not chose the
site, certainly must have seen its advantages in this respect: he carried out a major
religious re-organization of the Quirinal, restoring the Temple of Quirinus and converting
his own family's former home into the Templum Gentis Flaviae.

Burnt Offerings: Conclusions from the Altars of Vulcan.

Domitian was challenged to present himself as competent in facing the aftermath of the
fire of 80 – yet another urban crisis with cosmic dimensions. A capable administrator
who had inherited a healthy treasury from Titus' conquests, which he apparently
augmented with aggressive taxation, Domitian also needed to prove his capacity to
provide security from divine threats. Images associated with the Flavian rebuilding of the
city and manipulation of Nero's portraiture, as well as a carefully cultivated hostile
historiographic tradition, have been interrogated in recent years for the ways in which
they reflect memories of Nero's reign, including the fire and its lasting impression upon
the cityscape.⁵¹²

The Domitianic inscription invites comparison with Nero through mention of
events *Neronianis temporibus*: without accusing him of starting the fire, it still triggers
the recollection of his legendary behavior during the calamity. In a highly oblique and
nuanced fashion, then, Domitian seems here not to be attacking Nero outright, but rather
positioning himself as a leader in response to the threat of fire; in so doing he places
himself in favorable comparison with his predecessor's attempts to do likewise.

⁵¹² Elsner in Elsner and Masters (1994: 2-8); Sablayrolles (1994); Champlin (2003: 43-44, 85-101); Varner (2004: 10-11); Flower (2006: 197-232, esp. 212-222).

Domitian, in re-formulating both the altars vowed by Nero and the ritual of the Volcanalia, sends a message that is as much about the all-important role of the emperor in providing security and sustenance for Rome as it is about the threat of fire. The best-known ritual activity associated with the Volcanalia was the throwing of live fish into a bonfire, and offering which Varro tells us is *pro se* (“in place of oneself” or “to redeem oneself”);⁵¹³ “in place of human souls” Festus says, more precisely.⁵¹⁴ In this way, people contented the god of fire with a substitution offering to avoid suffering from his incendiary ire.⁵¹⁵ Domitian’s altars seem to have aimed at similar redemption: symbolically, the *princeps* acted to free Rome from its past – Nero, “his” fire, and the wrath of the gods – yet he ingeniously built the perpetuation of its memory into the sacred landscape and ritual calendar, casting himself as the city’s redeemer from the continual threat of destruction and oblivion. The altars write Nero’s memory, and that of 64 fire, into multiple locations in Rome’s sacred space, as well as into the ritual time of the city’s future, playing on time, space and memory in a way that is distinct from any other monument in Rome.

The fulfillment of a vow long neglected, the provisions made against the risk of another disastrous fire, and Domitian’s monumental efforts in Rome more generally may be seen as the culmination of the Flavian agenda for the city, and as a final closing of the book in a turbulent chapter in Rome’s history. Ironically, however, the monuments as they stood in Tacitus’ time bore evidence of yet another revision of imperial history: on at least two of the monuments, Domitian’s name has been chiseled out, presumably as

⁵¹³ Varro, *LL*.6.20.

⁵¹⁴ Festus 276, 3.

⁵¹⁵ On the Volcanalia as a substitution rite, see Turcan (2001:77).

part of the sanctions on his memory in the aftermath of his assassination. The annual 242 rituals celebrated at the *Arae*, which in concert with the veneration of Vulcan also would have renewed the memory of Nero's disgrace and dynastic failure, seem to have continued at least as late as the Antonine period: yet now they also highlighted Domitian's own downfall, and the end of the Flavian era. The altars, while claiming the power to prevent another disastrous fire, also stood as a constant reminder of the ever-present threat of renewed destruction. In time, they also became implicated in the collapse of Rome's first two dynasties: in at least one example of the altar inscription, Domitian's name appears to have been chiseled out in a likely instance of memory sanctions following his assassination. Tacitus' perpetuation of the memory of Neronian disaster, in a sense, makes good on these same threats, creating a cyclical pattern of destruction that eventually implicates not just Nero and the Julio-Claudian dynasty, but the entire structure of the Roman principate.

The Tacitean Political Landscape as Destruction Zone.

Tacitus' account of the Julio-Claudian dynasty, the *Annals*, provides a striking confirmation of the ideological centrality of fire at Rome, both as a metaphor for political conflict and as actual catalyst for political change. For imaginations already shaped by spectacles and narratives of disaster, the landscape created by an actual catastrophe, and the behavior observed as it unfolds, cannot but be reminiscent of the most breathtaking scenes calamity from literature and art.⁵¹⁶ Tacitus, I would argue, exploits this dynamic, positioning his references to fires, both real and imagined, to lead up to the actualization

⁵¹⁶ A point much commented on in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, cf. Žižek (2012) 19. See introduction, 14ff.

in 64 of these proleptic iterations. In this section, after some general remarks about 243 the rhetorical use of fire elsewhere in the Tacitean corpus, I discuss three different aspects of Tacitus' proleptic technique, all of which seem to target the Great Fire of 64.

Tacitus' work illustrates the full potential of the incendiary motif for an author constructing an ideologically charged narrative. The affinity between extended historical chronicles and epic poetry, though long recognized, has received increasing scrutiny in recent years.⁵¹⁷ Moreover, Nero's notorious proclivity for poetry, and particularly for destruction narratives, becomes an attractive target for Tacitus in his historiographic account of the last Julio-Claudian's life and career.⁵¹⁸ Tacitus' near-contemporary Quintilian placed the two genres in close proximity in a famous remark, arguing that like poetry, history is written *ad narrandum, non ad probandum* ("to tell a story, not to prove a point").⁵¹⁹ Tacitus has long been recognized for the way in which he constantly develops and refines his vocabulary, a process that involves common and unusual words alike.⁵²⁰ In the final books of the extant *Annals*, Tacitus' use of metaphorical terms

⁵¹⁷ Seminal studies for Tacitus include Schmaus (1887) on Vergilian correspondences in Tacitus, and Draeger (1882) more generally on Tacitean style and syntax. See also Adams (1972); Goodyear (1968) (=1992).

⁵¹⁸ In the decades prior to Tacitus' career the genres of poetry in history were already colliding in memorably fashion, forming implicit condemnations of leadership and ideology: Lucan's *Bellum Civile* is one such example, and his lost *de Incendio Urbis* is likely to have been another; Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis*, meanwhile, took aim at a more specific ideological problem, the deification of the late emperor Claudius. In the case of the *Apocolocyntosis*, the blending of genres was gained impact in part from the satirized Claudius' own noted penchant for writing history. See Damon (2010a).

⁵¹⁹ Quint. 10.1.31.

⁵²⁰ Tacitus has long been recognized for the way in which he constantly develops and refines his vocabulary, a process that involves common and unusual words alike. Oakley (2009) 195-196. See also (e.g.) Degel (1907); Syme (1958) 711-45; Adams (1972) and (1973). Detailed treatment of Tacitean style and lexical refinement, especially on archaisms and poeticisms, may be found in the commentaries of Gudeman (1914), Ogilvie and Richmond (1967), Heubner (1963-82) and (1984), Goodyear (1972) and (1981), Martin and Woodman (1989), Woodman and Martin (1996), Damon (2003) and Ash (2007b). Fletcher's work on Tacitus' vocabulary, especially

involving fire are especially notable for the ways in which they evolve through their 244 context and nuance in the work as a whole.

Moreover, although a number of scholars have highlighted the ways in which Nero's earlier behavior foreshadows the fire and seems to implicate him in the event itself, a synthesis of all these instances (starting with his entry into public life in Rome in Books 11 and 12) brings the strategy into stark relief, revealing a scope and a clarity of purpose behind the sequence which is more self-consciously literary than has previously been recognized. This sequence is related, in turn to the series of lesser disasters faced by previous emperors, which Tacitus carefully embeds into his narrative. Finally, Tacitus' account of the 64 fire is a culmination of epic proportions, effectively framing the Great Fire as a condemnation not so much of Nero as an individual instigator of the destruction, but rather of the imperial system writ large.

Political Violence and Incendiary Metaphor in the *Histories*.

To grasp the full range of Tacitus' pointed manipulation of fire-related image and metaphor in the *Annals*, we must establish that Tacitus, like Vergil, was fully capable of deploying this vocabulary towards a variety of artistic and ethical goals. Tacitus' historical narratives forge a series of links between popular unrest, political violence and fires both literal and metaphorical. Tacitus' *Histories*, which describe the chaotic year of Four Emperors and the rise of the Flavian dynasty, stands in a complex allusive

Fletcher (1964) also develop this point. For the development of vocabulary into Tacitus' final writings, Goodyear (1968) is especially useful (so Oakley, *loc. cit.*). Joseph (2012) shows a particular sensitivity to the shadings of literal and metaphorical in Tacitus' *Histories*, noting (e.g.) the shift in terms like military terms like *impugnari* and *ingredior/adgredior*; see Joseph (2012), 174-175.

relationship with the events and images of Julio-Claudian era detailed in the *Annals* at 245 a later point in Tacitus' career. In the *Histories*, Tacitus records frequent outbreaks of incendiary violence in the series of conflicts between leaders vying for control of Rome in the years 68-9 CE. The *Annals*, in allusively inviting re-readings of the subsequent events chronicled in the *Histories*, becomes an inherently proleptic project.⁵²¹ Yet again, a number of reminiscences of the Julio-Claudian period, and especially of Nero's rule, appear to have been deliberately embedded within the post-Neronian narrative of the *Histories*.

The use in the *Histories* of incendiary metaphors to characterize those most susceptible to (or responsible for) political chaos becomes a suggestive and effective tool in directing the reader to link these concepts together, especially since it becomes clear that political agitation often leads to outbreaks of actual conflagration. For example, the burning of the Capitoline, an emblematic event later described (at *Hist.* 3.72) as "the most lamentable and shameful" episode in the history of the city, is accorded pride of place in Tacitus' proem, in which he describes the depredations visited upon Roman and other Italian cities in the decades prior to the current regime: (*Hist.* 1.2) *haustae aut obrutae urbes, fecundissima Campania ora; et urbs incendiis vastata, consumptis antiquissimis delubris, ipso Capitolio civium manibus incenso* ("...cities in Campania's richest plains were devoured and overwhelmed; Rome was wasted by conflagrations, its oldest

⁵²¹ The *Annals*, a project Tacitus tackled at the end of his career, details the Julio-Claudian era from 14 CE up to (presumably, since the final section is lost) Nero's death in 68. The Year of Four Emperors (68-69 CE) and the Flavian dynasty, spanning from 69 to 96 CE, is covered in the *Histories*. Thus every event, image and character in the *Annals* cannot but be read as a forerunner or contributing factor to the instability of Nero's final years and the chaos of 68 and 69. Woodman (1988) offers fundamental discussion of Tacitus' pointed use of *topoi* and strategic redeployment of Livy, Sallust, and others (including his own prior work) at 168-79, 186-90.

sanctuaries consumed, the Capitol itself torched by citizen hands.”) The literal 246
devastation of the proem soon finds its cause in the metaphorical “conflagration” of
citizen unrest and military agitation in the year 68, activity which will ultimately
culminate in the burning of the Capitol in 69.

As tensions between factions after Nero’s death build up at 1.24, Tacitus singles
out one particularly culpable agent of destruction: *Flagrantibus iam militum animis velut
faces addiderat Maevius Pudens, e proximis Tigellini*. “To the minds of the soldiers
(already ignited) Maevius Pudens, one of Tigellinus’ close relatives, added (as it were)
firebrands.”⁵²² Tigellinus, of course, famously owned the property on which the Great
Fire of 64 mysteriously broke out once more after an apparent reprieve.⁵²³ The choice of
words here, then, seems to suggest that the ideologically incendiary Maevius is following
in his notorious kinsman’s footsteps, constructing the political devastation of 68-9 CE as
a second “Neronian” destruction of Rome.

Tacitus quickly follows this metaphorical provocation with the invocation of the
figure perhaps to be associated above all others with Roman conflagration. Describing
the spread of disaffection and mutiny that Maevius Pudens and others were encouraging
among Galba’s men: (*Hist.* 1.25.3) *erant quos memoria Neronis ac desiderium prioris
licentiae accenderet* (“There were some whom Nero’s memory, and the longing for once-
permissive attitudes, inflamed”). Here Nero, reborn as a personified memory, rises to
visit further destruction upon Rome, with characteristically incendiary effect.⁵²⁴ It is with
this understanding of the programmatic importance in Tacitus of fire’s metaphorical

⁵²² On this section of Tacitus generally see Ash (1999) 25-30.

⁵²³ See Ch. 2, 133ff.

⁵²⁴ Instances of personified memory noted, but not elaborated upon, by Meyer (1884) 21-6.

coloring, now undeniably tinged with Nero's memory, that we must read the text of 247 the *Annals*.

Within the more extended narrative of the *Annals*, Tacitus juxtaposes actual outbreaks of fire with metaphorical imagery associating the behavior of historical actors with fire, flames, or burning.⁵²⁵ The discussion below constitutes more of an evocative tour of compelling examples than an exhaustive study; search tools make the formation of a comprehensive list of every use of a term the work of a moment, but identifying the instances most illustrative of a point, or tracing a significant progression through the accumulation of moments associated with a given word, remains a demanding and rewarding task.⁵²⁶ As we will see, there is a discernible shift from metaphorical to literal uses as the Neronian disaster draws near. In a pointed inversion, characters representing potential challenges to current leadership, killed indiscriminately throughout the *Annals*, are often figured as fire snuffed out (*extincti*) - a fate that soon extends to family lines and collective memory.

Metaphorical Fires and Actualized Threats in the *Annals*.

⁵²⁵ The words most often used in metaphorical expressions are forms of *flagrare*, *ardere*, *ardescere*, *accendere*, and *incendere*; forms from *urere* are used much more sparingly, while nouns such as *flamma* and *ignis* are used primarily in literal senses. For the sake of brevity only the first and last of these terms are discussed in depth here, but preliminary examination of the examples of *ardere*, *ardescere* and *accendere* suggest they also have great promise.

⁵²⁶ The search engine used here is that of the Packard Humanities Institute (<http://latin.packhum.org>); a word search for the stem *incen-* yields all forms and can be limited by author and work, as well as appended to a search for a related word; e.g. *#incen* [Tac: Ann] yields 25 instances: fifteen of these occur before the fire narrative in Book 15. Of these fifteen examples, five are literal and ten figurative. The five literal instances all describe deliberate incendiary acts of warfare.

As noted in Chapter 1, the characterization in Augustan literature of the foreign leaders Hannibal and Dido as metaphorically incendiary figures owes much to the characterizations of decidedly more contemporary Roman political agents – specifically, to the characterizations of Catiline found in Sallust and Cicero.⁵²⁷ Tacitus was well-equipped to manipulate this range of vocabulary in the historiographic tradition, adding his own shadings and refinements to the terminology employed to describe leaders at Rome; he was also able to take advantage of the added resonance such characterizations had acquired from their appropriations by Vergil, Livy, Lucan, and Seneca.⁵²⁸ Moreover, just as Vergil and Livy were able to use these terms (in describing Dido and Hannibal, respectively) in proleptic tension with the reader’s presumed awareness of the fiery fate that awaited Carthage, Tacitus is able to use his incendiary metaphors in the *Annals* against the backdrop of his readers’ presumed awareness of the colossal destruction that awaited Rome in 64 and was renewed in 69.⁵²⁹ While readers might also have been able to see in such references fires within living memory (the fire of 80, for instance, or the everyday fires Juvenal deems such a nuisance), within the world encompassed by the narrative of the *Annals*, the 64 destruction inarguably looms large.

⁵²⁷ See Introduction: “Incendiary Leaders and Externalized Fires” (21ff). O’Gorman (2007) remarks on the fire imagery that these authors use in their delineation of Catiline’s passionate nature, which, along with terms like *cupiditas* (desire) and *libido* (lust) work towards the impression that his character contains a mixture of good and bad elements.

⁵²⁸ As Wiseman (2002: 359) remarks, Tacitus inhabits a “world in which prophecy, poetry, history and moral exhortation were not always thought of as separate conceptual categories.”

⁵²⁹ For discussion of sustained metaphors in Tacitus see Woodman (1998) 190-217, (2006) and (2010). On metaphor and poetics in Tacitus: see especially Santoro L’Hoir (2006) 77-100. On Tacitus’ affinity for Vergil: Schmaus (1887), Woodman (2012); Joseph (2010) and (2012); Pagán (2002). See also Ash (2002: esp. 268-272). On Vergil in Tacitus see also (after Pagán 2002): Walker (1952) 11, (1991); Syme (1958) 357; Goodyear (1981) 108-9; Tarrant (1997) 69-70. See also Putnam (1989); Baxter (1971) and (1972). For “substantive imitation” of other authors by Tacitus, see Woodman (1979) and (2012), as well as Joseph (2010) and (2012). For Tacitean allusion in general: Lauletta (1998).

The verb *flagrare*, one of the most extravagantly metaphorical words Tacitus' 249 vocabulary, has from its first appearance in the *Annals* strong connotations of destructive excess and imperial dissembling.⁵³⁰ Tacitus describes how Augustus went about grooming his grandsons Gaius and Lucius for the principate when they were still quite young: (*Ann.*1.3.2) *necdum posita puerili praetexta principes iuventutis appellari destinari consules specie recusantis flagrantissime cupiverat* ("he was entirely aflame with desire for them to be called leaders of the youth and awarded consulships, when they had not yet even given up the toga of boyhood").⁵³¹ The theme is next developed in a famous and pithy sentence describing the outbreak of violence amongst the troops stationed on the border at Pannonia: (*Ann.*1.22.1) *Flagrantior inde vis, plures seditioni duces* ("thereafter violence's fire intensified, and the uprising's leaders multiplied").⁵³² Leadership and metaphorical conflagration are repeatedly thrown together in the context of sedition and faction during Nero's reign, with an added sense of threat from the implied invasion of female ambition.

Like the passion for Poppaea that renders Nero ever more "aflame" (*flagrantior in dies amore Poppaeae*, *Ann.* 14.1.1), Agrippina's rampant usurpation of power is portrayed with a decidedly fire-friendly vocabulary. In describing the animosity of

⁵³⁰ Arguably positive connotations are attached to the uses at *Ann.* 14.39.8 and 16.26.13. Yet, as these refer (respectively) to energetic military opponents of Roman imperial power; and to Arulenus Rusticus, whose biography of the Stoic dissident Thræsea Paetus will later lead to his execution for treason and the incineration of his works. Therefore, they are consistent with the overall ill portents associated with the term. Literal uses occur at *Ann.* 4.64.10, 15.22.6 and 15.39.11

⁵³¹ The word perhaps already carries strong ethical associations over from the *Histories*, where it is used in negative characterizations such as the assertion that (at 2.31.1) *minus Vitellii ignavae voluptates quam Othonis flagrantissimae libidines timebantur*.

⁵³² The memorable phrase *flagrantior inde vis*, a clear turning point in the text of Book 1 from the Augustan past to the Tiberian period that occupies the first four books of the *Annales*, is later cleverly echoed to reflect the growing threat of Nero's passion for his mistress Poppaea at *Annals* 14.1, when he is described *flagrantior in dies amore Poppaeae*.

Agrippina towards Nero's retainers (and perceived rivals for his attention and favor), 250 Seneca and Burrus, Tacitus (at *Ann.* 13.2.2) evokes her animalistic aggression (*ferocia*), adding that she was "afame with all the desires of wicked autocracy" (*cunctis malae dominationis cupidinibus flagrans*).⁵³³ The figuration of Agrippina as a *dux femina*, along with the liberal application of Bacchic, stage-inflected terms and images, finds answer in the imagery that later characterizes the anti-Neronian, Fury-like figure of Boudicca.⁵³⁴ The clustering of stage-inflected vocabulary in the Boudiccan uprising at *Ann.* 14.32, as Santoro L'Hoir further argues, "prepares the reader for their recurrence in various combinations in Book 15 [the narrative of the Great Fire] ... as Nero's flagrant theatricality and prodigality combust literally into flames around him."⁵³⁵ Both portraits ultimately target Nero as an incendiary leader, much the way the torch-wielding Ghost of Agrippina in the *Octavia* evoked Nero's alleged responsibility for the 64 fire. Likewise, the interplay between the literal and metaphorical instances of various fire-related terms in the *Annals* targets both the inherent theatricality and the imminent efficacy of imperial rhetoric at Rome.

The verb *flagrare* in Tacitus, as I discuss above, is overwhelmingly metaphorical in usage, and its instances consistently create characterizations of leaders with destructive

⁵³³ For discussion of this passage as part of Tacitus' larger strategy of negative characterization see Traub (1953).

⁵³⁴ As Santoro L'Hoir remarks, the vocabulary Tacitus uses to describe Boudicca's revolt recalls Livy's *matronae* in a state of Bacchic ferment. Santoro L'Hoir (1994, 9 n.15). On the gendered rhetoric of the Bacchanalia generally: Santoro L'Hoir (1992) 89-99 and 120-146. Further discussion of the negative characterization of female power in Tacitus' Tiberian "hexad" provided, with bibliography, by Kraus (2009) 104-115.

⁵³⁵ At *Ann.* 14.32: *simulacrum, furorem, canebant, theatrum, speciem, and effigies*. *Ann.* 15 echoes the terms of the revolt in Book 14 (in particular) at 29, 33, 34, 37-41, 43, 44; after Santoro L'Hoir (1994: 9 n.15).

personalities, or describe violent situations such as wars or civil agitation.⁵³⁶ Perhaps 251 the most powerful shift between metaphor and reality comes with Tacitus' manipulation of *incendium*. In the earlier books of the *Annals*, Tacitus avoids the noun *incendium* in narrating any fires described in his text, even large ones such as the Caelian fire under Tiberius.⁵³⁷ At the same time, metaphorical use of the verb *incendere* in *Annals* 1-14 is liberal.⁵³⁸ Consistently conveying nefarious import, the metaphorical "inflammation" of various parties prepares us to see the literal conflagration to come as a physical manifestation of the ideological harm Rome had been suffering throughout the *Annals*.

An early example of the metaphorical power of *incendere* comes at *Ann.* 1.23.1

⁵³⁶ e.g. *Ann.* 15.45.1 (*Otho...flagrantissimus in amicitia Neronis habebatur*); *Ann.* 1.22.1 (*flagrantior inde vis*); *Ann.* 2.41.3 (*flagrantibus plebis studiis*). A complete list can be generated by searching on the Packard Humanities Latin website (<http://latin.packhum.org>) with the parameters *flagr* and [Tac:Ann]. This will include compounds, e.g. *conflagrare*. Of the eighteen appearances of *-flagrare* in the extant *Annals*, only three are literal, and these appear in passages which seem to emphasize the relationship between emperors' public image and disaster in highly marked ways: the key term *effigies* appears in the first two instances, and the even more pointedly theatrical *canere* in the last. Literal instances of *flagrare* are as follows: the Caelian fire in which reportedly spared only the image (*cunctis circum flagrantibus... sola Tiberii effigies... mansisset*) of Tiberius at 4.64.3; the fire which, in an inversion of the Caelian "miracle," melted the statue of Nero in his new gymnasium at 15.22.2 (*gymnasium ictu fulminis conflagravit effigiesque in eo Neronis ad informe aes liquefacta*); finally, the damning rumor of Nero's alleged performance of his song of Troy during the height of the 64 fire (*pervaserat rumor ipso tempore flagrantis urbis inisse eum domesticam scaenam et cecinisse Troianum excidium*). These literal instances, with their value-laden implications, suggest that the metaphorical uses of the verb are, in a sense, provocations to the literal destructions that follow.

⁵³⁷ *Ann.* 4.64.1; here, the suggestively personified phrase *ignis violentia* is used instead.

⁵³⁸ The lone instance of the noun *incendium* in the pre-Neronian books comes at *Ann.* 2.52.12 *Mazippa levi cum copia incendia et caedis et terrorem circumferret*. Mazippa's use of the phrase *incendia et caedis* in Tacitus invokes the tactics of urban mobs in Cicero's invective, here in pointed contrast to Tacfarinas' forces who are described as a more traditional military force on the Roman model; the only other time the phrase is used in the *Annals* is at 14.26.1 *quosque nobis aversos animis [Corbulo] cognoverat, caedibus et incendiis perpopulatus possessionem Armeniae usurpabat*. The only literal instances of *incendere* as a verb also come outside of Rome: at 3.46.4 when the leader of the Aeduan uprising, Sacrovir and his followers commit suicide together and burn their villa refuge around them (*incensa super villa omnis cremavit*) and at 4.25.1, when a report on the enemy Numidians' disadvantaged position at Auzea, a "half-ruined stronghold, which they had at some point torched themselves" (*castellum semirutum, ab ipsis quondam incensum*) leads the Romans into a surprise raid and decisive rout of the Numidians.

the rabble-rousing Vibulenus enlivens a speech inciting Roman troops to mutiny with 252 theatrical display: *incendebat haec fletu et pectus atque os manibus verberans*, (“these words he set aflame with tears, beating his face and chest with his hands”).⁵³⁹ Likewise, reports of Germanicus’ illness are quickly transformed into popular accusations of foul play and outbursts of protest against Tiberius and the ruling family; when news of Germanicus’ death follows, it so inflames popular opinion (*Ann.* 2.82.10, *hos vulgi sermones audita mors adeo incendit*) that official business must be suspended even before a decree to that effect can be issued.⁵⁴⁰ Thus, when the historian Cremutius Cordus defends his work, with rhetorical question “I’m not inflaming the people with harangues towards the cause of civil war, now am I?” (*Ann.* 4.35.6, *num..belli civilis causa populum per contiones incendo?*). The burning of Cremutius Cordus’ historical books provokes Tacitus to an open scorn (*at Ann.* 4.35.5) not unlike that expressed by Cordus in his speech. Thus, two ironies present themselves to us in Cordus’ speech: the obviously pointed choice of words on the part of one whose writings were to be consigned to the flames of censorship, and the more muted and infinitely more distressing irony that the potential for civil war between partisans of near-equal status is long gone.

In fact, the influence of an author to persuade the public at large to concerted action is perhaps gone by Cordus’ time, as well: the power to “inflamm” a crowd with angry words in the Tiberian *Annals* belongs to petty *provocateurs* like Vibulenus and the

⁵³⁹ Woodman (2006: 303-29) identifies a series of disease metaphors in this passage. This identification, however, need not obviate the possibility that some of the language is working both on the specific medical level Woodman argues and on the more general, fire-related level advanced by Goodyear (1972) 194-314. Woodman’s insistence (*loc cit.*) on claiming terms like *flagrans*, *vis*, and *incendere* as the specific property of medical discourse seems both forced and unnecessary.

⁵⁴⁰ On Vergilian overtones in the Tacitean treatment of Germanicus, see Bews (1972-3).

unnamed promulgators of *sermo vulgaris* at (*Ann.* 2.28). Nevertheless, the power to 253 “extinguish” the memory of those who resisted, Tacitus insists, is still beyond the grasp even of the emperor. In his own comment on the episode, Tacitus pointedly employs a loaded fire metaphor: *quo magis socordiam eorum inridere libet qui praesenti potentia credunt exstingui posse etiam sequentis aevi memoriam*, (“All the more, then, do we enjoy mocking the dull-wittedness of those who believe that future’s memory can be snuffed out with their current influence.”)⁵⁴¹ When the vocabulary of fire is applied to individuals rather than collective groups, it tends to be equally suggestive of public discourse.

Fire is a major component of stock descriptions associated with tyrants, whose grandiose ambitions and susceptibility to their passions, as well as to the influence of rumors and dubious counsel have a corrosive effect on their abilities as leaders.⁵⁴² A fine example comes in *Annals* 4 (39.1), when Sejanus, described as *nimia fortuna socors et muliebri insuper cupidine incensus* (“wits blunted by excessive good fortune and moreover, inflamed by woman’s desire”) composes the letter to Tiberius that initiates his

⁵⁴¹ Translations of *socordia* are difficult, encoding at once a sense of dull-heartedness, slow-wittedness, and complacency, which (at least in Tacitus) is often a by-product of a too-sudden ascent to power or an unearned success. See also the mental sluggishness that Calgacus identifies as the check to the progress of the Boudiccan rebels at after their incendiary success in *Agr.* 31.4: *Brigantes femina duce exurere coloniam, expugnare castra, ac nisi felicitas in socordiam vertisset, exuere iugum potuere* (“The Brigantians, under a *dux femina*, reduced Colchester to ashes and overran the Roman encampments. Had their jubilation not changed **into complacency**, they could have cast off their yoke”) (trans. Santoro L’Hoir 1994: 7). See also *Ann.* 4.39.1, where *socordia* and *incendium*, unite to characterize Sejanus’ power-drunk ambition (*nimia fortuna socors*) and woman-inspired scheming (*muliebri insuper cupidine incensus*).

⁵⁴² On Tacitus’ use of the *topoi* of the tyrant for the Julio-Claudians, Keitel (1984) cites Jerome (1923) ch. 17, 360-80, Walker (1962) 204-14 and Dunkle (1971) 12-20. See also now Keitel (2007) on Vitellius as a stock tyrant in the *Histories*. Andrew Riggsby also made a number of important points about the metaphorically “fiery” features of a tyrant in a recent talk, entitled “Seneca: *De ira*: Tyrants, Fire, and Dangerous Things”, paper delivered at “Latin Philosophy: a Conference at Columbia University,” March 24, 2012.

slide into ruin. Claudius, likewise, is described upon learning of Messalina's 254 infidelities at 11.35.2 as *incensumque et ad minas erumpentem* ("inflamed and bursting with threats"), a description that echoes Octavia's characterization of his reaction: (*Oct.* 265-6) *incendit ira principis pectus truci/ caedem in nefandam*, "it inflamed the heart of the *princeps* with harsh wrath, culminating in unspeakable slaughter."⁵⁴³

Thus, when the Great Fire strikes in *Annals* 15, the *flagrare, incendium, incendere* and related terms are firmly associated not simply with actual incendiary outbreaks and the imperial effort to suppress dissent through book burning, but with potentially ruinous political opposition and with figures who allow emotions, rumor, paranoia and jealousy to dominate their decisions.⁵⁴⁴ At this point, a significant change emerges from the text: *incendium* consumes Rome literally, and becomes equally pervasive in Tacitus' narrative (forms of *incendium*, seen only once previously in the extant text, occur eight times between 15.38 and 15.44). In concert with the arrival of the fire on the scene, metaphorical *incendium* disappears from the scene, apparently subsumed into this actual destruction which the previous sequence of metaphors now appears to have anticipated.⁵⁴⁵ In Books 1-14 of the *Annals*, threats to Rome's safety and the despoilment of its civic institutions were characterized with fire language, and so fire metaphors became highly invested with negative ethical values. Thus in Book 15, the fire itself becomes a physical

⁵⁴³ See also the behavior of lesser players in the story, e.g. the impetuous tribune Sagitta, who at *Ann.*13.44.3 murders his disaffected lover after convincing her to spend one last night with him: *et pars tenebrarum libidini seposita; ex qua quasi incensus nihil metuentem ferro transverberat*, even more disreputably, a slave at 14.42 kills his master, the urban prefect Pedianus Secundus "either because his freedom was denied him despite a negotiated contract, or inflamed by [the master's] love for a male prostitute" (*negata libertate cui pretium pepigerat sive amore exoleti incensus*, 14.42.1).

⁵⁴⁴ On the importance of Rumor in Tacitus: Gibson (1998). See now also Hardie (2012) Chapter 8.

⁵⁴⁵ These instances as listed on the Packard Humanities database (not the Heubner pages) *Ann.*15.38.10, 15.40.1, 15.40.7, 15.41.11, 15.41.14, 15.43.2, 15.44.19, 15.44.9.

manifestation of the damage to Roman society done by political manipulators, 255
volatile crowds, and unstable leaders. The Great Fire in Tacitus simply renders in
tangible form the devastation of the political landscape that had begun long ago.

When the final instance of *incendium* appears in the surviving text, it is highly
charged: the captured conspirator Subrius Flavius declares defiantly under torture that
Nero is a *parricida matris et uxoris, auriga et histrio et incendiarius*, (“murderer of
father, mother and wife, a charioteer and stage actor and incendiary,” *Ann.* 15.67.2). If we
understand the extent to which Nero functions as the logical extreme of a diseased
system, however, this becomes, if not a “smoking gun” in the hunt for the truth about the
origins of the 64 disaster (as some analyses have it), then a broader condemnation of the
activities associated with the concept of *incendium*.⁵⁴⁶ Subrius Flavius’ words certainly are
mean to assert his suspicion of Nero’s involvement in the fire. Moreover, however, they
trigger our memory of all the behavior Tacitus has marked out with variations on
incendere: vicious betrayals, shameless acts of demagoguery and paranoia, and selfish
disregard for the city’s well-being.

It is thus not in an entirely flattering light that Tacitus presents the other
conspirators who joined the plot on Nero’s life (not with variations on *incendere*, but the

⁵⁴⁶ e.g. Champlin (2003) 185-6. Champlin rather perversely insists that the context of the
accusation, when the speaker is being tortured to death and has nothing to lose by hurling every
kind of abuse imaginable at Nero, actually supports the veracity of his claim rather than opposite.
In fact, the word is also a *hapax legomenon* in Suetonius: a crowd is accusing the deposed and
doomed Vitellius of being an *incendiarius* at *Vit.* 17.2. This actually suggests that it was a
common, if damning, epithet to hurl at any unpopular leader after a fire, and more generally
reinforces the kinship between Nero and Vitellius as “stock tyrants.” See e.g. Keitel (2007).
Tacitus’ account of the same moment from Vitellius’ life (*Hist.* 3.84.4-85) does not include this
particular piece of abuse. Oakley (2009) 206-10 provides a good comparison of the two passages,
although without remarking on this particular discrepancy.

alternate form *accendere*):⁵⁴⁷ albeit unintentionally, Lucan and his fellow conspirators 256 worsen Rome's political situation considerably. In characterizing Lucan's motivations for joining the Pisonian conspiracy, Tacitus states at 15.49.3: *Lucanum propriae causae accendebant, quod famam carminum eius premebat Nero prohibueratque ostentare, vanus adsimulatione* ("Lucan's personal motives inflamed him, for Nero tried to suppress the fame of his poems and had forbidden their publication, futile in his attempt at competition").⁵⁴⁸ As with Cremutius Cordus' ironic reference to his (lack of) power to "inflame" crowds to action, the verb *accendere* may also allude to several well known aspects of Lucan's style and life.

Puns are a prominent feature of Lucan's poetic style; characterizing him with a "fiery" image may have been especially piquant given Quintilian's famous dictum that Lucan was "fiery and excitable" and "more suited to oratory than poetry."⁵⁴⁹ Moreover, the most currently significant piece of poetry that was suffering from Nero's ban in the aftermath of the 64 fire might well have been lost *de Incendio Urbis*. This work, argued

⁵⁴⁷ Epicharis at *Ann.* 15.51.1; the military betrayers of Faenius Rufus at *Ann.* 15.66.1; and Lucan at *Ann.* 15.49.3.

⁵⁴⁸ The last point (*vanus adsimulatione*) concerning Nero's rivalry with Lucan gains strength from its final position, emphasizing the threat that Nero perceived his more gifted competitor to be. Likewise, the verb *accendebant* to animate Lucan's feelings gains added significance from the poetic subject matter of the sentence and the anxiety Lucan seems to have caused Nero, aligning the poet with the negative characteristics common to all the figures touched by metaphorical fire in the *Annals*. Of the 28 uses of *accendere* in the extant *Annals*, only two are literal: 14.9.2 (Agrippina's pyre) and 15.30.1 (Corbulo's altar during his pact with Tiridates). All the rest are used to denote human emotion and motivation for action.

⁵⁴⁹ Quintilian 1.10.90: *Lucanus ardens et concitatus et sententiis clarissimus, et magis oratoribus quam poetis imitandus*. For the nuances of Quintilian's statement see Ahl (2010) 1-16. On puns in Lucan: see, e.g., Henderson (1988) 128-131. In fact Nero had banned Lucan from performing as an orator, perhaps suggesting that his potential for (and investment in) political influence at Rome is rather greater than Tacitus chooses to acknowledge here. Lucan banned from the law courts: cf. *Ann.* 15.49.3; Dio 62.29.4; Vacca *Lucan*. Assertion of Lucan's political convictions is implied in Champlin's discussion of the poet's final years. See Champlin (2003) 319-320 n. 17; *contra* (e.g.) Griffin (1984) 159.

by many scholars to have blamed Nero for the fire, is also the most likely candidate to²⁵⁷ have been the *famosum carmen* harshly criticizing the emperor and his friends that Suetonius says helped to finalize the poet's breach with his former patron.⁵⁵⁰ Therefore, the outrage over suppressed work that "inflames" Lucan at *Ann.* 15.49 may create a sly allusion to the poet's most "incendiary" work. This impression gains strength from the more clearly proleptic use of *incendere* in the narrative of Cremutius Cordus.⁵⁵¹ Moreover, the final instance of *flagrare* in our surviving text of the *Annals* is pointedly proleptic and involves yet another persecuted author.

When a group of Stoic-leaning supporters of the senatorial dissident Thrasea Paetus meet to discuss ways to delay or prevent Nero's anticipated condemnation of Thrasea, Arulenus Rusticus, a young tribune "afame, and desirous of praise" (*Ann.* 16.26.4: *flagrans iuvenis, et cupidine laudis*) offers to veto the Senate's condemnation of Thrasea. His valiant offer to defend the elder statesman, however, is met not with praise, but with rebuke at the futility and emptiness of the gesture, and general dismay at the risks of engaging in any public display of courage at such a time.⁵⁵² Furthermore, in using the term *flagrans* to highlight Arulenus' youthful energy, Tacitus is also making a clever appeal to our literary and historical memory.

⁵⁵⁰ On *de Incendio Urbis*: see above, 194-5. On the *famosum carmen* (Suet. *Lucan*) see Ahl (1976) 350-351; followed by Champlin (2003) 319-320 n. 17. Fantham doubts that this is the correct match, suggesting instead it was a catalogue of the emperor's debaucherous deeds (*flagitia principis*) that Tacitus tells us the poet performed upon his death (*Ann.* 16.19.5); Fantham in Asso (2008) 7-9.

⁵⁵¹ Discussed above: 244-5.

⁵⁵² Additionally, this attention to Arulenus' youthful idealism again invites us to consider his entire biography: as Turpin reminds us, "in calling attention to Arulenus' youth Tacitus is perhaps alluding to the fact that Rusticus was later to write Thrasea's biography, and would be executed for doing so." Turpin (2008) 388-9; cf. Tac. *Agr.* 2.1; Suet. *Dom.* 10.3; Syme (1958) 298. As Turpin further points out, though, the readers of Tacitus' time "will have felt a particular connection with a man who, as Tacitus reminds them, was their contemporary."

In a famous passage of the *Agricola* (presumably already a classic, by the time *Annals* 15 was written), Tacitus recalls how Arulenus' *Life* of Thræsea Paetus, as well as that of Helvidius Priscus by Herrenius Senecio, had resulted in the death penalty for their authors, and the burning of their books (*Agricola* 2.1).⁵⁵³ As with Cremutius Cordus, the act of commemorating one political martyr made Arulenus another.⁵⁵⁴ For a careful reader of Tacitus's vocabulary in the *Annals*, however, the overwhelmingly negative set of other characters described with reference to *flagrare* is perhaps on its own enough to signal the misguided nature of the young tribune's ideas.

A Disaster Foretold: Neronian Imminence in the *Annals*.

In the *Annals* generally, Tacitus develops an initial targeting of Nero and "his" fire, which he constantly intensifies and refines in a series of repetitions that revisit and anticipate the narrative of 64. These moments, which grow in richness and specificity, are indebted to the long series of literary disasters on which his narrative draws. The anticipations of the 64 fire take two main forms. First, other iterations of Roman catastrophe in the *Annals*, such as the mysterious fire at Colonia Agrippinensis, serve as

⁵⁵³ Quite what is meant by this section of the text (if the text is correct) is a matter of some uncertainty, however, especially as it is introduced by the distancing (and temporally uncertain) *legimus* ("we read" or "we have read"). See e.g. Birley in Woodman, ed. (2009), 47 n. 1; for extended discussion of the problem see e.g. Turner (1997). Martin suggests that Rusticus' biography may in fact have provided a model for the detail and eulogistic tone of Paetus' characterization in *Annals* 16: see Martin (1981) 210.

⁵⁵⁴ Furthermore, as Freudenberg points out, "an air of risk is thereby attached to Tacitus own telling of martyr tales in his several published works," developing again the sense of cyclicality in Tacitus' narrative of personal and public disasters. Freudenberg (2001) 220-221. See also Sailor (2004: 149-150 and n.30.), who further remarks on the similarities between this passage of the *Agricola* and Tacitus' comment on the trial of Cremutius Cordus in the *Annals* at 4.35.5: *quo magis socordiam eorum inridere libet, qui praesenti potentia credunt exstingui posse etiam sequentis aevi memoriam*.

forerunners of the actual conflagration in which Rome's "history" will be consumed. 259
Second, in selectively presenting information about Nero's debut into public life, Tacitus in fact shapes him from childhood onward as a repository of memory evoking the Trojan destruction, the event which for all time he will be accused of "singing" while Rome burned.

Both these forms of foreshadowing serve, subtly but perhaps even more powerfully for their gradual accrual, as representations of then "slow-motion" disaster that was befalling Roman political life in the years chronicled in the *Annals*. By the time the year 64 rolls around, the "real" (that is, ideological) damage the state has long since been done, but calamities chronicled in nearly every extant book of the *Annals* remind the reader to, as it were, "watch this space" – 64 is coming. Tacitus includes constant reminders of the *princeps*' inability to control the misfortunes that befall Rome and the peoples under Roman protection.⁵⁵⁵

The pattern begins with the re-visitation of the Varian calamity in Book 1, and continues with incidents such as the amphitheater collapse at Fidenae and the Caelian Fire under Tiberius.⁵⁵⁶ As we reach Nero's own lifetime, the catastrophes seem to intensify and multiply. Large episodes such as the catastrophic failure of the dam on Lake Fucinus under Claudius and the incendiary, Bacchic-inflected Boudiccan revolt are

⁵⁵⁵ On the re-visitation of the site of *clades Variana*, (*Ann.* 1.61-2) see especially Pagán (1999) and (2002). On the Caelian Fire (*Ann.* 4.63), see Chapter 2, 126 ff. On Fidenae (*Ann.* 4.62.), see Woodman (1972). As Santoro L'Hoir (1994: 22-3) notes, during the episode on Lake Fucinus (*Ann.* 12.56-57), Tacitus sets female usurpation in a theatrical context to imply subtly that Agrippina's aberrant behavior at the festivities in some sense invites the disaster. This is a pattern Tacitus will repeat in presenting the decadent banquet of Tigellinus just before the outbreak of the Great Fire in Book 15.

⁵⁵⁶ Keitel (2010) shows how Tacitus studs the years in the *Annals* with accounts of disasters both short and long, in some instances taking advantage of natural events to advance another agenda, as in the ways in which the accounts of flooding in 15 CE "reinforce [Tacitus'] portrait of Tiberius as secretive, controlling, and suspicious."

echoed, anticipated, and framed by smaller incidents, like the burning of the new Gymnasium and the accidental fire on the Tiber which destroys much of Rome's grain supply.⁵⁵⁷ Though "unforeseen calamity" is an especially prominent recurring theme in the *Annals*, in literary terms the Great Fire of 64 is anything but unexpected. Tacitus does a thorough job of building suspense and anticipation of the fire.⁵⁵⁸

Let us examine one such episode from the Neronian *Annals*. When the allied German colony of the Ubii is struck with an unexpected evil (*Ann.* 13.57.5: *malo improviso adflicta est*): "Fires suddenly bursting from the earth seized everywhere on villas, crops, and settlements, and bore down on the very walls of the newly founded colony. Nor could they be extinguished by rainfall, or water from rivers, or any other moisture..."⁵⁵⁹ The inexplicable blaze is only countered when the Ubii attack the flames as if they were an invading army, with weapons, armor, and finally their own cloaks. A digression of this sort in Tacitus often signals a political agenda, or an intertextual

⁵⁵⁷ Gymnasium fire: see above at Ch. 2, 134-5. Tiber fire: *Ann.* 15.8.2. Notably, Tacitus is unequivocal in assigning the cause of this fire: it happened accidentally (*fortuitus*).

⁵⁵⁸ Other examples of "unforeseen disaster" in the *Annals*: commenting on a nighttime earthquake that devastated Asia in 17 CE, Tacitus adds that the element of surprise intensifies the damage of a calamity: "the more unforeseen, and the more devastating harm was thus done," (*quo improvisior graviorque pestis fuit, Ann.* 2.47.1), a sentiment he echoes in describing the amphitheater collapse at Fidenae as a *malum improvisum* (*Ann.* 4.62.1).

⁵⁵⁹ The bizarre episode, which concludes the events narrated in Book 13, also has a number of other implications which in no way impede interpreting it as an anticipatory gesture towards 64. Though beyond the scope of the current project, the disconcerting digression on the fire in Ubii territory at *Ann.* 13.37 bears further scrutiny for its relationship to the activity of the Ubii elsewhere in the *Annals*, especially their association with female power via their namesake, Agrippina the Younger (on which, see O'Gorman 1993) (=2012, 97 n.10). Furthermore, Tacitus also tells us (*Hist.* 4.79) that a few years later, the inhabitants of the colony in desperation employ a stratagem and destroy an enemy cohort (*deletam cohortem dolo*) in their town: "having stupefied the Germans by a profuse entertainment and abundance of wine, [they] fastened the doors, set fire to the houses, and burned them." For the Ubii to employ the "sleep and wine" stratagem, a motif associated with the *urbs capta* theme as employed by, e.g., Vergil in *Aeneid* 2, they must be very "advanced" indeed in their Romanization, a scant decade after their first encounter with incendiary "assault" as detailed in *Annals* 13.

relationship that he is taking some pains to advance.⁵⁶⁰ In this case, at least one 261
function of the fire is to remind us of the conflagration Rome will soon find itself unable
to foresee or to fend off; another may be to suggest that the invading Ubii ought to be
warding off are the occupying Roman forces, whom the Romanized colony-dwellers have
notably received with little resistance. The destruction of the 64 fire is likewise an
“unforeseen” event, at least from the standpoint of the victims, making the misadventure
of the Ubii and their treatment of the fire as an invading army a thematic forerunner to
the figurative agenda Tacitus advances in Book 15. As Keitel and Woodman have both
argued, the events of July 64 are presented in terms suggestive of a military invasion.⁵⁶¹

Recent scholarship on Tacitus’ disaster narratives shows the clear influence of
literary values and poetic models, and the observable use of language suited to battle
narrative and of the *urbs capta* literary motifs.⁵⁶² This brings to mind Tacitus’ famous
lament at *Annals* 4.32-12, that his project is “inglorious and narrowly constricted,”
lacking both battle narratives and records of major legislative accomplishments at Rome.
Rather than offering the material available to previous generations of historians of “vast
wars, cities taken, and kings overthrown and captured,” the principate offers a “peace

⁵⁶⁰ As Pagán (2002: 46) argues concerning a digression in *Annals* 1 (formally similar in certain ways to the excursus on the Ubian fire): “Since ecphrasis and digression are discrete narrative units, they give the impression that intractable political issues can be managed, and indeed eloquently.” Pagán goes on to compare the ekphrastic treatment of the Battle of Actium on the Shield of Aeneas with Tacitus’ digression on the Varus disaster in *Ann.* 1.61-2.

⁵⁶¹ Keitel (2010) and (1984); Woodman (1992) 173-88; see now also Woodman (2012) 387-94 on the correspondences between *Annals* 15 and *Aeneid* 2.

⁵⁶² Woodman identifies as a key technique used by Tacitus the use of language better suited to wartime disasters at moments of the Tiberian era, figuring the ruler during his years on Capri as the virtual “besieger” of his own capital city, e.g. when Tiberius is described as *adsidens* (“stationed at” / “besieging”) Rome’s city walls at *Ann.* 4.58.3. Woodman (1972). As Keitel (2010) points out, Tacitus even describes the collapse as “an unexpected calamity [in which] the losses of great wars were matched” (*ingentium bellorum cladem aequavit malum improvisum*, 4.62.1). See also Keitel (2008) on Vergilian reminiscences at *Hist.* 3.84.4.

untroubled, or mildly provoked; Rome's sorry affairs; and a *princeps* uninterested in 262 the expansion of *imperium*.”⁵⁶³ As Keitel argues, disasters in the *Annals* are figured precisely as iterations of battles, designed to speak to the character of the emperors under which they occur.⁵⁶⁴ Thus, Tacitus' figurative language shows that the drastic assaults foregrounded in the *Annals* are not the battles at the edges of Rome's imperium; rather, the “war” on Rome is the imperial system itself. Keitel elsewhere details the ways in which emperors in the *Annals* are depicted as military aggressors against the city, concluding: “In summary, Tacitus conceives of both civil war and lawless persecutions and violence by the *princeps* as war against the state, comparable to the actions of a foreign foe in wartime.”⁵⁶⁵

The gradual accumulation of disaster narratives within the *Annals* builds to a crescendo that shapes the final, actual destruction of Rome in our surviving text as a repetition and amplification of all those that have preceded. Additionally, because Tacitus is able to exploit the reader's presumed knowledge of the events of 64, as well as (perhaps, for a more select few) an awareness of the centrality of destruction narratives to

⁵⁶³ See e.g. Levene's discussion in Woodman (ed.) (2009) 226-7 and 231. Conversely, Tacitus' narratives of actual military conflict become mired in suspiciously Julio-Claudian-esque dynastic infighting. See (e.g.) Ash (1999) 114: “Tacitus' own gloomy claim about his Parthian excursus at *Annals* 6.31-37 is that it provides his readers with some respite from the uninterrupted sequence of domestic miseries (*Ann.* 6.38.1), but this proves disingenuous, since themes of murder, treachery, and betrayal are as in some sections of this eastern narrative just as pronounced as they are in Rome.”

⁵⁶⁴ As Keitel's (2010) examples illustrate, these incidents are not used to illustrate general societal malaise, or the breakdown of cultural *nomoi*; instead, Tacitus targets the *principes* themselves and their allies in the political sphere.

⁵⁶⁵ Keitel (1984) 310. As Keitel (1984: 307-9 and n. 7) further points out, this theme finds little elaboration in the accounts of Suetonius and Dio increasing the likelihood that this aspect is one Tacitus chose to highlight specifically, or even (Keitel suggests) added himself. Keitel discusses the debate over sources here: Heinz (1948: 26-30), posits a single source for all three accounts, while Questa (1967) 99, accepts a common source for Tacitus and Suetonius here. Syme (1958: 437) does not believe a common source for all three authors need be supposed; each man's portrait of Nero simply corresponds in large measure to the facts.

the events already presented in his *Histories*, every mention of a fire or calamity in 263 the *Annals* can function as an anticipation of the Great Fire.⁵⁶⁶ Thus, the Great Fire reads as the culminating assault on Rome, the sack that concluded the siege on Roman ideology initiated from the start of the *Annals*.

Kraus demonstrates how Tacitus, in his description of Rome before and after the fire, offers a re-reading of Livy's account of the rebuilding of Rome after the Gallic invasion; Livy himself assimilates Gallic Sack to the destruction of Troy.⁵⁶⁷ The destruction of July 64 obviously invites parallels with the Gallic destruction. For Tacitus, Nero's rebuilding, and especially his luxurious Golden House, which drains the coffers of cities around the empire, is represented by Tacitus as the plundering not just of Rome, but also of Italy and the provinces.⁵⁶⁸ Moreover, the city still appears overwhelmed by fire even after the rebuilding, which many complain lacks shade and "burns with greater heat (*graviore aestu ardescere*) (15.43.5).⁵⁶⁹ In short, the refoundation and rebuilding of Rome becomes yet another sack.

⁵⁶⁶ This is a technique that, as Joseph shows, Tacitus had already developed extensively in the writing of the *Histories*. Joseph (2012) 98-106, 113-144. Joseph's book outlines correspondences with Vergil and Lucan at various key moments in the *Histories*. Clusters of Vergilian citations in the descriptions of the battle for the Capitol mark it out as the pendant to and punctuation of earlier scenes with marked allusions to the *Aeneid*, including the death of Galba in Book 1 and the battles of Cremona in Books 2 and 3. Likewise, Joseph demonstrates that the battle narratives centered on Cremona are fashioned not only as echoes of each other, but also of the degenerative repetition of the fighting at some of the (already repetitive) battle scenes in Vergil and Lucan.

⁵⁶⁷ Kraus (1994) 270-8 on Rome as Troy, and Kraus (1994) 285-7 on Tacitus' reading of Livy; cf. O'Gorman (2000) 174.

⁵⁶⁸ Tacitus (*Ann.* 15.45) describes the burdens placed upon Rome, as well as on the provinces by Nero's collection of funds for his building project: not only were Rome's remaining temples stripped of their treasures, but across Asia and Greece, even the gods' statues were hauled away. Also, as Kraus (1994: 287) points out of Tacitus' claim that "Nero used the ruins of his fatherland and built a palace" (*Ann.* 15.42.1): "Tacitus clearly perceives [the Golden House] as the plundering and occupation of a conquered city."

⁵⁶⁹ O'Gorman (2000) 174-5 suggests we see in this phrase an echo of Tacitus' initial characterization of the fire as "graver and more aggressive" (*gravior atque atrocior*) (15.38.1)

Just as every fire or other calamity presented prior to *Annals* 15 can be read as 264 a “dress rehearsal” of sorts for the spectacular main event of the 64 fire, so does Nero himself seem to be rehearsing, almost literally, the role he was to play in Roman history as its *princeps incendiarius*, a Troy-obsessed performer who “fiddled while Rome burned.” Tacitus appears to be deliberately shaping Nero as a figure destined to bring Rome back in touch with its legendary roots in Trojan legend (and, by association, in Trojan conflagration). Nero’s early representation in the *Annals* creates an accumulation of Trojan references which, on their own, might seem innocent enough, or even potentially flattering about the youth’s prospects. Taken together, however, they form a complex that seems designed to move Nero into place for his most memorable evocation of Trojan legend, when he sang of Troy’s fall while he watched Rome burn.

The future emperor makes his debut as a public figure in the *Annals* in 47 CE, at a reperformance of the Trojan Games sponsored by Claudius (*Ann.* 11.11.5, where the event is called *ludicrum Troiae*).⁵⁷⁰ Nero’s appearance at Claudius’ games evokes for many onlookers memory of his grandfather Germanicus, whose death at an early age robbed Rome of a promising successor to Augustus’ *imperium*. At the same time, however, Nero’s appearance is mediated through the treatment of the Trojan games presented in Vergil, which were led by Iulus, founder of the Julian line.⁵⁷¹ Whereas Iulus

than any previous destruction. To this, I would add his comment about the more serious nature of unexpected calamity (*quo improvisior graviorque pestis*) at *Ann.* 2.47.1.

⁵⁷⁰ See also Suetonius, *Nero* 7.

⁵⁷¹ O’Gorman (2000) 163; as O’Gorman points out, it also recalls the earlier, unsuccessful Nero (the emperor Nero’s uncle) who seemed by recent memory (*recenti memoria Germanici*) to be an image of his father (4.15.3). O’Gorman’s semiotic arguments, which are too complex to summarize here, need not be rehearsed or endorsed in full in order to extract the value of her observations concerning the structural patterning of Nero as a figure obsessed with his Trojan lineage and reenactments of Trojan pageantry. On Nero and the Trojan Games, see O’Gorman (2000) 162–175. O’Gorman does not mention the treatment in Senecan tragedy, in which the

goes on to found a family line, however, Nero marks its end.⁵⁷² Just as the viewers of 265 this spectacle were apparently unable to see Nero without recalling his famous Julian ancestors, readers of Tacitus' account are unable to read of Nero's promising start in public life without recalling its grim finale. Similarly, for a Roman audience any reference to Troy was a way of talking about Rome: Troy's primary significance lay in the fact of its destruction, which had brought Rome into being. Superimposed onto the celebratory rites of the Trojan games, then, is the awareness of Troy's eventual fate.

Nero's dominant role in the game of Troy positions him at the center of a web of historical signification, which, as O'Gorman has demonstrated, is further reflected in the patterning of Tacitus' larger narrative.⁵⁷³ *Doctus Nero*, as Martial was later to call the poetic *princeps*, went on to write a *Troica*, either an epic or a series of smaller vignettes, including a passage in which Paris, a figure of dubious merit elsewhere in literature, is rewritten as the bravest of the Trojans.⁵⁷⁴ Nero apparently goes so far to portray Paris as the victor over Hector in the games sponsored by the Trojan royal family (i.e. "Trojan Games"), during which the young, previously dispossessed prince's true identity is revealed. The story of Paris' prowess at the Games appears elsewhere in ancient

game is invoked, pathetically, by Andromache as part of the future that the doomed Trojan heir Astyanax ("Master of the Citadel") will never fulfill (Sen. *Tro.*778). This is a reference, however, that might well have been familiar for Tacitus' readers, and all the more piquant for Seneca's historical relationship with Nero.

⁵⁷² O'Gorman (2000) 164.

⁵⁷³ O'Gorman (2000) 168.

⁵⁷⁴ Champlin (2003) 82-3. *Doctus Nero*: cf. Martial 8.70. In general, there is good evidence that Nero's poetry was popular and continued to be read and performed for decades after his death. See notes to Champlin (2003) 82-3, with bibliography. Lucan's poetry and its value is given short shrift in Tacitus, but may work its way into his historical narrative at various points (on the *Histories*, see Joseph 2010 and 2012, on the *Annals*, see Woodman 2012 and discussion below). Likewise, we should consider the possibility that Nero's narrative of Paris' prominence at the original "Trojan Games" informs Tacitus' account of the *ludicrium Troiae* to some extent. On the *Troica*, see Sullivan (1985) 91-2; the fragments, with commentary, in Courtney (1993), 359; further discussion in Morelli (1914) 135-8.

literature, but the detail about his defeat of the heir apparent, Hector, is believed to 266
have been Nero's own invention. This Paris reflects the paradoxes of Nero's own
character: a combination, as Champlin puts it, "of sensual living and careful training."⁵⁷⁵
Yet the story seems to mirror the moment detailed in Tacitus, when Nero outshone
Claudius' son (and, until that moment, heir apparent) Britannicus at the Trojan Games in
Rome.

Similarly, Nero's later pattern of behavior as represented in the *Annals* only
serves to reinforce his status as a "copy or a copyist," with a particular fixation on Troy,
as well as on disaster more generally.⁵⁷⁶ Nero again distinguishes himself for his
commemoration of his Trojan ancestry in his initiation into public service. Soon after
assuming the *toga virilis* and marrying Octavia,⁵⁷⁷ Nero in his first public oration
"advocated the cause of the people of Ilium." Eloquently recounting how "Rome was the
offspring of Troy, and Aeneas the founder of the Julian line, with other old traditions akin
to myths" Nero secured Troy's exemption from "public burdens."⁵⁷⁸ Tacitus goes on to
tell us that on another such occasion, Nero intervened successfully on behalf of Bononia
(Bologna), which had recently experienced a devastating fire.⁵⁷⁹ This gesture, too, may
have been a nod to Nero's family history: Bononia had followed Mark Antony in the war

⁵⁷⁵ Champlin (2003) 83.

⁵⁷⁶ O'Gorman (2000) 179.

⁵⁷⁷ Nero assumed the *toga virilis* a year early, at the age of thirteen; see Tac. *Ann.* 12.41.

⁵⁷⁸ *Ann.* 12.58. Suetonius (*Ner.* 6) specifies that the speech for Bononia, in Latin, was Nero's first; the speeches on behalf of Troy and Rhodes, in Greek, came later. Tacitus, then, may have switched the order to foreground Nero's interest in Troy.

⁵⁷⁹ An inscription found at Bononia shows that Nero followed through, providing a bath complex (*CIL* 11.720), cf. Collins-Clinton (2000: n. 11). Furthermore, Bononia is believed by most scholars to have been the site of the meeting between Antony, Octavian and Lepidus in 43 BCE, which resulted in the formation of the Second Triumvirate (*Cic ad Fam.* 11. 13 , 12. 5 ; Dio 46.36.54; Suet. *Aug.* 96). Appian, *BC* 3.69 alone gives a different location. See Southern (1998) 53, for discussion of sources.

against Octavian, and may have maintained a relationship with his descendants.⁵⁸⁰ 267

Thus, the first two public speaking occasions mentioned by Tacitus link the Julian family's history of internecine strife and its bloody ascent to power. Moreover, they foreshadow the role Nero is to play in *Annals* 15: singing of Troy's fall on the night of Rome's disaster, and subsequently rebuilding Rome in the aftermath.

Nero's identity in the *Annals* as a figure obsessed with re-creating past events, family history, and established texts is clearly apparent in Nero's most famous allusion to Troy: his reported performance of a song on the Trojan destruction as he watched Rome burn. This account is itself preceded by Tacitus' description of Nero's (often historically or textually inspired) excesses at Rome. This sequence culminates in the wild banquet on Agrippa's Lake, which Tacitus reminds us is itself only a generic iteration, a sample representation of a "typical" party of the time. The fire at Rome is thus, as O'Gorman argues, "represented almost as a consequence of the myriad transgressions depicted, opening with the words 'a disaster ensued' (15.38.1)."⁵⁸¹ Finally, the passages in which Tacitus alludes to Nero's alleged part in the fire "conflate authorship and authorisation, extending the matter of Nero's poem from the words he sings to the city he destroys."⁵⁸² In fact, as we will see, the narration of the fire itself in Tacitus is highly poetically inflected.

⁵⁸⁰ Levi (1949) 104; Levi suggests that the assistance after the fire was a deliberate effort on Claudius' part to help the young Nero gain popular support (after Fentress (2003) 58-9 and n. 130). Fentress (*loc. cit.*) further speculates that Nero was responsible for the rebuilt curia at Bononia which featured statues of Claudius, Nero and Agrippina the Younger.

⁵⁸¹ O'Gorman (2000) 179.

⁵⁸² O'Gorman (2000) 181. The passages O'Gorman cites are 15.39.3 (Nero's alleged performance makes "present misfortunes like past disasters" *praesentia mala vetustis cladibus adsimulantem*); 15.38.1 ("a disaster ensued, whether by chance or by the treachery of the *princeps* it is uncertain, for authors (*auctores*) hand down both traditions..."); and 15.38.7 (Nero is claimed as the authority (*auctor*) of the firebrand-wielding figures seen during the fire).

Roma Incensa as Urbs Capta in Tacitus.

In the previous section, I establish that various urban and military disasters narrated by Tacitus in *Annals* 1-14 function as anticipations (“watch this space”) of the Great Fire of 64; that the disasters narrated in Tacitus’ *Histories* and *Annals* alike tend to contain especially dense clusters of poetic overtones, and especially of epic intertexts. I have also given a range of examples demonstrating the ways in which fire-related metaphor is used to characterize unstable leaders and other characters and activity detrimental to Rome’s political environment. I relate this phenomenon to the discussions of Woodman, Keitel, and Damon, who demonstrate that Tacitus characterizes the principate as a form of civil war waged on Rome’s own citizens. Keitel and Woodman further demonstrate that throughout the *Annals*, there is a tendency to use figurative language, and especially the motif of the *urbs capta*, to suggest in various ways that the *princeps* is committing a military assault on the Roman state.⁵⁸³ The Great Fire, then, is the realization in the narrative of all the proleptic anticipations and metaphorical insinuations that Tacitus has made throughout the *Annals*: it is the culminating moment in which Rome’s political integrity, long since breached, is finally matched by its physical devastation.

According to Tacitus, Nero’s accusers suspected that he wanted the glory of being the “founder of a new city (*condendae urbis novae...gloriam*, *Ann.* 15.40.2).” The phrase, however, can be read as critical of Nero’s alleged ambitions: Camillus and Augustus, his

⁵⁸³ Woodman (1985) and (1992); Keitel (1984) and (2010); Damon (2010b). Likewise, O’Gorman (2000: 23-45) that Tacitus uses the mutinies in *Annals* 1 to collapse the boundary between principate and civil war, creating verbal affinities to suggest functional continuity between the two.

supposed models in refoundation, were exactly *not* founders of a “new city”; rather, 269 they gained status as “new founders” of the city.⁵⁸⁴ While Camillus and Augustus used Rome’s origins in the sack of Troy as analogous inspiration for Rome’s ability to rebuild after disaster, Nero’s accusers read the scenario in reverse: Nero is seen as literally replaying Troy at Rome, inspired by Trojan myth and Roman history to burn the city and build a new one.⁵⁸⁵ Nero’s conflation of myth and history, and of poetry with reality is very similar to the way Tacitus shapes the episode for us in the *Annals*.⁵⁸⁶

Pushing back against a tradition in scholarship which objects to the detection of “slivers of verse” in historical prose, Woodman has recently offered an extended examination of poetic correspondences in *Annals* 15.38.1-40.1.⁵⁸⁷ Tacitus’ report of the rumor that Nero “sang the destruction of Troy, making present misfortunes like ancient disasters” (*Ann.* 15.39.3 *cecinisse Troianum excidium, praesentia mala vetustis cladibus adsimulantem*), in Woodman’s view may form “an encoded reference, a metaliterary comment alerting readers to the possibility that, just as Nero sang of the destruction of Troy, so Tacitus’ narrative alludes to the firing of Troy as described in some earlier text.”⁵⁸⁸ The sentence initiating the disaster sequence (*Ann.* 15.38.1) *Sequitur clades, forte an dolo principis incertum* (“Calamity ensued, whether by chance or the *princeps*’

⁵⁸⁴ Feeney (2007) 106. After Libby (2011) 218; Libby and Feeney, however, discuss this phrase as a representation of Nero’s own ambitions; Tacitus, however, clearly distances himself from this idea by reporting it as an impression Nero created (*videbatur...Nero*) rather than as fact.

⁵⁸⁵ Libby (2011) 219.

⁵⁸⁶ A device also evident in the other eras covered in the extant text: the Tiberian *Annals*, with their emphasis on reportage and written communication, reflect the truant emperor’s policy of “principate by proxy.” The Claudian books, by contrast, contain a greater element of antiquarian history and broad farce, commemorating Claudius’ obsession with arcane history and general mockability.

⁵⁸⁷ Woodman (2012) 387-92.

⁵⁸⁸ Woodman (2012) 389-90.

trickery is not known...”) is rightly flagged by Woodman for the words with which 270 Vergil’s Aeneas introduces his account of the fall of Troy: (*Aen.* 2.34) *sive dolo seu iam Troiae sic fata ferebant*. This passage also offers perhaps the best known example of Tacitus’ technique of the “loaded alternative,” part of what Inez Ryberg describes as Tacitus’ “art of innuendo.”⁵⁸⁹

This strategy of innuendo and the larger project of foreshadowing the fire in the earlier books of the *Annals* (as well as the early sections of Book 15), and it does suggest a powerful indictment of Nero, seeming to indicate the high probability that Tacitus is willing to assign to the claim that Nero started the fire.⁵⁹⁰ Yet much more important is the fact that Tacitus refuses to assert Nero’s guilt outright, and insists on the inaccessibility of the truth given the accounts at his disposal (a standard writers after him were only too happy to abandon). Thus, in sacrificing the opportunity to make perhaps the most damning accusation that could be made of any leader in the history he narrates, Tacitus makes an implicit claim for the reliability of his account and integrity of his approach, indemnifying himself against charges of falsifying other various other outrages that he presents as fact. That Tacitus would choose to cloak such a significant gesture in a

⁵⁸⁹ See Ryberg (1942). Tacitus notoriously places emphasis on the latter of two alternatives as the more plausible one: see Whitehead (1979) and Yavetz (1975) (after Pagán 1999, 303 n. 7). The tactic appears again in the fire narrative at 15.38.7, when we are told it is uncertain whether certain persons said to have prevented firefighting and even to have added more firebrands to the blaze were claiming the emperor’s authority either were “seeking to plunder more freely, or obeying orders” (*sive ut raptus licentius exercerent seu iussu*).

⁵⁹⁰ As Cogitore (2002: 633) argues, in *Annals* 15 Tacitus anchors his narrative in precise places. As Tacitus writes it, Rome functions as protagonist in the tragedy of the fire, also playing a central role in the conspiracy. Every location mentioned in the passages set in Rome is linked with Nero, who, (as Cogitore highlights), according to Tacitus “uses the city as his home.” At the end, Nero becomes master of a the city at large, effectively now all his *domus*. As I argue, this behavior in fact only extends and develops patterns set in place as early as Augustus: see above, 36-53.

Vergilian citation says a great deal about the parallels he is trying to draw overall 271
between Rome's situation and that of Troy. In using the foundational text of Roman imperial literature in his account of Rome's destruction, Tacitus provides a powerful representation of the sense that Roman society, and Roman history, were unmaking themselves before our very eyes in the Julio-Claudian period.

Other elements identified by Woodman fit in broadly with the *urbs capta* motif that Tacitus has developed elsewhere, albeit here with specific reference to *Aeneid* 2.⁵⁹¹ Tacitus offers a description of "terrified women, those weary with age or those of a youthful inexperience" (*Ann.* 15.38.4 *paventium feminarum, fessa aetate aut rudis pueritiae*) who trap themselves and each other in their frenzied activity. This scene evokes the *pavidae matres* (*pavidae ~ paventes, feminae ~ matres*) mentioned twice in *Aeneid* 2. Once such instance uses suggestively similar collocation of terms: *pueri et pavidae longo ordine matres / stant circum* (*Aen.* 2.766-7).⁵⁹² The frantic milling-about of Tacitus' scene seems a point of contrast with the Vergil lines, but in fact the women and children of Troy in *Aeneid* 2, rounded up by the Greek and waiting to be distributed by lot, are equally trapped. The phrase *fessa aetate* also arguably echoes the exhortation of

⁵⁹¹ On the variation of the *urbs capta* motif in which destruction is visited on a Trojan-esque population rendered vulnerable by drinking and merriment-exhausted sleep: Rossi (2002), esp. n. 35.

⁵⁹² The expression is colored here, however, by previous use of the trope in Tacitus' other accounts of besieged cities or settlements, e.g. the wailing of women that motivates the Thracians to resist the Roman armies at *Ann.* 4.51.2: *illis extrema iam salus et adsistentes plerisque matres et coniuges earumque lamenta addunt animos* ("Their energy was heightened by this final chance at survival, and the presence of many mothers and wives, and their wailing"). See also *Hist.* 4.1.2: after Vitellius dies and the conflict of 69 nears its conclusion, Rome is again beset, this time not by fire but by Flavian soldiery: *ubique lamenta, conclamationes et fortuna captae urbis, adeo ut Othoniani Vitellianique militis invidiosa antea petulantia desideraretur*, "Everywhere were lamentations, and wailings, and all the miseries of a captured city, until the abuse of the Othonian and Vitellian forces, previously so loathed, was actually wished for."

Aeneas' mother Venus to save his father Anchises "*fessum aetate parentem*" (*Aen.* 2. 272-273).⁵⁹³ Additionally, Tacitus' report that some victims wished to die in the face of such colossal loss, even when escape is possible (*quidam amissis omnibus fortunis, diurni quoque victus, alii caritate suorum, quos eripere nequiverant, quamvis patente effugio interire*) echoes both Anchises' initial wish to stay and die at Troy (*Aen.* 2. 368-49) as well as unnamed figures who despairingly leap to their deaths or cast themselves into the flames (*Aen.* 2. 565-6).

Finally, Tacitus lists among the buildings destroyed by the fire an unnumbered quantity of *delubra deum*, a poetic expression that Aeneas famously uses to describe the temples where the Trojans, ignorant of their fate, spent their last day celebrating and feasting: *nos delubra deum miseri, quibus ultimus esset / ille dies, festa uelamus fronde per urbem*.⁵⁹⁴ Thus Tacitus, like Vergil before him, suggests the population's complicity in their own destruction. The complicity may be no more than a willful oblivion to the dangers presented by an alluring image of celebration and security, but this, our authors imply, is itself a form of surrender.

⁵⁹³ Woodman (2012 390 n. 40) also acknowledges a number of Tacitean precedents for combinations of *fessus* and *aetas*.

⁵⁹⁴ Woodman (2012) 390-1. Both the Vergilian reference and the actual location Tacitus mentions here, apparently in the monumental district lavishly endowed with temples, which contains not just the *delubra deum* but colonnades for pleasure (*porticus amoenitati dicatae*), should invite us to look more closely not just at the fire scene in Tacitus, but the scene of revelry that precedes it (*Ann.* 15.37). Tigellinus' banquet, often read as a scene of Nilotic, Cleopatra-esque revelry (or alternately, as a Baiae-like seaside entertainment imported to Rome) also reads as an adaptation of Troy's last day; Tacitus admits that it does not, in fact, represent such an unusual set of behaviors for the time, increasing the sense that he has designedly placed it before the fire narrative to imply a kind of causality between the two events. Vergil, in fact, goes out of his way to paint the Trojans not just as blissfully ignorant, but as blinded by internecine strife and beguiled by the lies of the Ulysses-figure Sinon; "buried in sleep and wine," they are complicit in their own destruction.

The textual conflagration of *Annals* 15 may gain additional resonance from 273

the possibility that Lucan's *de Incendio Urbis* was (as most scholars agree) a long-format poetic narrative of the Great Fire. As Woodman points out this means there existed at Tacitus' disposal not only Vergil's poetic destruction of Troy, but two other potentially major poetic models: Lucan's lost work and the poem on Troy's fall that (as Tacitus' *rumor* has it) Nero recited as an allegory of the fire he watched consume the *urbs*.⁵⁹⁵ "Since we have already seen ample evidence of Tacitus' deployment of allusion," Woodman continues "it seems reasonable to assume that he would have alluded to [Lucan's] poem in the very episode where Nero constituted a rival voice."⁵⁹⁶ This recognition leads to a new understanding of the way in which the figurative language of fire, and allusions to poetic disaster, operate in Tacitus' projects as a whole.

Tacitus and the Catastrophic: Conclusions from the *Annals*.

In embedding the Vergilian narrative of Troy's destruction into his account of the fire of 64, Tacitus is doing more than simply aestheticizing a moment of destruction. If Rome is, as it were, Troy 2.0, then experiencing a destruction comparable to Troy's is a bleak prospect. It suggests the collapse of Roman time back onto itself, reversing not only the Augustan regeneration that inspired the composition of the *Aeneid*, but also perhaps the entire span of ten centuries, give or take, between Troy's mythic fall and Rome's incineration in 64 CE. The textual conflagration of *Annals* 15 can offer us a new understanding of the way in which the figurative language of fire, and allusions to poetic disaster, operate in Tacitus' project as a whole. The *Annals* writ large forms a portrait of

⁵⁹⁵ Woodman (2012) 392.

⁵⁹⁶ Woodman (2012) 392.

the slow-motion, man-made disaster that was the Roman principate, a process 274
initiated by Augustus, and accelerated under Tiberius and his Julio-Claudian successors.
In the episode of the fire, this process is rendered in analogue form upon the literal fabric
of the Roman city. The devastation Tacitus depicts is designed to provide insight not just
about the Julio-Claudians, but also about later imperial periods and the nature of imperial
rule.

Conclusion:

In its essence the *Annals*, like the *Aeneid*, was a project with strong cautionary as well as
commemorative functions.⁵⁹⁷ Domitian, in dedicating the Altars of Vulcan, is also
engaging with Rome's history culture, apparently attempting to "rewrite" recent memory.
Re-defining the fire in "Neronian times" as *the* fire of Rome, the narrative presented in
the inscriptions of the *Arae* contributes to the characterization of Nero as a failed leader,
which the Flavians had done so much to create. It also seems to have authorized
Domitian to retroject blame for what had been, after all, a very similar event in the reign
of Titus, onto this very portrayal. Domitian's dedication of the Altars of Vulcan, and the
inscription that records it, both works to draw the anxiety about urban fires away from an
abstracted threat and give it a name – Nero's, with which it would forever be associated.

The overt theatricality apparent in many of Nero's political gestures, as well as his
proclivity for stage performances and public charioteering, strongly suggest the

⁵⁹⁷ If Woodman is correct in his speculation that Tacitus may have followed Lucan's *de Incendio Urbis* in some details of his presentation of the fire narrative, then the passage itself forms such a cautionary commemoration, reminding us of the price Lucan paid for his work.

emperor's acute awareness of and active participation in this dynamic.⁵⁹⁸ Such 275

behavior, in turn, may have made him a particularly compelling figure for the unknown author of the historical drama the *Octavia* to adapt for the stage.⁵⁹⁹ The *Octavia's* profound engagement with earlier literary models only underscores its relationship to Rome's history, deploying images and tropes with demonstrable precedents in earlier literature to illustrate memorable incidents from Nero's lifetime. More specifically, the play works exploits the generic constraints of tragedy to focus on a single moment of conflict, as well as to foreshadow the Great Fire as the paradigmatic event of Nero's reign.⁶⁰⁰

Tacitus both implicitly and explicitly challenges the rhetoric of the *pax Romana*, conveying a sense that the Julio-Claudian emperors in general and Nero in particular continually waged a form of civil war on their own citizens. The *Octavia*, however, actually anticipates this strategy, taking an era of documented peace and restaging it on the model of a civil war: generic markers, thematic language, and historical cyclicity that a Roman audience would expect from such narratives of strife are all in evidence.⁶⁰¹ Yet the key representation of this strife, in the *Octavia* and in the *Annals*, comes in imagery that function as an anticipation of the Great Fire of 64. *Octavia's* potent blend of literary allusion and cultural memory creates a chain of proleptic allusions. These references both point back to earlier texts dealing with crisis and conflagration, and look forward to the

⁵⁹⁸ Bartsch (1994); Champlin (2003) esp. 84-110;

⁵⁹⁹ Boyle (2008) xxi.

⁶⁰⁰ The rhetorical power of the *Octavia's* declamatory soliloquies and dialogic speeches reinforce its setting in a Rome recognizable to its audience, if not quite contemporary with it. See Boyle (2008) lxvii.

⁶⁰¹ Donovan (2011) 97.

disasters of 64-69, which would ensue after the conclusion of the events portrayed in 276 the text.

Both Lucan in his epic and Seneca in his tragic and philosophical writings had promoted the remembrance of misfortune and the negative exemplum as a primary mode of expression; *Octavia* now extends this tendency to Rome's very recent history. It can also be seen as anticipating some of Tacitus's strategies its complex triangulation between images of fire and destruction derived from Vergil, Lucan and Seneca. Though this does not go far in demonstrating, say, an actual influence of the play upon historian, it does suggest the trans-generic appeal that this mode of expression held for authors chronicling the Neronian era.

Tacitus' centrality to our understanding of the events of 64 is hard to overstate. In drawing attention to his method of allusion, we can understand how Rome's literary legacy could be recontextualized in potentially polemical ways. We can also see how readily events at Rome, often figured as the center of the cosmos and the epicenter of human achievement, invited parallels from myth and legend. Mixing recognizable Vergilian reminiscences in with the memory of ancient monuments of Roman history, which are being obliterated "before our eyes," Tacitus' fire of 64 becomes its own kind of "book-burning," in which the memorials of ancient Roman leadership, long desecrated by imperial corruption, are finally obliterated from the landscape.

CONCLUSION

Individuals experiencing the aftermath of a catastrophe, or facing the prospect of a new one, engage with the symbols evoking their predicament in a visceral manner.⁶⁰² As Lakoff and Johnson point out, the symbolic process provides a feedback loop: to achieve any deeper understanding of both the representation and of the event, the symbol must be integrated with the experience.⁶⁰³ The texts examined in my project suggest a programmatic awareness of fire's rhetorical value on the part of leaders and literary authors alike: it was both a threat to be forestalled and an agent of change. Today, the factors that trigger our deepest fears have changed, and the catastrophes we experience are different too. Yet in important ways, many of the mechanisms guiding and manipulating our collective imagination – the factors which shape our anxieties, our memories - and eventually our histories - remain the same.

The Monument Inscription: London's Neronian Accent?

Standing today in a small patch of pavement, dwarfed by the skyscrapers that surround it in London's financial district, is the monumental column built to commemorate the Great Fire of 1666, known popularly if unimaginatively as The Monument. Its modern view, however, does not correspond to the structure's erstwhile importance as one of London's proudest landmarks, a skyscraper in its own time.⁶⁰⁴ Designed by the greatest architect of the English baroque style, Christopher Wren, and modeled on Rome's Column of Trajan, the

⁶⁰² Hoffman (2002) 115.

⁶⁰³ Lakoff and Johnson (1980) 145; Hoffman (2002) 115.

⁶⁰⁴ These points are largely drawn from Moore (1998).

Monument was the first and is still the tallest of all the commemorative columns in that city. Wren was a polymath with a superior command of the Latin language. Along other prominent scholars, he worked to compose the extensive Latin narrative of the fire inscribed in the base of on the Monument. 278

On the inscription that adorns the dado, or monumental façade at the base of the column, some twenty-odd specific citations have been identified from Tacitus's account of the Great Fire of Rome. This is fairly unsurprising, since seventeenth-century grammar-school boys in Great Britain and elsewhere in Europe knew all about the burning of Rome in 64, and they learned it from Tacitus. Somewhat more arresting, however, is evidence that Seneca's Letter 91 also finds an echo in the inscription: (North Dado) VELOX CLADES FUT: EXIGVVM TEMPVS EANDEM VIDIT CIVITATEM FLORENTISSIMAM ET NULLAM: "the destruction was swift: a scant span of time saw the selfsame city in full bloom and nonexistent." The morphology and syntax of the Senecan model are closely followed.

The line's ending, with a singular feminine noun in the accusative case (*nullam*), is followed and modified by an adjective in the superlative degree. Likewise, the conjunction "and (*et*)," and the final adjective *nullam*, rendered unusually forceful by its placement –are preserved from the Senecan text. Moreover the text borrows the embellished term *florentissimam* from only a few lines later in Seneca who likewise employs it as a representation of the height of prosperity, soon to be stripped away: (*Ep.* 91.4) "Therefore, nothing to us should seem unforeseen...For what exists that Fortune does not drag down from its peak of bloom (*ex florentissimo*) when she so wills it? What that she does not attack and shatter all the more, the more spectacularly it gleams?"

Borrowing not just from Tacitus, the obvious model, but from Seneca's text, with 279 its pointed delineation of the quick and overwhelming changes wrought by fate upon a great city, the London text transcends mere imitation. Using texts from Roman antiquity as a source for telling the story of London's fire, the committee preserved both the narrative function and the emotional charge of their models. Thus, the unmaking of Rome as treated by Tacitus and Seneca – what Seneca called the transformation from *urbs maxima* to *nulla* – became the allusive models for London's commemoration of its own unmaking, some sixteen hundred years later. In sum, Seneca and Tacitus both did powerful work in crafting literary reflections of Rome's Great Fire, intertwining present disaster with cultural and literary allusion. Their narratives of the 64 fire clearly shaped reactions to new disasters at least down to the 17th century. As I discuss below, our own centuries seems to find the same set of ideas equally evocative, albeit in visual rather than textual media.

Fire and the Unmaking of Rome: Modern Representations.

The conceptual components of fire and spectacle at Rome were perhaps most powerfully evoked in set of installations designed by the Danish-Argentinean artist couple Thyra Hilden and Pio Diaz, who aim, in their own words, to “destabilize European cultural history by setting building and monuments on fire.” Their projects are intended “to create an exchange of ideas with society on the theme of fragility and the transience of constructions built by man.” Their ongoing video project “City on Fire,” subtitled “Burning the Roots of Western Culture,” specializes in site-specific video illusions on a

scale of 1:1, projecting highly realistic images of conflagration onto the surfaces of famous monuments, so they appear to be enveloped by flames. 280

From September 17th through the 19th, 2010, Hilden and Diaz created an installation that seemed to ignite a massive fire inside the Colosseum, Rome's (and, arguably, the world's) most famous monument. In so doing, they re-created (perhaps unwittingly) the event that signaled the beginning of the end for the Colosseum's career as Rome's prime venue of public entertainment: in 217 CE, the building was hit by lightning and ravaged by fire on the day of the Volcanalia, feast of the Roman god of fire. As Dio tells it, the building was effectively reduced to ruins: "Human effort could not prevail against the conflagration, though practically every aqueduct was drained; nor could a downpour from the sky, though extremely heavy and violent, accomplish anything – to such an extent was the water from both sources consumed by the power of heaven's blaze."⁶⁰⁵ The event was seen as an ill portent, signaling the political disasters that were to come following the demise of the emperor Caracalla, and the structure thereafter seems to have fallen into disuse for many years.⁶⁰⁶

In fact, the image of the Colosseum ablaze activates several important historical memories attached to this structure. The first concerns the amphitheater's origins in fiery destruction: its site was largely determined by the symbolic value of rededicating space once occupied by Nero's fantastical Golden House, an expansive architectural exploit made possible only by the vast swathes of land obliterated during the great Fire of 64. The second, closely related point, is the vast capacity for destruction implied by the Flavian amphitheater itself. The unrelenting violence of the arena spectacle presented in

⁶⁰⁵ Dio 79.25.2-3. Translation adjusted from Cary (LCL).

⁶⁰⁶ See Lancaster (1998) for an account of attempts at reconstruction.

the Colosseum was the product of Rome's history of foreign conquests, internal conflicts, 281 and technological marvels. These aspects were represented in the structure, respectively, by the inscription stipulating that the amphitheater had built with the funds generated from the conquest of Jerusalem, which, along with the nearby Arch of Titus, emphasized the Flavian suppression of a major rebellion against Roman control;⁶⁰⁷ by the audience's knowledge that the building stood on the site of Nero's palatial residence, dismantled after the violent collapse of his dynasty;⁶⁰⁸ and by the intricate set of mechanisms that made possible not just the construction of the massive edifice, but the production on an everyday basis of its many effects.⁶⁰⁹ The image of such a resounding expression of imperial control falling subject to an uncontrollable fire is striking, as is the equally suggested notion of the structure's miraculous survival amidst the "flames," which evokes the legendary portent of the flaming crown, associated with one of Rome's early kings, Servius Tullius, as well as with Aeneas' son Ascanius.

In an equally arresting spectacle, on New Year's Eve, 2005, Hilden and Diaz "ignited" the neoclassical Fountain of Trevi, which presents an image of divine majesty in the form of Neptune. With its aquatic grouping of Neptune driving his *quadriga* of four energetic seahorses, Bernini's iconic tableau evokes the famous portrayal of Neptune in the opening scene of Vergil's *Aeneid*, in which the charioteering sea-god arrives

⁶⁰⁷ The dedicatory inscription is reconstructed by Alföldy (1995) as follows: *Imp. T. Caes. Vespasianus Aug. Amphitheatrum Novum Ex Manubis Fieri Iussit*. As Hopkins and Beard (2005: 34) observe, the Colosseum was, in effect, "the Temple of Jerusalem transformed by Roman culture, rebuilt for popular pleasure and ostentatious display of imperial power."

⁶⁰⁸ Cf. Martial, *Spect.* 2.

⁶⁰⁹ These features included a network of underground elevators and tunnels to contain and orchestrate the appearance of human and animal performers, as well as a vast system of canvas awnings operated by a detachment of sailors from the imperial fleet, who were garrisoned in Rome for this specific purpose.

amidst a calamitous storm at sea to restore order and dispense justice. As I discuss in Chapter 1, in the epic's paradigmatic opening simile Vergil compares Neptune's appearance to that of a statesman who subdues a rioting crowd, prepared with torches and firebrands to lay waste to the city, creating a suggestive association of destructive forces, heightened by the elemental opposition of fire and water. The storm at sea is the referent for the incendiary crowd, and Neptune's power to quell the storm, and more generally to assert control his aquatic universe, is likened to the authority of a Roman political leader. Hilden and Diaz' "conflagrations," both of Neptune in the Trevi fountain and of the Colosseum, iconic representations of Roman power from different eras, create an opposition of images similar to that of Vergil's emblematic simile.

Hilden and Diaz state that they intended their series of fire exhibitions to draw attention to the problem of Europe's decaying cultural patrimony and lack of investment in the preservation of ancient remains: the spectacle serves as a symbolic inferno of monuments that have endured for millennia. At the same time, the spectacle of our most cherished monuments "going up in flames" provokes consideration of the destructions currently visited by some of our own governments on other nations around the globe, as the artists point out in their comments on the 2005 piece. These images of destruction were also intended, according to the artists' statement, as a reminder that Europe was currently at war, spending vast amounts in military efforts that threatened foreign communities with destruction even as the continent's own greatest treasures decayed for lack of funding.⁶¹⁰

⁶¹⁰ Comments available at <http://www.cityonfire.org/projects/Trevi%20Fountain/Trevi.html>.

Providence, R.I.-based performance group WaterFire created a spectacular installation on the Tiber River between Ponte Sisto and Ponte Giuseppe Mazzini on the Vatican side of the river near the old city. Brilliant bonfires, lit in a choreographed sequence by dancers and acrobats arrayed into troupes with classically inspired names, burned from sunset to midnight. The floating bonfires glowed just above the waters of the Tiber, which reflected the light and illuminated the crowd of spectators. Employing the basin of this straight stretch of the Tiber, the space between the bridges was transformed into a “virtual piazza,” as defined by the New York –based artist Kristin Jones.⁶¹¹ The space in fact closely approximates the dimensions of the ancient Circus Maximus: thus, the WaterFire spectacle might more accurately be said to have formed a “virtual arena.” In this space unfolded a classically inspired spectacle (all the more gladiatorial, perhaps, in the training and athleticism required of the performers to avoid injury from the flames they wielded), viewed from the perimeter by a large audience of residents and visitors. WaterFire is, according to its own mandate, a “community-based” art initiative, in which the audience is conceived of as an active participant and protagonist.⁶¹² Variants of the show have been performed in the United States and as far afield as Singapore, but the

⁶¹¹ The WaterFire event and an earlier installation by Kristin Jones are both supported in large part by Tevereterno, an international multidisciplinary organization that produces cultural events to promote the renewal of the Tiber and its embankment areas. Jones herself staged an equally evocative project along the Tiber’s banks in during the summer solstice of 2005: a frieze of twelve grand “She-Wolf Shadows” were revealed by power-washing the accumulated soot from the embankment walls, selectively revealing stenciled images of Rome’s totemic animal. Erasing the patina of time (as represented by the accumulation of soot, fire’s gritty byproduct) only emphasized the city’s long history of creation and destruction. More information available at: <http://www.tevereterno.it/programs/2005-solstizio-destate/>.

⁶¹² The show aims at a synesthetic experience that stimulates community interaction, a kind of contemporary tribal rite: “Water and fire are the heart of the installation, with a deliberate juxtaposition of the elements which have always been the symbol of life and community ever since ancient times.” For more information, see <http://www.waterfire.tv/en>.

setting on the Tiber has the effect of evoking the legend of Rome's incendiary history and²⁸⁴ its traditions of arena spectacle, with its barely contained violence, as well as the apparently universal fascination with the dual nature of fire.

Thus, although the focus of my dissertation is on imperial Latin literature, the Monument inscription, as well as the recent exhibitions at Rome, show just how many of the points of inspiration in this literature remained profoundly influential. Political conflict and ambitious leadership were the twin forces that guided much of Rome's history of progress. Yet these political contests, like fires, sometimes got out of control. Within such moments, Rome's identity and its values were in danger not just of being remade, but of being erased. Roman authors constantly create ruptures with the past even as they allude to it. In developing and manipulating the imagery and narratives associated with urban conflagration, Roman authors were, as ever, finding ways to make old material speak to new problem. The cultural impact of living under the shadow, as it were, of the volcanically supreme power of the principate found expression in a wide array of genres and settings. Conflagration – a single and yet infinitely variable type of hazard – thus became a multivalent and powerful referent for the ideological threats and imagined catastrophes of the early imperial era.

APPENDIX (A). The So-called *Arae Incendii Neroniani*.

The Epigraphic Text and its Implications.

The message of the monuments known as the *Arae Incendii Neroniani* is most clearly evident in the epigraphic text, which remains the key piece of evidence for this topic.¹

This paper will therefore explore the implications of the *text* of the inscription(s) associated with the *Arae* (as they will be called in this discussion), concluding with a particular attention to the religious implications of the vows, rituals, and roles therein of the emperors named by the text: Nero and Domitian. Offered as a religious solution to a specific problem, the so-called *Arae Incendii Neroniani* deserve greater attention than has heretofore been given them as a striking example of the Roman response to disaster.²

The remarkable text of the inscription, even combined with an associated monumental structure surviving *in situ* on the Quirinal Hill, has provoked curiously little scholarly debate. Apart from the initial publication of the Quirinal findings in the late 19th century, treatment of the altars up to this point has largely been limited to (at the very most) a paragraph or two within much more wide-ranging surveys of Roman topography,

¹ General reference works consulted here: Nash, E. *Pictorial Dictionary of Ancient Rome*, 1962; Platner-Ashby, *A Topographical Dictionary of Ancient Rome*, 1929. Richardson, L. A., *New Topographical Dictionary of Ancient Rome*, 1992. Steinby, E.M. (ed), *Lexicon Topographicum Urbis Romae*, 1993-1994. Degraffi, A. *Inscriptiones Latinae Liberae Rei Publicae*. Fasc. I, 1957 and 1963. H. Dessau, *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae*, 3 vols., 1892–1916. Pauly-Wissowa, *Realencyclopädie der Klassischen Altertumswissenschaft*, 1894. Fundamental Publications and Reference Treatments of the “*Arae Incendii Neroniani*”: Nash 1. 60-62.; Platner-Ashby 30.; Richardson 21; *LTUR* I, 70-71; *CIL* VI. 30975 (p 3758) = D 03090 = AE 1891, 00110 = AE 1980; F. Coarelli, *Roma*, (1995) 222. ; R. Lanciani, *FUR* t. 16; R. Lanciani, *N. Sc.* (1888) 159-160; R. Lanciani, *BullCom* (1889) 331 ff.; R. Lanciani, *Pagan and Christian Rome* (1892) 84; C. Hulsen, *RomMitt* (1891): 116ff and (1894) 94-97.

² Jones (1992:102) does cite the altars as an example of Domitian’s scrupulous attention to religious matters, but does not elaborate on the function of form of the altars themselves.

Flavian building, or imperial biographies.³ The most enlightening treatment from a 286 religious viewpoint is that of R. Palmer, whose discussion of the topic in his well known 1976 article on the religion of hills at Rome⁴ has been perhaps undervalued in terms of the promise of its approach, and whose unpublished notes on the *Arae* offer several important suggestions. Otherwise, even those studies focusing on Vulcan as a deity or the propitiation of gods at Rome have made little, if any use of the *Arae* as significant evidence,⁵ highlighting the need for continued effort to integrate topography and religion as practiced at Rome – a “religion of place,”⁶ with appropriate stress on both elements.

The somewhat stalled state of scholarship on the *Arae* is more understandable in light of the problematic nature of the evidence. The actual inscriptions from which our three examples of the text come are all now lost; the documentary evidence relating to their discoveries is old, discontinuous and fragmentary. Their collective *CIL* entry (fig. 1)

³ e.g. Nash 1. 60-62, Platner-Ashby 30, Richardson (1992: 21), *LTUR* I, 70-71; Coarelli (1995) 222.; Lanciani, (1892:84); Jones (1992: 84); Darwall-Smith (1996: 232); Sablayrolles (1996: 458-459); Flower (2006: 237-240) first notes it as a significant item in the development of memory sanctions.

⁴ Palmer (1976: 51-52).

⁵ Capdeville’s otherwise thorough 1995 study of the phenomenon of Vulcan at Rome includes not a single mention of the *Arae*. For discussion, see also Linderski’s criticism of this omission in his review article (Linderski 1997). Turcan (2000) does much to integrate our documentary evidence about Vulcan in with the topography of the city, but again, includes no discussion of the *Arae*; Turcan (2000: 63, 70, 77, 88). Sablayrolles’ magisterial account of the development of firefighting forces at Rome mentions the *Arae* as evidence for cult practice to ward off fire, but does not consider the period, sites, or inscriptions in any detailed fashion (Sablayrolles 1996: 458-459). Lea Cline has completed (at the University of Texas at Austin, under the supervision of Rabun Taylor and Penelope Davies) a dissertation on monumental altars at Rome, which includes a chapter on these altars (L. Cline pers.comm.). I have not seen this dissertation material, but I gather that Cline’s approach is any case different from mine in many respects, though we are working with the same basic source material. Cline (2009) represents some of her findings: Cline favors the theory that the site and design of the altars was entirely Domitianic and part of a larger program of religious signification. I have no major objections to this possibility, but Cline does not discuss the issue of the vow or offer definitive arguments against a Neronian initiation; nor does Cline (2009) discuss the text of the inscription in any detail.

⁶ On this topic generally, see Beard, North and Price (1998:167-210), much of which had been articulated previously in Price (1996: 814-841).

is cobbled together from a variety of sources, with widely disparate levels of contextual information for each example. Our first example is known only from G. Mazocchi's 1521 compendium of epigraphic material at Rome, and seems already at that point to have been removed from its original context, so no usable conclusions may be drawn from it.⁷ However, the second example, found on the Aventine in the mid 17th century (fig. 2), combined with the more extensive documentation provided by the 19th-century excavations of the altar found in situ on the Quirinal (fig. 3) and associated with a third example of the inscription, is sufficient to yield some conclusions about the nature of the monuments to which each was related.⁸ A brief review of the context for each of the inscriptions will provide background for the treatment of the text, which is of primary interest here.

The Altar Precincts: Locations and Layout.

⁷ My own examination of Mazocchi's text in the rare books collection of Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge suggests that he tends to be extremely specific about where and in what circumstances an inscription is found. The fact that he specifies this as having been brought along for the construction of St. Peter's, and that it is listed under the heading *De Burgo S. Petri* strongly suggests that he found it already cut and transported there. Admittedly, *saxum* suggests a big stone, *oblongum* rather than *obeliscum* (a term he certainly uses elsewhere, and which would likely have been appropriate for the tapered, pyramid-topped cippus on which the Quirinal example was inscribed) are suggestive of an altar. But again, we cannot know the state in which this inscription reached him; it may already have been recut into an oblong. Therefore we cannot contextualize the inscription as necessarily having come from a monument distinct from the two otherwise known, *contra*, Darwall-Smith (1996: 236), Richardson (1992: loc. cit).

⁸ See table outlining the evidence (below). The discovery in 1618 of a second example, on the slope of the Aventine at the edge of the area where the Circus Maximus once stood, was documented in enough detail to suggest strong parallels with the text of the inscription. More importantly, the context of the third find (c. 1640 for the inscription and some of the associated paving, and 1888-89 for a continuation of the paving, in which the altar itself was found) on the Quirinal paralleled that of the Aventine find in a number of respects. On both sites, the inscriptions were found on obelisk-shaped cippi, in association with steps, paving, and, intriguingly, altars and/or statues dedicated to Mercury just outside the confines of steps or cippi. On the Quirinal, the line of the steps could be followed from the site of the 1640's find to the paving around the altar itself, which was found and documented by Lanciani and Hülsen in the late 19th century.

Taken together, evidence for each epigraphic find associated with the *Arae* suggests a 288 high level of correlation between traits of the monuments as detailed in the text of the inscriptions, and the finds reported from one or both of the two known find sites: an open paved area (evident most clearly on the Quirinal site), marked off by steps and cippi (steps with multiple obelisk-shaped cippi set into the lowest course were found at both the Quirinal and Aventine sites), and a spiked metal railing (found on the Quirinal site). Finally, the altar and its surrounding precinct were set at a lower level than the cippi, which marked it off (the altar on the Quirinal sits in a paving which is three steps down, a full meter below the street level of the ancient *Alta Semita*). The finds described at the Aventine, along with the stone bearing the inscription, were used as building material for St. Peter's.⁹ However, elements discovered there are discussed in terms too explicitly analogous to the later finds on the Quirinal to be in any real doubt as to the site's character.¹⁰

The 19th century discovery on the Quirinal is the only site excavated to archaeological standards and best conveys the impact of the monument's physical dimensions. Three steps run some 35 meters along the contemporary street edge, which

⁹ Its exact location is irrecoverable, but based on documentary evidence analyzed by Platner and Ashby, it can at least be placed on the slope of the Aventine at the edge of the area where the Circus Maximus once stood.

¹⁰ Appendix (A): The 1618 sources describe the findspot of the inscription as a 'little temple,' with steps and pyramid/obelisk-shaped cippi (referred to as 'piccole pyramide,') one of which bore a second, though less complete, example of the inscription, found in association with steps, paving and an 'altar, a little smaller than our own [i.e. Christian] altars.' This 'altar,' however, was found at the *top* of the steps (the altar described in the inscription is '*inferius*,' 'below,') and outside the confines of the cippi, and thus is unlikely to be the one dedicated by Domitian. Additionally, its documentors record that symbols associated with Mercury were carved into its sides. It is more probably a later addition to the site, and has interesting parallels with the statue base of Mercury found by 19th century excavators of the site on the Quirinal; since bases were and are frequently confused with altars, it is possible this so-called 'altar' was in fact a statue base like the one found on the edge of the Quirinal altar's precinct.

lead to a travertine paving about a meter below the top step; the final step down is set 289 with obelisk-shaped cippi standing almost 2 meters high. Within this stretch of sunken paving lay an island of steps leading up to a structure interpreted as the travertine core of a massive altar, measuring some 6.25m wide by 3.25m deep, and over a meter and a half high without its posited marble facing or upper cyma. Upon its stepped platform, the structure had additional steps set against its south and west faces, features presumably added to facilitate in the sacrifice.¹¹ A full reconstruction is problematic because the altar core itself is too exceptional in size and design to find many easy comparanda.¹²

To sum up before moving on to the inscription itself, the form of the monument on the Quirinal, as detailed above, appears very similar to the setting in which the 1618 find at the foot of the Aventine is described. As for the 1521 inscription, we cannot say

¹¹ Little else of the altar's original decoration and fittings survive, but holes for metal clamps in the travertine suggest at least a marble cornice to match the marble facing running around the base (still extant in parts along the bottom), as well as marble facing along the sides (Hülsemann: 1894, 116). The universal identification in scholarship of the Quirinal monument as an altar, rather than, say, an equestrian statue base, is a valid one in light of such features, which are commonly associated with altars and would serve no purpose on other structures.

¹² Surviving examples of other altars of such dimensions are few. Of the hundred or so freestanding altars found in Rome and its environs, very few are more than 1.5m wide; the roughly contemporaneous altars associated with tombs from Pompeii, though similar in certain aspects such as the stepped platform and marble facing, are less than half this size. The partial *pulvinus* found at Piazza Sforza would have measured some 3.80m., and is considered to indicate the depth of an altar of 'colossal scale' (Boatwright: 1985, 487-491 and 492, n. 13.); nevertheless, we would do well to remember that the dimensions of the 'Arae Incendii Neroniani' may not have been quite unique in the environment of late-republican and early imperial building at Rome; as M. Boatwright points out in her discussion of the Piazza Sforza find, altars of 'extraordinary size and unusual layout' in Rome would be appropriate for the tombs of certain individuals, and the Piazza Sforza example may be one of several structures with altars of such dimensions. However, that still leaves us in the category of, if not unprecedented, still 'extraordinary and exceptional' within the repertoire of building at Rome. Additionally, the surviving travertine of the altar has an unusually large and deep depression, oblong in shape, on its top. This type of depression stands in marked contrast to the usual shallow, bowl-shaped libation holes that typify the majority of altars found at Rome. It may indicate that a metal grill or plate of some sort was attached to protect the travertine and marble from the sacrificial fires, a suggestion offered by Bowerman for the so-called 'Plane-leaf Altar,' comparable in shape if not in size to the Quirinal monument (Bowerman: 1913, 129).

definitively that it represents a third monument,¹³ as opposed to being simply an additional element of either the Quirinal or the Aventine monuments (though its eventual find spot in the Vatican plain may indeed suggest a third site). This not to say that these examples are definitively the only ones which ever existed; only that we must ask answerable questions of the available data. The inscription itself must be our starting point for such an investigation.

The Text: *CIL VI 826 = 30837(b) = ILS 4914.*

The text offered below is that of *CIL VI 826 = 30837(b) = ILS 4914*, from the inscribed cippus found on the Via del Quirinale in the 17th century; it appears to be the most complete of the three, but certain disagreements with the other two texts will be noted and discussed below.

Haec area intra hancce
definitionem cipporum
clausa veribus et ara quae
est inferius dedicata est ab
Imp Caesare Domitiano Aug 5
Germanico ex voto suscepto
quod diu erat neglectum nec
redditum incendiorum
arcendorum causa
quando urbs per novem dies 10
arsit Neronianis temporibus
hac lege dedicata est ne cui
liceat intra hos terminos
aedificium exstruere manere

¹³ *contra* Darwall-Smith (1996: 236), Richardson (1992: 21).

negotiari arborem ponere 15
 aliudve quid serere
 et ut praetor cui haec regio
 sorti obvenerit sacrum faciat
 aliusve quis magistratus
 Volcanalibus (ante diem) X K Septembres 20
 omnibus annis vitulo robeo
 et verre r(obeo) fac[tis] precationibus
 infra scriptam aedi[] K Sept
 ianist []
 [] dari[] quae s 25
 quod Im(perator) Caesar Domitianus
 Aug Germanicus Pont Max
 constituit q[]
 fieri

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‘[1] This area, within this boundary of cippi enclosed with spikes, and the altar which is below, has been dedicated by [5] the Emperor Caesar Domitian Augustus Germanicus, from a vow undertaken, which was long neglected and not fulfilled, for the sake of repelling fires, [9-10] when the city burned for nine days in the time of Nero. By this law it is dedicated, that it is not allowed within these confines for anyone to build a structure, settle, [15] conduct business, place a tree, or plant anything, and that the praetor to whom this region has come by lot, or some other magistrate, shall make a sacrifice [20] on the Volcanalia, the 23rd of August, in all years of a red calf and a (red) hog, with prayers made [the fragments of lines 23-25 will be discussed below]...[26] which as chief pontiff the Emperor Caesar Domitian Augustus has established...(q?) (there shall be??)...’

Significant differences with 30837(a) (Mazocchi’s find) include: the apparent chiseling out of Domitian’s titlature from *ab* (4)...*Germanico* (6). Mazocchi comments that they have been deeply (*celte*) erased, and it seems probable that this inscription was a target of the memory sanctions carried out against Domitian following his death in 96. In line 18, where the text of (b) above reads *sacrum faciat*, Mazocchi’s text reads *litaturum se sciat*: ‘(the praetor or some other magistrate) shall know that he is to make a favorable

sacrifice.’ Line 20 above includes the entire word *Septembres*, while example (a) 292 reads only *Sept*, a possible abbreviation. Line 21 above contains the adjective *robeo*, while (a) offers *robio*. After this, the text breaks off, which, given Mazocchi’s efforts elsewhere to record all visible text, suggests that the stone was either broken or partially observed when it was recorded.

Example 30837(c), found on the north slope of the Aventine, begins only at *ex voto suscepto* in line 6; though it is of course impossible to recover its state of preservation at the time the inscription was recorded, the point at which it picks up midline matches that of the (in all likelihood) deliberately damaged line in example (a). In line 12, instead of *dedicata* we see *dicata*. This seems a probable scribal error, more likely on the part of the recorder than of the inscriber, but we cannot be certain. Otherwise, the text largely matches that of (a), reading *litaturum se sciat* at 18; at line 20, reading *Sept*; and at line 21, *robio*. It also ends with the exact same word in 22: *verre*. To outline the arguments of Hülsen,¹⁴ these commonalities might be enough to suggest that the 17th century sources for example (c) could even simply have been copying lines 6-22 from Mazocchi’s 1521 text (a), were it not for the compelling similarities these sources describe between the context of find (c) and the altar of on the Quirinal associated with (b), which was not known until the excavations of the late 19th century.¹⁵ I, with some reservations (since none of the material allegedly observed and recorded here are available, it is impossible to confirm), subscribe to Hülsen’s reading and accept (c) as genuine.

¹⁴ More detail is offered in his fundamental analysis of the site (Hülsen: 1894).

¹⁵ For a full account of parallels between the two sites see Appendix (A); after Hülsen (1894).

A more difficult question is how much we can trust the hand that recorded (b),²⁹³ our most complete example. Though the lineation matches that of (a) and (c), the differences such as *Septembres* for *Sept* and *robeo* instead of the non-standard *robio* at least raise the possibility of an author filling in blanks or correcting ‘mistakes’ from his own knowledge of Latin. In this light, (b)’s *sacrum faciat* as opposed to the *litaturum se sciat* of (a) and (c) could begin to look like the informed guess of a reader confronted with a damaged text offering fragments: []rum []iat, perhaps? The author’s apparently faithful preservation of damaged words in 23-25 and 28-29 militates against this somewhat, but these items were perhaps too fragmentary to warrant any conjecture. At any rate, these issues combined with those surrounding example (c) mean we must proceed with caution when offering any interpretation of the text.

To begin analysis of the text requires acknowledgement of this study’s debt to the unpublished notes of Palmer, who performed a similar exegesis, confirming my own independently formed impression of the potential of this text to yield important information bearing on a variety of topics (in Palmer’s words):

...creation and aspect of an *area*, setting bounds by means of markers, local cult to ward off fire, encroachment on public space, cult and lustration of shrines, and *above all the care that Domitian took to improve the life of the city twenty years after the fire* [emphasis mine].

To this I would add the importance of the role Nero evidently played in the origination of the project, an aspect that Domitian’s own text seems to foreground in a deliberate fashion. Though my interpretation differs from Palmer’s at several junctures, his approach to the sites as a unified whole, his close attention to the text of the inscription, and his interest in situating the *Arae* within the culturally appropriate context of *religious*

activity at Rome, as opposed to purely political or administrative interpretations, are 294
all major contributions to the scholarship on the topic. The examination herein looks
more towards Domitian's treatment of Nero's legacy, but acknowledges Palmer's
influence.

A detailed commentary on the text will further illuminate the questions raised
above. Lines 1-3, (*haec...ara*) open with a definitive marking off of the *area*. The cippi
would have been sufficient to mark a ritual boundary, and the additional physical
boundary of a spiked railing (*veribus*) suggests an elevated concern about keeping the
precinct clear. As with many monumental inscriptions, the descriptive nature of the
introductory lines is likely a reflection of the original language of the vow,¹⁶ which
proposes a dedication in specific terms, to be fulfilled when the supplicant's wish is
granted. Though no longer available, the cippus on which 30837(b) was inscribed came
to light on the Quirinal in association with steps and the remains of metal spikes set in
lead, probably the means by which the site (*area*) was "enclosed with spikes" (*clausa
veribus*).

Lines 3-4 (*et...inferius*) again reflect the actual design of the surviving site, with
altar set into a paved area sunken about a meter below contemporary street level. That all
the examples of the inscription include this detail again suggests that the *inferius* nature
of the altar was part of the original proposal of the vow, rather than a feature determined
by local setting. The apparent consistency of the design across multiple sites reinforces
the sense that this program of sacred space was meant to send a clear message.

Nevertheless, each inscription also appears as self-sufficient, making no references to any

¹⁶ cf. Rüpke (2007: 162).

of the other sites, suggesting that each monument was expected to function independently within its own setting.¹⁷

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Line 4 (*dedicata est*) takes both *ara* and *area* as its subject. The entire precinct, then, is to be seen as sacred space marked off for ritual activity; such specific clarification may have been necessary given the proliferation of freestanding altars throughout the city. Lacking any defined zone of protection, many altars might have gone virtually unnoticed by those not involved in whatever cult activity it attracted. Here, the detailed description of the site may point not only to the original language of the vow, but also to the unusual nature of the site, with its fenced precinct and massive altar. The proposed monument may have been unparalleled enough in the vocabulary of sacred architecture at Rome that simply referring to an “altar” was insufficient. The public may even have needed some instruction on how to understand the new set of parameters for defining this space.

Lines 4-6 (*ab...Germanico*) identify Domitian as the dedicator of this structure, and close the dating at least on one end, since he did not assume the title of Germanicus until 83; however, no more specific date is indicated, such as a year of tribunician power or a consulship (though possibly this information was provided in a now-lost part of the inscription). Yet the very absence of information in these opening lines may flesh out a kind of truth for us about this monument. Domitian’s emphasis seems to have been not on

¹⁷ Though beyond the scope of this study, a possibly illuminating comparison with this material exists in the *Tabula Siarensis*, bronze inscriptions preserving parts of the senatus consulta for Germanicus (though the Senate was in charge, rather than the emperor) of honors after his death in Syria in 19. Though the surviving example is found in Spain, clear mention is made of additional monuments to be erected in Syria and Germany. Translation of the text is available at <http://www.umich.edu/~classics/programs/class/cc/372/sibyl/db/H006.html>; see also Tac. *Ann.* 2.83, Sánchez (1999).

a significant date of dedication, but on the ritual activity that would take place on the site from year to year. The inclusion of only his military distinction at this point, not his filiation or other status markers may likewise point to a self-styling on Domitian's part as protector of the city from threats, be they external (invasion) or internal (fire).¹⁸

Line 6's identification of the monument as a fulfillment of a vow (*ex voto suscepto*) is in itself confirmation that the *Arae* were offered as a response to a specifically religious problem. Something was asked of a deity, and was believed to have been granted. Thus, the obligation to build had its roots in some previous event with a religious dimension. This is a straightforward enough proposition in itself, but the picture is immediately complicated by the lines that follow (7-11), which need to be considered together due to the multiple possibilities for punctuation and construal. The most standard way to take it is as follows: *quod diu erat neglectum nec redditum, incendiorum arcendorum causa, quando urbs per novem dies arsit Neronianis temporibus*, '[a vow] which was long neglected and not fulfilled, [undertaken] for the sake of repelling fires, when the city burned for nine days in the time of Nero.'¹⁹ The issue that leaps out from this reading is the inferral that the monuments were vowed not by Domitian, their dedicator, but were promised either during the fire, or in its immediate aftermath.

¹⁸ On Domitian's standard titulature see Cagnat (1914: 191-92) and Martin (1987).

¹⁹ This understanding of the text is the most widely accepted in current scholarship, but, as an example of how differently the text can be construed, Palmer's unpublished notes suggest the following: 'in accord with a vow, because of long neglect and failure to restore. For the purpose of warding off fires inasmuch as the city burned for nine days in the time of Nero, the dedication was made under these terms...' This seems to demand a number of forced readings of the text, and to ignore the common semantic field of words like *votum*, *suscipere*, *neglegere* and *reddere* suggesting they should be understood together. However, non-standard readings of epigraphic material should always be mooted out, as they tend to reflect speech acts, which operate under rather different conditions to literary texts.

The technical meaning of the religious terminology requires consideration. A 297 *votum*, as defined in sacral law, was a solemn commitment made in favor of a divinity. It was not suable under civil law, but the promissor (and after his death, his heir) was obligated to the divinity at the hazard of further divine punishment.²⁰ *Suscipere*, in contractual and obligatory relations, is to assume a unilateral obligation, to incur a debt – again, one that implied an obligation that would pass to one’s heirs. The most logical originator in ‘Neronian times’ of a sacred obligation that could be passed on to Domitian is presumably his predecessor as *Pontifex Maximus*: Nero himself.

If Nero can be identified as the source of the vow in this scenario, it is still unclear whether the *quando* clause refers to a vow made during the fire, in which case the *Arae* were owed for mere limitation of a nevertheless devastating destruction; or whether in the aftermath, Nero took steps to prevent another such catastrophe, promising veneration if some period of time passed without significant incendiary activity (on the model of forest fires, a slow period after a major fire cleared the area was perhaps to be expected in any case). Though the former option is not without its attractions, on balance the latter seems more likely. Tacitus (in an uncharacteristically complementary passage) records Nero’s active role in the in the aftermath of the 64 destruction, in which propitiation of the gods was a high priority, and extraordinary measures he records such as special lustrations and supplications are consistent with the idea of building a monumental altar or altars.²¹

On a physical level, both Tacitus and Suetonius’ extended descriptions of the Neronian redesign for the city include extensive measures in the building codes for

²⁰ On *vota* and *leges sacrae*, see Wissowa (1912) 380, and (1902) 319-23; Latte (1960) 46-7; Gargola (1995) 22-3.

²¹ Tac. *Ann.* 15.44.2.

preventing further fires from spreading rapidly.²² Additionally, if Nero met his end 298 before the time at which the vow required fulfillment, it would help explain how it came to be “long neglected and not fulfilled. As for the evocative phrase *Neronianis temporibus*, the text seems to be more concerned with associating Nero with the event, than with pinpointing a significant date. This may be in part because the date was such common knowledge, but it also seems to bespeak an elevated interest in bringing Nero into comparison with Domitian as a leader. Equally, with the entire period of Nero’s reign as the temporal setting, the nine-day conflagration seems to become the defining event of the era.²³

The remaining lines of the inscription (12 ff., *hac lege dedicata est...*) are all concerned with the ritual nature of the site and the activities to take place therein. The prohibitive *ne* clause (12-16, *ne...serere*) makes reference again to the boundaries of the precinct (*intra hos terminos*) first outlined in 1-3, forbidding any kind of building, settling, commercial activity or cultivation from taking place there. Though these kinds of ritual injunctions are very well understood to have applied to any space defined as

²² These passages in fact use language and descriptions suggestively similar to those of the altars’ inscription. Suetonius, in describing Nero’s rebuilding of the city following the fire of 64, relates: *Formam aedificiorum Urbis novam excogitavit et ut ante insulas ac domos porticus essent, de quarum solariis incendia arcerentur, easque sumptu suo extruxit...*(Suet. *Ner.* 16). Here the same terms we find in the Domitianic inscription, *incendium* and *arcere*, are clearly used in relation to a physical structure from which the fire could be fought; Tacitus uses an analogous phrase, *ignibus reprimendis*, when he is similarly describing facilities and measures decreed by Nero to check fires that have broken out (Tac. *Ann.* 45.43).

²³ Martial’s poems celebrating the rededicated space of the Colosseum make much of Nero’s inappropriate response to the destruction of the city; the anonymously authored historical drama *Octavia*, though it may date from as early as the reign of Galba, displays a similar impulse throughout, using a profusion of metaphorical language suggesting fire, as well as an eerie prophecy of the destruction delivered by the ghost of Agrippina. Tacitus’ *Annals* and Suetonius’ *Life of Nero* both amply demonstrate how dominant this hostile strain of historiography had become by the post-Flavian era..

sacred.²⁴ It is quite unusual to see them spelled out on the sites themselves, and so this passage has attracted a variety of interpretations, all of which are problematic in different ways.²⁵ In truth, no motives for articulating the injunctions in this inscription are viable without first determining one's position on how and when the language of this part of the text was formulated.

If the injunctions part of the original language of the vow, then the design of the precincts, the motive (*incendia arcendorum causa*) and possibly at least one of the locations, was determined in "Neronian times." If this is the case, it strengthens the reading of the importance of open space as reflection concerns about the spread of fire, as these are well attested as part of Nero's legacy in the urban landscape. This brings us back to their original, symbolic aspect as sites of sacrifice to Vulcan, meant to prevent fire from breaking out to begin with, through divine propitiation. Were fire were to break out within the very confines of the precinct, or, worse, spread from the sacrifice itself, the

²⁴ cf. Ulpian, *On the Edict* bk. 68 fr. 1482-3. See also Ando's remarks on sacred space more generally, in Ando (2003: 247-251).

²⁵ A full exploration of these arguments is beyond the scope of this study, which focuses not on the structure, but on the inscription; but to outline the main points: Richardson (1992) suggests that the pavements, cleared of any structure or activity as the inscription dictates, might serve as a firebreak. This notion is rejected by Darwall-Smith (1996: 236): '...this altar, and others like it, would serve no protective purpose in a fire.' In attempt to interpret the inscription's evident concern for keeping the area bare, he concludes: 'One can only see it as a religious gesture, to appease the gods by keeping some areas ritually waste.' However, while parallels for 'ritually waste' zones in bustling commercial centers are few, the idea of keeping areas open in order to fight fire is well attested; nor is it entirely unreasonable to speculate that this might have been the intention, whether effective or not, behind the design of the monuments. Rodríguez-Almeida's attempt to the injunctions in with Domitianic legislation against the encroachment of market-stalls on street space stands or falls with his identification, which is by no means secure, of the altar on the Quirinal with the *pila Tiburtina* referenced in Martial's epigrams 7.61 and 5.22 (Rodríguez-Almeida 1986). Though Rodríguez-Almeida's treatment is ingenious and a number of common vocabulary items link the inscription to the epigrams, he does not address the oddity of referring to a large altar, which would in any case have been faced in marble, as the 'Travertine Piling,' nor explains how 7.61 seems to refer to this *pila* as part of the previous situation on the street (*nuper*, 7.61. 5, 10), prior to Domitian's intervention and regulation (*nunc*, 7.61.10), which he claims the altar commemorates.

disfavor of the gods this would signal, the disgrace to the parties involved would be 300 considerable.

Alternately, Domitian's identified in the text as dedicator at lines 4-6 may signal a shift to language formulated in the Domitianic period, including the specifics of the laws spelled out below (*hac lege ff.*). This would suggest that, perhaps because of the long lapse between vow and dedication, Nero's original boundaries were in some danger of being disrespected and the injunctions needed to be emphasized. The scenario that best explains this is one in which the altar was vowed – and even partially begun, at least as far as the precinct, by Nero, but then lay unfinished after his death for many years as a reminder of a vow 'long neglected and not fulfilled,' before eventually being taken up, finished off in marble, cippi, railings, etc. and dedicated by Domitian.

During the intervening years between the death of Nero and the dedication under Domitian, opportunistic local retailers and residents would naturally have encroached upon the unfinished monument; hence, the special injunctions about the inviolability of the newly dedicated space. This would explain a great deal about the nature of the inscription, especially the unusual step of explicitly evoking Nero's memory. The text's assertion that the project first began with Nero, but fell into neglect, would just be an articulation of what must have been readily apparent for years.²⁶ Domitian's additional imprimatur at the conclusion of this section, and his identification of himself as Pontifex

²⁶ cf. R. Osborne's conclusions about epigraphic evidence for the Salaminioi in Attica, in Osborne and Alcock (1996: 143-160, esp. 148-9). Confirmation or denial of the possibility of an earlier Neronian stage of the Quirinal monument may be possible pending the site's re-evaluation (the first in over a century) currently underway in Rome, under the supervision of M. G. Lauro, who kindly discussed her plans for the project with me in July of 2009. However, further thoughts along these lines must await her publication of her findings.

Maximus (27) may strengthen the possibility that lines 12 ff. represent his re- 301
formulation of the vow. This interpretation need not obviate idea that the design
principles were Neronian, as suggested above, but it explains the emphasis put on
delimiting the space as a reflection of the years between vow and fulfillment.

Finally, the text from 23-25, though too fragmentary to read with confidence,
presents some points of interest: at 23, Palmer suggests restoring *infra scriptam aedi...*
as *infra scriptam aedi(culam)*, controlled by a lost verb. It is unclear, however, how a
shrine (even a small one) would be “written below” our text. It seems more appropriate to
imagine *infra scriptam* as perhaps modifying a lost noun such as *precationem*, and
perhaps to imagine *aedi...* as the beginning of this prayer. More intriguing is Palmer’s
suggestion that since there appears to be no room for X before the K in line 23, we may
assume another ritual took place on September 1st.²⁷ This is perhaps the occasion for the
infra scriptam precatio, if we may risk that restoration. Additionally Palmer’s suggested
emendation of *ianist* at 24 to *lanis t(urisque)*, “with wool and incense,” seems at least
plausible in the context of a yearly ritual with some lustral aspect, possibly carried out on
September 1st.²⁸ Since the other texts break off before this point in (b), it is impossible to
be sure if they contained mention of this posited extra ceremony, or whether the Quirinal
monument was singled out for special devotion. In any case, these final words seem to
emphasize again the ritual importance of the dedicated site(s), and perhaps also the high
level of concern with purification and renewal.

²⁷ Although, as Palmer notes, we have no record of a pertinent festival on that date in surviving
calendars.

²⁸ On the *Arae* as part of a larger Flavian scheme of cleansing and lustration in the wake of major
fires, see Palmer (1976).

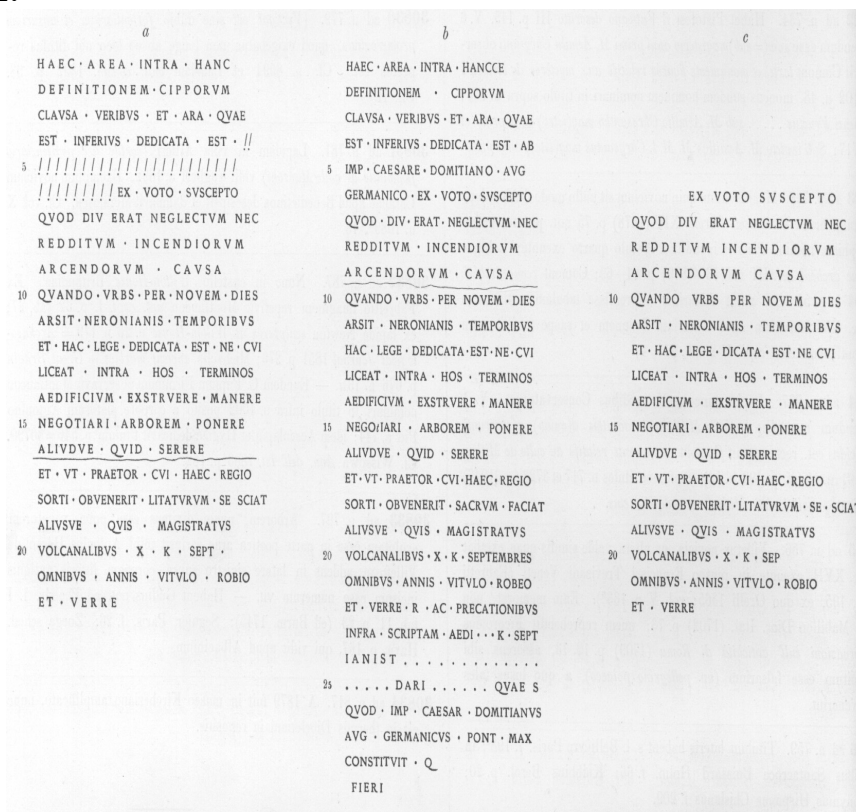
altars are known is an inappropriate and somewhat misleading one. The name suggests that they commemorate the Great fire of 64 in a direct fashion, and does nothing to indicate that Domitian is the actual dedicator, or even that Vulcan is the true object of worship.²⁹ Yet all three known inscriptions associated with this presumed set of altars clearly state that the altars are intended for sacrifices on the day of the Volcanalia, an ancient holiday honoring Vulcan, the Roman god of fires and forges. For this reason, I suggest that they be known instead as the “Altars of Vulcan.”

²⁹ Indeed, Griffin’s otherwise excellent study on Nero (1984: 129 n. 39) identifies them as sacred to Neptune.

Table of evidence for the Domitianic Altars of Vulcan (“Arae Incendii Neroniani”):

Site/ Date <i>Source</i>	State of Evidence	Travertine cippus bearing inscription (all now lost)	Other Travertine Cippi	Monumental Altar	Steps	Paving	Metal Railing	(Possible) Statue of Mercury.
Language used in inscription paralleled by finds <i>CIL entry</i>		(cippus bore the inscription)	<i>definitio cipporum</i>	<i>et ara</i>	<i>quae est inferius</i> (implies a descent between cippi and altar)	<i>haec area</i>	<i>Clausa veribus</i>	No mention; suggests statue was a later addition to site.
Unknown/ late 15 th Century <i>Mazochius, 1521</i>	Inscription only evidence recorded; taken as building material for first Basilica of St. Peter.	Yes; (<i>Domitian's name and title scratched out on this example only</i>)	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i
Aventine/1618 <i>Letter recorded in Angelonius' la historia Augusta...illustrata dell' antiche medaglie</i> (Rome 1641)	Inscription recorded and site described by early antiquarian; all materials taken as building material for second Basilica of St. Peter.	Yes	Yes; Described by source as ‘ <i>piccoli pyramide</i> ’ i.e. obelisk-shaped.	No mention	Yes	Yes	No mention	Yes; Small statue base/ altar, carved with <i>petasos</i> and <i>caduceus</i> .
Quirinal/1646?? and 1888 <i>1648 Letter from Holstein to Cardinal Barberini, mentioning find some two years earlier. Recorded in cod. Paris/ fonds Dupuy; Lanciani, N. Sc. 1888-1890; Hülsen, Rom. Mitt. 1894.</i>	Known from 17 th century documentary sources only; document also describes associated finds of steps and railing.	Yes; described and recorded by 1648 letter.	Yes; obelisk-shaped cippi described and measured by Lanciani.	Yes; described and measured by Lanciani.	Yes; mentioned by 1648 letter; later described and measured by Lanciani.	Yes; described and measured by Lanciani.	Yes; described in 1648 letter.	Yes; Find of statue base with winged feet recorded by Lanciani.

Fig. 1:



CIL 30837: Three examples (from right to left):

a) Fragment of uncertain provenance; recorded in Mazochius, (1521); Domitian's name scratched out.

b) Fragment found on the Quirinal.

c) Fragment found near the Circus Maximus.

Plan of the Circus Maximus; note estimated location of Ara Incendii Neroniani.

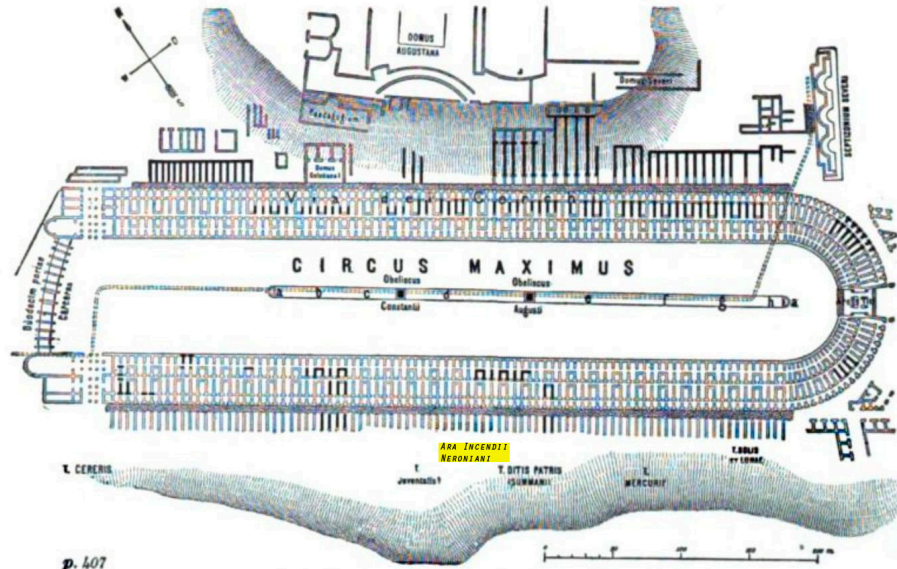
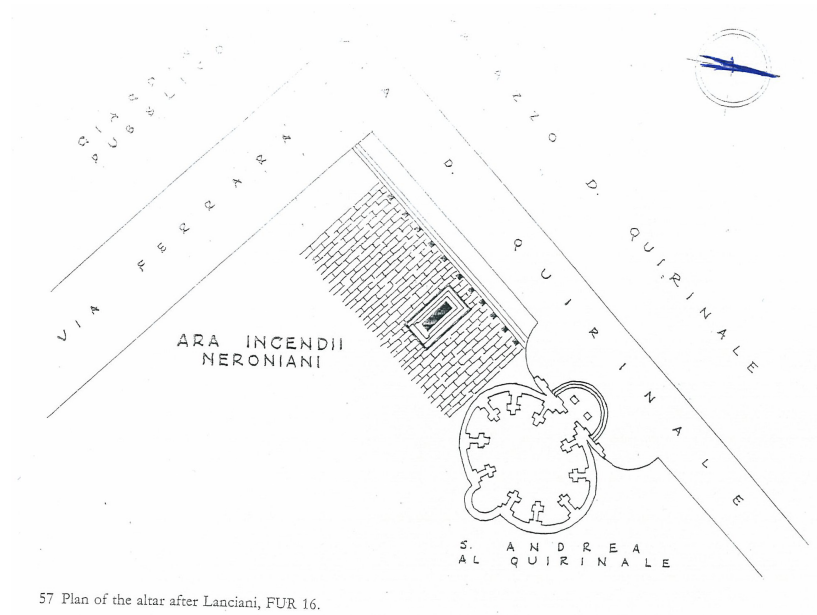


FIG. 82. — PLAN OF THE CIRCUS MAXIMUS.

Source: Platner, *The topography and monuments of ancient Rome*, Edition 2 (1911).



Plan of Quirinal Ara Incendii Neroniani Complex (Lanciani, *FUR* 16) Note the cippi positioned along the edge of the paving, parallel with the modern Via di Quirinale.

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CIL = Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum.

LTUR = Lexicon Topographicum Urbis Romae. E. Steinby, ed. (1993-2000) Rome.

OLD = Oxford Latin Dictionary. P. W. G. Glare, ed. (1968-82) Oxford.

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