

THE PREFECT'S DILEMMA AND THE DATE OF THE *OCTAVIA**

The long-awaited publication of Otto Zwierlein's edition of Seneca's Tragedies provides a welcome opportunity to present a few observations on the penultimate scene of pseudo-Seneca's *Octavia* (846–76).¹

The scene in question features Nero quarrelling with his Guard Prefect over the fate of the Empress Octavia. In this altercation there are three textual points which have for long been in dispute. The first section of the article is concerned with these, favouring an emendation (858) discarded in the new Oxford edition, but questioning two of the verse divisions suggested (867b–868a) or adopted (870a) by Zwierlein.

Whatever the strength of the individual arguments put forward in the first section, the detailed discussion of the text will, I hope, provide a useful background for the ensuing attempt to reassess the old problem of the Prefect's historical identity. Is he a dramatic stock figure, or did the playwright model him from life? This problem has an important bearing on the intricate issue of the date and purpose of the tragedy. So, while the second section is devoted to examining the relative weight of the arguments *pro et contra* the historical identity of this *persona*, the conclusion then examines how the proposed identification of the Prefect accords with what is otherwise known about the original scope and context of the *Octavia*.

I. THE TEXT

By way of introduction, one may briefly recapitulate the relevant context. The plot of the *Octavia* focuses on a dynastic purge in the Julio-Claudian family. Three exiles are executed and three heads brought to Rome. Like Tacitus, the unknown dramatist suggests a connection between these murders.² In two parallel scenes (437ff.;

* I am indebted to Amanda Claridge, Karsten Friis-Jensen and Elisabeth Nedergaard for their critical comments, linguistic as well as factual, on earlier drafts of this paper.

The following books and articles will be cited by author's name alone:

M. Alenius and P. Kragelund (edd.), *Octavia, kejser Neros hustru* (Copenhagen, 1984).

G. Ballaira (ed.), *Ottavia, con note* (Torino, 1974).

T. D. Barnes, 'The Date of the *Octavia*', *MH* 39 (1982), 215ff.

M. T. Griffin, *Nero. The End of a Dynasty* (London, 1984).

P. Kragelund¹, *Prophecy, Populism and Propaganda in the 'Octavia'* (Copenhagen, 1982).

P. Kragelund², 'Vatinius, Nero and Curia Maternus', *CQ* 37 (1987), 197ff.

P. L. Schmidt, 'Die Poetisierung und Mythisierung der Geschichte in der Tragödie *Octavia*', *ANRW* II. 32.2 (1985), 1421ff.

O. Zwierlein¹, 'Weiteres zum Seneca Tragicus (II)', *WJ* 4 (1978), 143ff.

O. Zwierlein², *Kritischer Kommentar zu den Tragödien Senecas* (Akad. d. Wiss. u. d. Lit., Mainz, 1986).

All references to Seneca Tragicus are to Otto Zwierlein's edition of the *Tragoediae* (Oxford, 1986).

¹ These observations on the text originate from the joint efforts of editing and translating the *Octavia* with Marianne Alenius for a production of the drama at Boldhusteatret in Copenhagen in October and November 1984 (cf. the bilingual edition, with introduction and notes, cited above). It should be emphasized that the *praetexta* in what follows will be assumed to postdate the fall of Nero in June A.D. 68; cf. nn. 47ff.

² Tac. *Ann.* 14.48ff.; on the dynastic implications of the purge, see Griffin, pp. 189ff. (with prev. bibliography).

846ff.),³ Nero demands the execution of his three *hostes*: first of his two relatives, Rubellius Plautus and Faustus Cornelius Sulla Felix, then of his wife, Octavia. In both cases he meets resistance. While Seneca in the first of the two scenes valiantly sustains a prolonged argument with the tyrant, the Prefect's objections in the second are swept aside, after a tense and brilliant exchange.

The arguments of the two scenes exhibit salient similarities. Against the objections of Seneca, Nero insists that the proud ancestry (496) and popular favour of Plautus and Sulla make them his rivals and *hostes* (443; 469). Exile had not broken (*fregeret* 464) them: it was his life, or theirs. Better therefore strike first. In an outburst of anger he even discloses his wish to deal with his sister and wife, Octavia, in a similar manner: indeed, all who excelled should be brought low (462ff.).

Nero's suspicions against Octavia are soon to be confirmed. She too enjoys popular favour (183; 273ff.; 786; 877) and Seneca warns Nero that the *populus* would oppose her expulsion (572ff.). In vain: Nero is confident that a resolute display of power would break (*fractus* 576) the people's sympathy for the Empress.

Events prove him wrong. His marriage to Poppaea triggers riots in the city, and attacks on the Palace. Poppaea should leave and Octavia regain her previous station and rightful share in the power, as the people demands (789–90). While the Guard drives back the rioting crowds, Nero, in a soliloquy, reveals his intention also to remove this challenge to his power. She is responsible for the riots (827ff.) and shall atone for her crimes. As for the people, he will in due course ordain a fitting punishment, the great Fire, which would subdue them, once and for all:

fracta [sc. turba] per poenas metu
parere discet principis nutu sui. 842

As will appear from this brief summary Nero is, as it were, possessed by a mad craving for revenge and punishment. Hence his dissatisfaction with the Prefect in whose terse report on the suppression of the revolt the ideals of moderation and restraint stand out:

Populi furorem caede paucorum, diu
qui restiterunt temere, compressum affero. 846

Nero will hear nothing of restraint (*Et hoc sat est?* 848) and demands true revenge (*vindicta* 849). The Prefect points out that the leaders of the riots had already been executed (850), but Nero furiously evokes the crimes of the crowd (*turba* 851): shall they not be punished (*debita poena vacat?* 855)? The Prefect in reply invokes moral principle,⁴ and the Princes' paternal duties towards his citizens:⁵

Poenam dolor constituet in cives tuos? 856

but like Seneca's in the parallel scene these pleas now go unheeded:

Constituet [sc. poenam], aetas nulla quam famae eximat. 857

³ The parallel is ignored by D. F. Sutton, *The Dramaturgy of the 'Octavia'* (Meissenheim, 1983), p. 20; for a detailed discussion, see Schmidt 1435ff.

⁴ Cf. for instance Seneca's admonitions to Nero in *De clementia* I.20.3: *clementem vocabo non in alieno dolore facilem, sed eum qui... intellegit magni animi esse iniurias in summa potentia pati nec quicquam esse gloriosius principe impune laeso*. For a detailed discussion of the loans from i.a. *De clementia*, see F. Bruckner, *Interpretationen zur Pseudo-Seneca Tragödie Octavia* (Diss., Nürnberg, 1976), pp. 14ff.

⁵ *tuos* gives deliberate emphasis to the paternal aspects of the Principate: cf. Seneca's admonition to Nero *Obsequere potius civibus placidus tuis* (578); in the otherwise very restrictive *apparatus criticus* of the OCT edition, Stuart's *tuus* could therefore safely have been disregarded.

Even if Nero does not disclose his true intentions (i.e. the Fire), the enormity of his secret plans for revenge should at this point be clear to the Prefect: its memory would, Nero claims, endure for ever after. Yet, to judge from the reading of previous editors, the Prefect now suddenly declares that he is prepared to do whatever Nero demands: 'Your wrath, and not my fears shall be my law' is the commonly accepted interpretation of his response *Tua temperet nos ira, non noster timor*.⁶ Discarding the objections of Paolo Frassinetti, Zwielerin has recently endorsed this interpretation. Yet, given the otherwise sane and moderate stance of the soldier, it is strangely inconsistent that he should now *exhort* the Emperor to release the terrible impact of his *ira*. It seems more likely, therefore, that the Prefect, by reminding Nero of the restraint engendered by his subjects' fear (cf. 457ff.; 494; 526; 842), once again wishes to *question* the justification and necessity of irate excess:

Tua temperet nos ira, non noster timor?⁷

858

Thus phrased, the Prefect's reply becomes the logical culmination of the debate on the suppression of the revolt. While Nero in his hatred of the *vulgus* or *turba*, as he is fond of terming the *populus*,⁸ demands a massacre, the Prefect advocates restraint and moderation; in his final line the latter even emphasises his solidarity with the people's lot (note *populi* 846; *cives* 856; *nos...noster* 858).

Unperturbed, Nero confirms that it is indeed his *ira* (cf. *ira...mea* 821; *iram...nostram* 830) which will dictate his policy:

Iram expiabit prima quae meruit meam

859

but as the Prefect is quick to perceive, Nero now seems to waver in his demand for a general massacre. Since the Prefect obviously wishes to keep the bloodshed at a minimum (cf. *paucorum* 846; *duces* 850) he eagerly grasps this apparent concession and promises that the object of the Emperor's anger will not be spared (*nostra ne parcat manus* 860). Whether or not the phraseology is intended to allude to the Senecan ideals of imperial *clementia* Nero's subsequent insistence on the murder of his wife (861) certainly brings the differences between the Emperor and his Prefect to a pitch: the Prefect recoils in horror (862) – and a heated argument (in rapid half lines) ensues:

863 NERO Parere dubitas? PRAEF Cur meam damnas fidem?
 864 NERO Quod parcis hosti. PRAEF Femina hoc nomen capit?
 865 NERO Si scelera cepit. PRAEF Estne qui sontem arguat?
 866 NERO Populi furor. PRAEF Quis regere dementes valet?
 867 NERO Qui concitare potuit. PRAEF Haud quemquam reor.
 868 NERO Mulier, dedit natura cui primum malo
 869 animum, ad nocendum pectus instruxit dolis.
 870 PRAEF Sed vim negavit, ut ne inexpugnabilis
 871 esset, sed aegras frangeret vires timor.

⁶ tua *Buecheler*: qua *A*: quam *recc.*; the emendation has in general been accepted as necessary. The translation is that of Watling (*Penguin Classics*, 1966); cf. Herrmann (*Budé*, 1926) *Que ta colère me dirige et non mes scrupules!* and Thomann (*Artemis*, 1961) *Dein Zorn bestimme uns, nicht unsere Angst*; Zwielerin² 475 makes the Prefect equally obsequious, and unprincipled: *es leite mich dein Zorn, nicht meine Zaghaftigkeit*.

⁷ As suggested by Alenius and Kragelund; the editors owe the idea to discussions with I. Boserup. I now see that P. Frassinetti, *RIL* 107 (1973), 1115–16 had already suggested the emendation, with very similar arguments.

⁸ Cf. 455; 579; 835; 851; the contrast to Seneca's and the Prefect's consistent use of *populus*, *plebs* and *cives* seems deliberate. For the very similar emphasis on Nero's hatred of and crimes against the *populus Romanus* in the propaganda of Galba and Vespasian, see pp. 504–5.

872 NERO Vel poena, quae iam sera damnatam premet
 873 diu nocentem. Tolle consilium ac preces
 874 et imperata perage: devectam rate
 875 procul in remotum litus interimi iube,
 876 tandem ut residat pectoris nostri tumor.⁹

867b *Praefecto tribuunt codd.*: 867b–871 *Praefecto Lipsius*: 867b–868a (Haud.../mulier.)
Praefecto Zwierlein. 868–876 *Neroni codd. et Giardina*: 870a *Praefecto Peiper-Richter, Leo,*
Hosius, Herrmann, Ballaira et Zwierlein: 870–871 *Praefecto Ritter, Alenius-Kragelund*.

Let us, line by line, examine this exchange.

Nero starts by questioning the Prefect's loyalty – and the latter retaliates by questioning the identification of a *hostis* and a woman (864). Nero is of course stubbornly unimpressed: her crimes prove her guilt (865a). But is there any evidence, the Prefect asks (865b); Nero now adduces the riots (866a), and when the Prefect questions the underlying assumption that such a mad crowd is at all governable (866b), the Emperor simply maintains that it is so (867a).

The Prefect is therefore thrown back on his last defences. What he attempts is a change of technique. In six of his preceding eight lines he had adhered to questioning Nero's assertions. Now he ventures a polite (*haud...reor*) if unequivocal negation – but since the issue of the culprit's gender has already slipped into the background (note *quis* 866b; *qui* 867a), the Prefect prudently persists in maintaining an uncommittal generality: *quemquam* (867b).

So far we have respected the traditional verse division. Yet, also at this point the Prefect's reaction stands in dispute. Like Bertil Axelson, Otto Zwierlein took strong exception. To make sense of the Prefect's reply, Zwierlein for his part was originally tempted by Lipsius' *quaquam*, '〈eine〉 Korrektur...um die man in der Tat *nur* herunkommt, wenn man mit Axelson (der dies freilich selbst nur zögernd vorschlägt) zu übersetzen versucht: "niemanden (geschweige denn eine Volksmasse) konnte eine schwache Frau aufwiegeln"' (my italics), but in the event he chose to ascribe *Haud quemquam reor/ mulier* to the Prefect.¹⁰

In my view considerations of metre, syntax and sense speak against this division. Firstly, it confuses Seneca's manner of changing speaker with that of his epigone; while occasionally found in the iambs of the former, the division after the first longum in the first metrum is not only unprecedented in pseudo-Seneca,¹¹ it also introduces an irregularity completely at variance with what we know of his stylistic ideals. As opposed to his paragon, his practice in iambs is strict and uniform, with a marked preference for symmetry.¹² Apart, of course, from the half lines, the beginning and end of his iambic speeches almost invariably coincide with those of the line. The sole departure from this pattern, Octavia's isolated aside (195b), is only

⁹ The text is basically that of Zwierlein, but the verse divisions have been altered in 867–8 and 870–1. The notes on the *codices* and on previous editors are merely intended to highlight the departures from the Oxford text, the *apparatus* of which should be consulted for further information.

¹⁰ Zwierlein¹ 159 (the article's *quamquam* is a misprint).

¹¹ Cf. L. Strzlecki, *De Senecae trimetro iambico quaestiones selectae* (Kraków, 1938), p. 6 (one instance in *Medea*, one in *Phaedra*, five in *Thyestes*).

¹² Unfortunately, the study by B. Seidensticker, *Die Gesprächsverdichtung in den Tragödien Senecas* (Heidelberg, 1969) does not discuss the divergent employment of antilabai in Seneca and in the *Octavia*; as for the symmetrical structure of the latter drama, note the corresponding speeches (100ff.; 137ff.) at the centre of the first scene as well as the outlay of 174–272; 690–761; 762–819: Kragelund¹ 55ff.; it is odd that Zwierlein in his discussion of the *lacunae* in 516ff. and 590ff. ignores the possibility that the whole Seneca–Nero scene (377–592) might be similarly structured.

partly an exception – and it would certainly require weighty arguments to introduce an anomaly like the one suggested by Zwierlein.

I doubt, secondly, that the linguistic difficulties to which Zwierlein takes exception are really of such a magnitude as to necessitate this heavy-handed alteration. It is surely more simple to adopt the interpretation of numerous translators, and most recently of G. Ballaira *ad loc.*: *haud quemquam* [sc. *regere dementes valere*] *reor*.¹³

And finally, is it not in the Prefect's best interests, and completely in keeping with his overall strategy, to refrain from referring to women in general and the Empress in particular? Given his use of the masculine *quemquam*, it makes all the more sense to let the emphatic *Mulier ...!* remain Nero's.

In other words, it is Nero's tenacious adherence to his original intention that produces this exclamation. Reverting to the gender issue, he claims that a woman (i.e. Octavia) by her very nature is well-equipped for such crimes (868–9).

This assertion would almost seem to *demand* a rebuttal. How then does the Prefect respond? Again his reaction stands in dispute – and here the issues involved are considerably more complex than in the cases discussed above. The problem is that to judge from the MSS. all the lines from 868 to the end of the scene (876) should pertain to Nero. Yet, surely Peiper was right in ascribing the retort *Sed vim negavit* [sc. *Natura*] to the Prefect: it is after all not at all Nero's manner to weigh the pros and cons of a case; moreover, this argument seems in effect to question Octavia's very capacity to commit the crimes of which she stands accused – and since the following line and a half (870b–871) likewise stress the weakness of her sex I have long felt it difficult to accept that these lines should go to Nero.

My objections are fourfold. Linguistically, Peiper's division is of course perfectly possible, with the two subordinate clauses elaborating the ulterior purpose of Nature's design. The problem is that, like Zwierlein's, Peiper's solution produces a speech which is perfectly in accordance with the practice of Seneca, but not with that of his epigone. Seneca frequently allows an iambic speech to begin halfway through its first verse, our dramatist never.

Even allowing for the possibility of a conscious departure from the dramatist's usual practice, it is, secondly, highly disturbing that this retort is so singularly uncharacteristic of Nero: elsewhere he is shown to be ruthlessly single-minded, but here he starts making concessions.

Thirdly and equally seriously, these concession serve to undermine rather than strengthen Nero's position. If he concedes that Octavia is such a feeble creature, how can he at the same time accuse her of being an inveterate criminal (*diu nocentem* 873)? Buecheler tried to overcome this difficulty by reading *acres* for *aegras* [sc. *vires*] in 871: thus Nero's concessions would at least retain an indication of an actual menace.¹⁴

But not even Buecheler's ingenuity could remove all the drawbacks of Peiper's division. Axelson's paraphrase brings out clearly one of its basic weaknesses:

Wenn die Natur der zum Bösen neigenden, durch List und Intrigen Schaden stiftenden Frau auch noch Kraft und Energie gegeben hätte, so wäre sie unbezwingbar. In ihrer schwachen (Widerstands-)Kraft besitzt sie wenigstens eine Angriffsstelle, wo Furcht oder (wenn auch diese nicht wirksam ist) Strafe etwas gegen sie auszurichten vermag. Diese Strafe trifft nun – all zu spät – die lange Schuldige.¹⁵

¹³ Zwierlein¹ 159 n. 78 considers *reor* paratactical, but the traditional reading is of course equally viable: cf. e.g. Livy 10.9.4 *causam...haud aliam fuisse reor*; note, moreover, that both the two other occurrences of *reor* in the *Octavia* (447; 566) have acc. and inf.

¹⁴ F. Buecheler, *RhM* 27 (1872), 474 (= *Kleine Schriften* ii (Berlin–Leipzig, 1927), p. 31).

¹⁵ Zwierlein¹ 160 n. 81 (quoting a letter).

Viewed as a train of thought this is undoubtedly orderly and coherent – but is it drama? The problem is, that by accepting Peiper's division one allows the tension of the dialogue to drop alarmingly – and that at the sort of juncture where this author usually is at his best. *Poena* is, as we have seen, one of the keywords in the passage. *Clementia* and moderation vs. *ira* and vindictive craving for punishment, that is the basic contrast underlying this debate. Yet, if the sequence ... *timor/ vel poena* goes to Nero, his very insistence on murdering the protagonist of the play falls flat. The *vel* in particular seems strangely out of focus; since *poena* is what he has persistently demanded, why bother to mention the alternative? Axelson's (*wenn auch diese* [sc. *die Furcht*] *nicht wirksam ist*) is a valiant attempt to circumvent the difficulty. But if this was indeed the dramatist's intention, it is, as the brackets reveal, certainly not quite what he wrote.

It could be objected that none of these difficulties need render Peiper's division untenable. The metrical anomaly and the logical inconsistencies (if such they are) were perhaps merely due to careless writing. However, it is worthwhile briefly reconsidering the arguments in favour of an alternative solution which in my view has too readily been discarded: in his Bonn edition of 1843, Franz Ritter proposed ascribing not merely 870a, but the whole of 870–1 to the Prefect.¹⁶

For a number of reasons this proposition is an attractive alternative. It has, to begin with, the definite advantage of conforming to pseudo-Seneca's usual way of handling changes of speaker. And the lines ascribed to the Prefect would then also be completely consistent with what is otherwise known of his stand. He adduces Octavia's sex as an argument in her favour (*femina* 864b) and when Nero subsequently turns this argument against him, it seems logical to assume that the Prefect would rise to the challenge by countering the argument from feminine callousness with a parallel one from feminine weakness: first he invokes woman's natural lack of strength and endurance (*sed vim negavit, ut ne inexpugnabilis/ esset*), then he adduces a parallel argument, again introduced by an emphatic *sed*, which deftly minimizes the potential of whatever frail powers she still might wield. Reverting to a contrast he has already once exploited, the Prefect lays bare the futility of Nero's irate excess (cf. 858): Octavia's personal fear would (were it at all necessary) suffice to render her innocuous: *sed aegras frangeret vires timor* (871).

A change of speaker is at this point highly effective. With the aggravating twist so typical of dramatic dialogue, Nero quickly disposes of the Prefect's arguments. The metaphoric *frangeret* (cf. above p. 493) is his cue, and with the laconic *Vel poena* and inexorable switch from guarded subjunctive to the insistent future¹⁷ (cf. 572–4; 583; 858–9) the debate *pro et contra* Octavia's innocence (*aegras vires* vs. *diu nocentem*) reaches its murderous conclusion.

As always in this author, the culmination has been carefully prepared. Throughout the play it is Nero who insists on the necessity of political murder. Others must die that he may live secure. While Seneca rejects this course as immoral and suicidal, the Prefect at first complies. But even for the soldier there is a limit. His duty consists in preventing or quelling a riot, not in warfare on the citizens or on a harmless woman.

¹⁶ *Octavia praetexta. Curiatio Materno vindicatam*... ed. F. Ritter (Bonn, 1843); the suggestion was acknowledged neither by Richter (1867) who favoured Peiper's modified alternative, nor, it seems, by any subsequent editor.

¹⁷ For the reading, and previous discussion, see Zwierlein¹ 158 n. 76, there favouring *tam...premit*, whereas the OCT text has *iam...premet*; a case could also be made for *premat* (Bothe).

If our readings are correct, it is he who twice (858; 871) maintains that their proper fear should suffice to coerce them.

To summarize: whatever the particular merits of the individual observations presented above, the short dialogue is as a whole successful in suggesting that the Prefect was coming to view Nero's wanton cruelty with disapproval and horror. What had preceded his and Nero's entry in 437 is left unsaid, and even if there is notable emphasis on Nero's orders (*imperata* 437; *iussa* 439) for the purge, the Prefect obeys without apparent misgivings: the protest comes from Seneca. Yet, in the parallel, final scene he bravely sticks out his neck to defend the Empress as well as the man in the street. And even if he fails to restrain the Emperor, the delineation of his dilemma, duty (*fides* 845; 863) or moral rectitude is clearly intended to exonerate him of co-responsibility for the murders.

In his treatise on *clementia* Seneca had reminded Nero as well as his subjects of a proverbially edifying moment in the young Emperor's dealings with his Prefect:

Animadversurus in latrones duos Burrus praefectus tuus, vir egregius et tibi principi natus, exigebat a te, scriberes in quos et ex qua causa animadverti velles. Hoc saepe dilatatum ut aliquando fieret instabat. Invitus invito cum chartam protulisset traderetque, exclamasti: 'Vellem litteras nescirem!'.¹⁸

In deliberate contrast, as it seems, our dramatist has reversed this image of the well-meaning counsellor and well-meaning Emperor: here Nero rejects the pleas for *clementia*, from Seneca as well as from his Prefect; here it is he who without the slightest hesitation insists on punishment. Thus, the responsibility for the murders is in either case shown to be exclusively his. The Prefect by contrast had merely been 'obeying orders' (*imperata* 874).

II. THE PREFECT'S IDENTITY

Nero coegit: in the decades after Nero's death, the claim to have acted 'on orders' was, it seems, a common excuse for apparent complicity in the tyrant's crimes.¹⁹ Hence the two problems with which this section is concerned: (1) was the portrayal of the Prefect intended to attenuate the guilt of a particular individual? and (2) if so, whose?

The text offers no easy answers. The Prefect who twice confronts Nero is anonymous. In a text comparatively rich in prosopographical detail, the fact has rightly excited scholarly curiosity. The doxography is extensive, but basically there are only two schools of thought on the issue.²⁰ While some affirm, others have denied this portrait all historical verisimilitude. The 'Prefect' differs, so it is asserted, all too strongly from what is otherwise known about Nero's Guard Prefects. His anonymity arguably supports this view: the soldier is simply yet another instance of the tragic *satelles*.²¹

There is undoubtedly some truth in this. Despite the absence of extant parallels, the

¹⁸ Sen. *Clem.* 2.1; using the passive *admoneretur* (sc. Nero) Suet. *Nero* 10.2 records neither the office nor the name of the Emperor's interlocutor.

¹⁹ *Hoc certe... Nero non coegit*, Tac. *Hist.* 4.42.3 (Curtius Montanus' indictment of Aquilius Regulus); cf. Pliny, *Ep.* 3.7.3 on Silius Italicus: *Laeserat famam suam sub Nerone (credebatur sponte accusasse)*.

²⁰ Schmidt 1442 provides a detailed discussion.

²¹ Thus e.g. F. Ladé, *Dissertationes philologicae Vindobonenses* iii (Wien, 1891), p. 32; R. Helm, *Sitzb. d. preus. Akad.* (Berlin, 1934), pp. 330ff.; Schmidt 1442.

Prefect could well be the product of literary convention, as are the nurses,²² the tyrant, and even 'Seneca'; even the situation, a counsellor vainly trying to reason with an irate tyrant, conforms to well-established patterns.²³ But as the sources testify, the *praetexta* was equally expected to feature historical individuals.²⁴ Moreover, the emphasis on the conventionality of these portraits should not be exaggerated. In more ways than one, this tyrant is recognizably Nero;²⁵ and the verisimilitude of the 'Seneca' is in fact so lifelike that it has for centuries been discussed whether it was actually a self-portrait.²⁶

The scene captions at 437 (*Nero . prefectus . Seneca*) and 846 (*Prefectus Nero*) and, more importantly, the references in the text itself to the soldier's office (*praefecti* 805) and sphere of action (*castra* 439; 845; *cohortes* 782) are unmistakable. Whatever the precise date of the play, the events to which it refers were in all probability within living memory at the time of its publication.²⁷ Given the prestige of the Prefect's office (see below, p. 503), it is hard to believe that a Roman audience of the period, when hearing Nero's introduction of the trusted official

Sed adesce cerno rara quem pietas virum
fidesque castris nota praeposuit meis.

844

would have acquiesced in viewing the *persona* as wholly fictional. If this inference is plausible, we may proceed to examining whether the text actually offers any clues as to his identity.

Given the chronological framework of the drama,²⁸ three days in the Spring of A.D. 62, only two of the total of four Neronian Prefects

Sex. Afranius Burrus	(A.D. 54–62)
L. Faenius Rufus	(62–65)
Ofonius Tigellinus	(62–68)
C. Nymphidius Sabinus	(65–68)

²² Faithful nurses, like Nero's and Domitian's, were social facts as well as literary conventions (Suet. *Nero* 50; *Dom.* 17.3); it will have offended no one's historical sensibilities that Octavia's nurse had in fact died prior to the divorce in A.D. 62 (*ILS* 1838); and even if Octavia, like Nero, had had more than one, the *persona* is unlikely to have been intended as a portrait.

²³ It is unnecessary to quote the numerous precedents, for instance in Sophocles (whose *Electra* the dramatist appears to have studied: *Oct.* 18–19; *El.* 203) or in Seneca (whose Atreus/satelles scene in *Thy.* 176ff. has frequently been invoked); for parallel confrontations between emperors and prefects, cf. nn.18; 45–6.

²⁴ Keil, *Gramm. Lat.* i.489 (Diomedes): *prima species est togatarum quae praetextatae dicuntur, in quibus imperatorum negotia agebantur et publica et reges Romani vel duces inducuntur, personarum dignitate et...sublimitate tragoediis similes*; for similar definitions, cf. R. Helm, *RE* 22.2 (1954), 1569ff.

²⁵ The playwright's charges against Nero mirror rather closely the official Emperor panegyric: Nero's was not, as poets had asserted, a Golden Age (416ff.), his ideals were not, as initially asserted *crebris orationibus* (Tac. *Ann.* 13.11.2; cf. Griffin, pp. 64ff.) *clementia*, but very much the opposite (437ff.), he was not a true friend of the *populus Romanus* (nn. 8; 55) and his much advertised *liberalitas* (Suet. *Nero* 10; cf. Griffin pp. 197ff.) was in fact *luxuria* (427; 433).

²⁶ The similarities with Seneca's style have most recently induced G. Simonetti Abbolito, *Studi Traglia* ii (Roma, 1979), pp. 731ff. and F. Giancotti, *Orpheus* NS 4 (1983), 215ff. to restate the arguments in favour of the drama's authenticity; the inference is not cogent (and other arguments, below, p. 504 refute it) but the obvious parallels certainly support the assumption of a date in the period when such familiarity and admiration still appear to have been widespread (cf. below, n. 73).

²⁷ Cf. below p. 504.

²⁸ For the chronology, see Tac. *Ann.* 14.51ff. with the discussion of R. S. Rogers, *Studies in Honor of B. L. Ullmann* (Rome, 1964), pp. 217ff.; the divorce clearly postdated the two murders as well as Burrus' death: Octavia inherited Burrus as well as Plautus (Tac. *Ann.* 14.60.4).

seem likely candidates. Burrus died before Plautus, Sulla and Octavia, and Nymphidius Sabinus only became Tigellinus' colleague in A.D. 65, so we are left with either Rufus or Tigellinus. That we are in fact dealing with a period of dual tenure seems confirmed by the reference to the Prefects, in the plural (782); Burrus was sole Prefect throughout the first half of the reign.²⁹

However, the dramatist might, here as elsewhere, have manipulated the chronology. Burrus and Faenius Rufus were after all believed to have restrained or even opposed Nero, on behalf of Octavia or otherwise. Thus Burrus had strongly opposed the divorce, and Faenius Rufus eventually joined the Pisonian conspiracy. The dramatist's sympathetic presentation of the Prefect's dilemma has on this basis been taken to refer to one (or both) of these two individuals.³⁰

There are two serious objections to this hypothesis. One is that it does not stand to reason that an author wishing to pay a tribute either to Burrus or to Rufus would fail to make it clear whom we are meant to recall. Why not provide a name?³¹ Neither style nor metre would have constituted an obstacle. For instance, Seneca's opposition to Nero's plans is recalled in a memorable epigram: ...*liceat* [sc. *Neroni*] *facere quod Seneca improbat* (589). So is the name of one of Claudius' Prefects, the ill-fated first husband of Poppaea, Crispinus (731). Like Rufus he had perished in the aftermath of the Pisonian conspiracy: the dream scene evokes him as her betrayed husband, and as a victim of Nero's.

Secondly, all other sources are unanimous in connecting Tigellinus with the purge: he had worked on Nero's fears of Plautus and Sulla; an anecdote reveals him in the torture chambers, vainly attempting to draw incriminating evidence from Pythias, a slave of the Empress Octavia.³² The dramatist's portrayal is to be sure very different, but in essentials the parallel is clear: for all the references to orders (*imperata* 437; 874), to duty (*fides* 845; 863) and to his futile entreaties (*preces* 873), there is no denial that he had been the Emperor's agent in having Plautus, Sulla and Octavia executed.

In short, if the Prefect is not to be considered wholly fictional, the evidence seems so far to point clearly to Tigellinus.³³ Still, two aspects remain problematical: (1) the anonymity, and (2) the striking divergence from the otherwise consistently hostile depiction of Tigellinus' role at Nero's court. In an author otherwise fiercely anti-

²⁹ This seems the natural interpretation of 782; *contra*, Ballaira *ad loc.*: '...probabilmente occorre sottintendere a *praefecti* un *cohortium*: ad ogni coorte pretoria era preposto un *praefectus*, che dipendeva dal capo di tutta la guardia imperiale, chiamato *praefectus praetorii*.' There is, however, no evidence to support this assertion. Whereas a *praefectus cohortis* was an equestrian command of auxiliaries (L. Keppie, *The Making of the Roman Army* (London, 1984), p. 177), the Palace was normally guarded by a single *cohort* commanded by a tribune: Tac. *Ann.* 12.69; *Hist.* 1.29; Suet. *Nero* 9, with the comments of M. Durry, *Les cohortes prétorienne* (Paris, 1938), p. 275.

³⁰ Burrus: Dio 62.13.1–2; see further nn. 45–6; Faenius Rufus: Tac. *Ann.* 15.50ff.; his attitude is characterized as *segnem innocentiam*: *Ann.* 14.51.2. For the identification with Burrus and/or Rufus, cf. the summary in Schmidt 1442, quoting i.a. P. J. Enk, *Mnem.* 54 (1926), 404 (both) and E. Flinck, *De Octaviae praetextae auctore diss.* (Helsinki, 1919), pp. 26ff. (Faenius Rufus).

³¹ The same objection applies to the suggestion of L. Herrmann, *Octavie. Tragédie prétexte* (Paris, 1924), pp. 62ff. and 149ff. that the drama features *two* Prefects, first (439) Tigellinus, then (846) Faenius Rufus. How was the reader meant to know who was who? Or are we to believe that the possibility of an audience confusing one with the other did not bother the author?

³² Murder of Plautus and Sulla: Tac. *Ann.* 14.57 (with reported discourse); torture scene: *ibid.* 60.3; Dio 62.13.4 reports her name.

³³ Most recently, *PIR*² O 91 has likewise opted for Tigellinus as the Prefect in vv. 438ff. ('*patet*'); unfortunately, the article neither quotes nor comments upon vv. 846ff.

Neronian, the latter aspect is in fact no less paradoxical than the former. However, the reason may not be far to seek: there is a possibility that it is the particular political circumstances of Tigellinus' fall which hold the key to this enigma.

Tigellinus managed his betrayal of Nero in June A.D. 68 with remarkable dexterity. Deprived of his office by his colleague Nymphidius Sabinus, Tigellinus went unharmed and rose to new glory after the latter's ill-fated *coup*. And in a period when not only freedmen and persons of similar low status, but even senators and consuls were jeopardized by their complicity in Nero's crimes, Tigellinus prospered, the unlikely protégé of Galba and his junta.³⁴ Imperial protection could not, however, obliterate the memory of Tigellinus' past. Rioting crowds demanded his execution. When so many were being punished, it seemed a flagrant injustice that Tigellinus, the 'tyrant's teacher and pedagogue', should go free. In Tigellinus' defence his powerful friend Titus Vinius would invoke a very recent instance of the former Prefect's *clementia*, but sceptics viewed Tigellinus' efforts to spare the life of Vinius' daughter in less unselfish terms. The outcry reached such proportions that Galba felt compelled to issue an edict rebuking the people for its *saevitia*, for its attempt to 'turn his reign into a tyranny'.³⁵ Ironically, it was therefore Galba's 'Neronian' successor Otho who eventually gave in to the clamour of public indignation.

Tigellinus' end, Tacitus avers, conformed with his evil life. Posterity concurred. His posthumous reputation appears to have been uniformly negative. Indeed, Juvenal would still cite him as a clear instance of the dangers a poet would incur should he venture openly to attack a powerful contemporary: it was safer, Juvenal reminds his critic, to concentrate one's fire on the dead.³⁶

It is tempting to speculate whether our playwright felt similarly constrained. His period of writing is commonly assumed to be fairly close to Nero's fall. As Timothy Barnes has pointed out, the curious evasiveness as to the Prefect's identity may well offer an important, if indirect clue to the precise time of writing. Whereas 'a dramatist writing while Tigellinus retained influence [i.e. after Nero's fall but before that of Galba] had an obvious motive for leaving Nero's prefect anonymous', such reticence is, Barnes argues, difficult to comprehend if one assumes that the drama postdates that reign: after Tigellinus' death a poet would need no such circumspection.³⁷

Barnes' suggestion undoubtedly merits serious consideration. Being an argument *e silentio* it is of course circumstantial,³⁸ but even when viewed in isolation this

³⁴ Whatever Tigellinus' precise role, he was viewed as Nero's *desertor ac proditor*, Tac. *Hist.* 1.72.; for the defection of the guard, see Griffin, p. 182; the purges after Nero's fall were anarchic (Plut. *Galba* 8.5) and individual cases were strongly determined by the power and connections of the accused (Tac. *Hist.* 2.10); after Galba's arrival we mainly hear of freedmen being punished, but note the execution, *en route*, of the consular Petronius Turpilianus (Tac. *Hist.* 1.6; Plut. *Galba* 15.2) and the attacks on Epirus Marcellus (Tac. *Hist.* 4.6).

³⁵ Riots: Plut. *Galba* 17.4; innocent men: cf. Suet. *Galba* 15.2 on *poenas innocentium impunitates noxiorum*; τὸν διδάσκαλον καὶ παιδαγωγὸν τῆς τυραννίδος: Plut. *Galba* 17.2; Tigellinus' *clementia*: Tac. *Hist.* 1.72.2. The edict: Suet. 1.c.; Plut. *Galba* 17.4; in view of this outcry it does not stand to reason that posthumous attempts by Greek historians to whitewash their benefactor Nero should somehow lie at the root of the uniformly hostile tradition concerning Tigellinus: T. K. Roper, *Historia* 28 (1979), 356 (following E. Cizek).

³⁶ Juv. 1. 155-8 with the comments of Courtney; I find the attempt by B. Baldwin, *Athenaeum* NS 45 (1967), 308 to detect a pun on *Tigillus* = Jupiter, rather than a reference to the Prefect, unconvincing: the necessity for the Satirist to employ historical examples is after all the whole point of the passage.

³⁷ Barnes 217; accepted by Kragelund¹ 88 n. 261 and J. P. Sullivan, *Literature and Politics in the Age of Nero* (London/New York, 1985), p. 72.

³⁸ An argument in the same category is the observation by Barnes 216 and the present writer that the playwright's reticence about Otho, the lover (or husband) of Poppaea might have a

explanation of the anonymity has much in its favour. At Rome the history of the recent past notoriously entailed *graves offensae, levis gratia*.³⁹ Tigellinus' controversial past would in the period in question certainly have been a subject to be handled with the utmost discretion. Dramatists were, like historians, well advised to tread warily lest their work should provide 'a handle for misrepresentation' or even 'displease the mighty'.⁴⁰ It is therefore not *a priori* implausible, that our playwright, wherever his plot carried implications of a more problematical nature, would have preferred to sidestep open commitment.

In fact, on closer inspection the anonymity of the Prefect is not the only aspect of his portrayal which seems relevant to the present examination. The dramatist's endeavours to provide what may best be described as an apologia for the Prefect is in my view equally thought-provoking, especially since the defence so closely mirrors the charges actually levelled against Tigellinus. Thus his complicity in the purge is, as we have seen, clearly a fact which the dramatist would like to gloss over – and in what follows I shall briefly single out a number of aspects which seem equally notable. The parallel emphasis, in the drama and after the fall of Nero, on the Prefect's display of *clementia* (above, p. 501) in defence of feminine innocence is perhaps merely coincidental: in any case, it highlights the kind of behaviour which would have been expected to count in his favour. So, presumably, does the description of his attitude to the *populus*: while the Prefect (on the reading of line 858 advocated above) is consistent in defending its weal, it was, so the dramatist asserts, Nero who all on his own had decided to punish the *noxium populum* with fire, ruin, want, famine and sorrow:⁴¹

Mox tecta flammis concidant urbis meis	831
ignes ruinae noxium populum premant	
turpisque egestas, saeva cum luctu fames.	

This emphasis on the Prefect's concern for the *populus* stands in telling contrast to the fact that the urban crowds after Nero's fall would so clamorously condemn him as the 'tyrant's teacher and pedagogue'. Special pleading? The suspicion of ulterior motives can only be further nourished by the remarkable manner in which the dramatist foreshadows the future Fire of Rome: the Prefect clearly has no share in Nero's evil plans, but, when the Fire happened, hostile rumours had made much of the suspicious circumstances surrounding its spreading to the Esquiline, where a conflagration had suddenly and – it was asserted – inexplicably erupted in what were then the estates of Ofonius Tigellinus.⁴²

Cui bono? If the question is pertinent, it is undoubtedly Tigellinus who stood most to gain from the sympathetic depiction of the Prefect's dilemma. For all the dramatist's careful retouching, his are the features which the mask seems likely to

similar cause: Otho only 'allowed himself – or found it expedient – to acknowledge his connection with Nero and Poppaea' after Galba's fall (Kragelund¹ 61). While accepting that a date rather early in the Flavian reign is plausible, Zwierlein² 445 dismisses this argument but does not comment on the question of the Prefect's identity.

³⁹ Plin. *Ep.* 5.8.12; cf. Hor. *Carm.* 2.1.6 (Pollio's history) and Suet. *Claud.* 41.2 (Livia and Antonia directing the boy to safer subjects than the civil wars).

⁴⁰ Cf. Tac. *Dial.* 3.2: a friend suggesting the author of a politically controversial *praetexta* to remove *si qua pravae interpretationi materiam dederunt*; *ibid.* 10.8 on the risks of *potentiorum aures offendere*.

⁴¹ While the sources, with Tacitus as the notable exception, agree on charging Nero as an *incendiarius*, the dramatist is alone in suggesting that the motive was his hatred of the people: Kragelund¹, 80 n. 162 (with further references).

⁴² Tac. *Ann.* 15.40.2 *plusque infamiae id incendium habuit quia praediis Tigellini Aemilianis proruperat videbaturque Nero condendae urbis novae... gloriam quaerere*.

cover. The anonymity of his *persona* is not at variance with this identification. Like Ovid,⁴³ but for different reasons, the playwright's 'cautious fears' might well have restrained his 'official zeal' from actually naming, let alone attacking, the former Prefect. A concession to fears and unease, the anonymity would moreover have the additional advantage of evoking the wider aspects of the case. Individual guilt has often sought protection in numbers. And who could claim not to have been involved? Even the *dolor* of the Roman people had been *segnis* (675), its loyalty and *pietas* ineffective (288ff.; 673ff.). Where a Seneca had failed, a soldier, with his oath of allegiance, could hardly have succeeded in restraining the tyrant.

In conclusion: at Rome the rise of the monarchy fostered the establishment of a new military post, that of the *praefectus praetorio*. Responsible for the Emperor's safety, the holders of this office would in daily routine no less than in hours of crisis be among the most conspicuous representatives of centralized power. The names of Seianus, Macro, Burrus and Tigellinus evoke crucial episodes in the history of the dynasty.⁴⁴ Whether as partners in power, kingmakers or trusted members of the Emperor's *consilium*, their advice and attitudes in matters of life and death were later the subject of much comment and dispute. The dramatist was not the first to portray a Prefect vainly insisting on proper procedure and a moderate course.⁴⁵ Several versions exist as to the relative guilt and complicity of Seianus, Macro and Burrus.⁴⁶

Given this background, I cannot believe that our dramatist would have intended, or his audience considered, this *persona* to be a non-person; neither are the parallels between the charges against Tigellinus and the defence for this anonymous Prefect likely to have been fortuitous. Seianus, Macro and Burrus each had their advocates: it is tempting to propose that the author of the *Octavia* is indeed offering an indirect plea on behalf of Tigellinus.

III. THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The preceding two sections have focused on the problems raised by our dramatist's sympathetic and, I have argued, apologetic portrayal of Nero's Prefect. It is time now to assess the merits of the proposed identification of this *persona* with Tigellinus in a wider perspective. There are in particular two sets of problems to be addressed. (1) Is it reasonable to assume that the drama is contemporary with the fervent post-Neronian debate *pro et contra* the guilt and complicity of Tigellinus? And (2), what

⁴³ Cf. Ov. Tr. 3.4b.63ff.: *vos... amici/ dicere quos cupio nomine quemque suo./ sed timor officium cautus compescit, et ipsos/ in nostro poni carmine nolle puto./ ante volebatis.../ quod, quoniam est anceps, intra mea pectora quemque/ alloquar, et nulli causa timoris ero.* The dramatist may well have reasoned similarly.

⁴⁴ On the Guard and its Prefects, see M. Durry, op. cit. (n. 29); for the Trajanic and Hadrianic period, R. Syme, *JRS* 70 (1980), 64ff. = *RP* iii (Oxford, 1984), pp. 1276ff.

⁴⁵ Cf. Phil. Leg. ad Gaium 41f. (Macro trying to restrain Gaius); similarly, Tac. Ann. 13.20.3 (Burrus dissuading the execution of Agrippina): *Nero... non prius differri potuit quam Burrus necem eius [sc. Agrippinae] promitteret, si facinoris coargueretur: sed cuicumque, nedum parenti defensionem tribuendam; nec accusatores adesse, sed vocem unius ex inimica domo adferri...*

⁴⁶ The classic instance is the divergent verdicts on Seianus: that of Suetonius (*Tib.* 55; 61: the initiative coming from Tiberius, not Seianus) is very different from Tacitus'; similarly, Tac. Ann. 6.45.3; 50.5 ascribes crimes to Macro which Suet. *Gaius* 12.2 ascribes to Gaius; Macro and Burrus had allegedly mitigated or opposed the stern commands of their masters (Joseph. *AI* 18.203; Tac. Ann. 13.2); whether Nero had informed the latter of his plans for murdering Agrippina was a debated issue (Tac. Ann. 14.7.2); by contrast, some of Tigellinus' crimes had allegedly been perpetrated without Nero's knowing: *Hist.* 1.72.

are the reasons of a more circumstantial nature for suspecting, or at least acknowledging the possibility of such an early date and a political purpose for a literary work of this character?

As for the first of these problems, the precise date of the *Octavia* has been discussed for centuries. Although a *communis opinio* favouring a post-Neronian date has long since emerged, precise *termini post et ante* continued to prove curiously elusive.⁴⁷ However, as I have argued elsewhere, detailed study of the drama's pivotal dream scene (712ff.) and of its numerous parallels in Roman literature can provide a reliable *terminus post*: in the symbolic language characteristic of such dream narratives, Poppaea's account prefigures the deaths (in that order) (1) of herself (subsequent to Seneca, in A.D. 65) and of her two husbands, (2) Crispinus (A.D. 66) and (3) Nero (9th June A.D. 68).⁴⁸

Several factors suggest a date fairly soon after the death of Nero: the playwright's undisguised hatred of Nero,⁴⁹ his admiration for Seneca, his sympathy for the tyrant's exiled opponents and obvious familiarity with the phraseology and prosopography of Claudian and Neronian Rome.⁵⁰ However, in my view, within the broader post-Neronian era, two distinct periods may safely be discarded. The dramatist's denigration of Nero renders suggestions of an Othonian (Jan.–April A.D. 69) or Vitellian (Jan.–Dec. 69) date highly unlikely: both posed as successors of Nero.⁵¹

Instead, I have argued, a hitherto neglected category of evidence has brought the reign of Galba (June 68–Jan. 69) and the early years of Vespasian (A.D. 70–ca. 72) into sharp focus: the dramatist's view of the *populus Romanus* is remarkably positive. Far from subscribing to the usual *panem et circenses* image, he evokes the glory of its Republican ancestors (291ff.; 676ff.). Where Tacitus⁵² belittles, the dramatist exalts their loyal but futile attempt to safeguard Octavia's position. To enhance the significance of the episode Nero is cast in the role of Tarquin and Appius Claudius,

⁴⁷ C. J. Herington, *CQ* 11 (1961), 25; F. Bruckner, op. cit. (n. 4), 7–8 (with prev. lit.); note, however, that the tradition of Seneca's authorship still has its advocates: n. 26.

⁴⁸ Kragelund¹ 30ff. The inferences from the dream's ambiguous conclusion have been questioned by M. T. Griffin, *CR* 33 (1983), 322: according to that scholar only Crispinus' (and not Nero's) death is alluded to. Yet, in view of the confusion and controversy among editors (since Ascensius, 1514), commentators (since Treveth, 1315–16) and translators (since Dolce, 1560) it solves nothing simply to deny that these crucial lines carry more than one meaning. The very fact that another recent exponent of a one-dimensional reading, M. Royo, *REL* 61 (1983), 200 opted for the alternative (Nero, not Crispinus) seems indirectly to undermine either of these extreme positions.

⁴⁹ The playwright's anti-Neronian attitude has frequently been considered a possible indication of an early date: cf. e.g. E. Meise, *Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der Julisch-Claudischen Dynastie* (München, 1969), pp. 125; 134, 171 and 209; H. Grassl, *Untersuchungen zum Vierkaiserjahr 68/9 n. Chr.* (Diss., Wien, 1973), *passim*; recently E. S. Ramage, *Historia* 32 (1983), 210 n. 32 has on this basis suggested a Flavian or Galban date.

⁵⁰ For the phraseology, see Kragelund¹ 85 n. 221 and Zwierlein² 446 (with bibliography); on the Senecan style, n. 26. The dramatist presupposes considerable familiarity with the 'Who's Who' of the period: one is for instance expected to know that the *famula* (194) is Claudia Acte; the result is occasionally confusion: thus K. Fitzler, *RE* 10.1 (1917), 908; 938–9 mistook *Iulia* (944), the daughter of Drusus for a daughter of Germanicus; note also the, for the uninitiated, bewildering tendency to defer the introduction of proper names: *Britannice* (169); *Nero* (249); *Seneca* (589) and *Poppaea* (?590; 596).

⁵¹ For the evidence, see Kragelund¹ 82 n. 196; A. Garzetti, *Mélanges Piganiol* ii (Paris, 1966), pp. 781–2; the Flavian denigration emphasized their admiration for Nero: A. Ferrill, *CJ* 60 (1964–5), 267ff. The assumption that the *Octavia* dates to the reign of Otho (V. Ciaffi, *Riv. Fil.* 65 (1937), 264 and E. Cizek, *L'époque de Néron et ses controverses idéologiques* (Leiden, 1972), pp. 7–8) is therefore highly unlikely to be true.

⁵² *Ann.* 14.60.5.

Octavia in that of Lucretia and Verginia. The choice of parallels is instructive: retribution would ensue, the oppressed be vindicated and the *populus* liberated.⁵³

This emphasis on *populus* and *res publica*, I believe, finds a remarkably close analogy in the political phraseology of the *bellum Neronis*. In conjunction with the literary and epigraphical evidence, the coinage of the Galban revolt reveals that the fall of Nero was celebrated as a *victoria populi Romani*.⁵⁴ In apparently deliberate contrast to Nero, Galba sought in his coinage and otherwise to stand forth as the champion of Senate and *populus*, *res publica*⁵⁵ and *libertas*.⁵⁶ Significantly, these 'republican'⁵⁷ and populist slogans are demonstrably less prominent in the coinage of Galba's two 'Neronian' successors, Otho and Vitellius, but they returned with Vespasian:⁵⁸ here as elsewhere the Flavians proved eager to stress their allegiance to the anti-Neronian cause.⁵⁹ However, the sudden enthusiasm for advertising the people's glory⁶⁰ soon petered out. After A.D. 72 the Flavian coinage exhibits a return to more traditional modes of monarchic self-representation.⁶¹

The drama therefore might simply be a contemporary manifestation (be it Galban or Flavian) of this short-lived enthusiasm for *populus* and *res publica*. On

⁵³ For references, cf. Kragelund¹ 38ff.

⁵⁴ For a detailed discussion of this coinage, see P.-H. Martin, *Die anonymen Münzen des Jahres 68 n. Chr.* (Mainz, 1974). Martin has with powerful arguments challenged Mattingly's division of the anonymous coinage in five distinct groups (cf. A. Wallace-Hadrill, *NC* 1981, 33; K. V. Hewitt, *NC* 1983, 64), but in *RIC*² (London, 1984) Mattingly's division is upheld; likewise, C. H. V. Sutherland, *NC* 1984, 29ff., but the evidence adduced in its favour seems tenuous.

⁵⁵ Initially, Galba had termed himself *legatus Senatus ac populi Romani* (Suet. *Galba* 10); the revolt was later described as *bello quod imp. G(a)lba pro (re p(ublica)) gessit* (IRT 537); a revision of temple treasure was undertaken, allegedly *ne cuius alterius sacrilegium res publica quam Neronis sensisset* (Tac. *Agr.* 6.5); likewise, the adoption was for the benefit of *populus Romanus* and *res publica* (Tac. *Hist.* 1.16; 13.2; cf. Plut. *Galba* 21) and Galba died willingly *si ita (e) re publica videretur*: Tac. *Hist.* 1.41.2 (Plut. *Galba* 27 has τῷ δῆμῳ Ῥωμαίων). The coinage displays a similar emphasis on such highminded slogans as *SPQR* and, above all, the *populus Romanus*: Kragelund¹ 41ff. (with bibliography).

⁵⁶ Along with the coin symbols and legends (Kragelund¹ 43; 46), the literary evidence testifies that Galba's revolt was advertised and celebrated as a universal manumission: Suet. *Galba* 10; Plut. *Galba* 5; 6.4; Suet. *Nero* 57; note, moreover, the edict professing abhorrence from tyranny (n. 35) and the dedication of a *signum Libertatis restitutae* (ILS 238) on the 15th October A.D. 68 (i.e. during the *ludi Iovi Liberatori*: A. D. Nock, *Essays on Religion and the Ancient World* (Oxford, 1972), p. 774).

⁵⁷ On the republican colouring of these slogans, see A. Wallace-Hadrill, art. cit. (n. 54), 37–8.

⁵⁸ On the relative differences between the emphasis on *populus* and *libertas* in the coinage of Galba–Vespasian *vis-à-vis* Otho–Vitellius, see Kragelund¹ 45ff.

⁵⁹ On the Flavians and Galba, see J. Gagé, *REA* 54 (1952), 290ff.; on their denigration of Nero, E. S. Ramage, art. cit. (n. 49), 209ff.

⁶⁰ To the Flavian examples discussed in Kragelund¹ 44ff. should be added the Cypriot inscription from A.D. 70–72, published by P. Roesch, *BCH* 95 (1971), 573ff. J. Reynolds, *JRS* 66 (1976), 181 has tentatively suggested that its curious variation of the *pater patriae* title, πατέρα δήμου Ῥώμης ἡγεμονίδος (ἀ)νικητόν was influenced by 'Republican terminology surviving in a senatorial province'; more plausibly, it is a further instance of the shortlived but ostentatious trend discussed above (I am grateful to Joyce Reynolds for an inspiring discussion of this point).

⁶¹ Along with the Flavian invocations of the *populus* vanished those of *Libertas*: 'Vom Jahre 72 ab ist der Göttin (sc. Libertatis) Name und Bild wieder von den Münzen verschwunden, die flavische Monarchie hatte ihre Macht begründet, bedurfte der lockenden Fiktion nicht mehr. Erst nach 24 jähriger Pause verkündet die LIBERTAS PUBLICA des Nerva nach Domitians Ermordung wieder den Beginn einer neuen Zeit', P. L. Strack, *Untersuchungen zur römischen Reichsprägung des zweiten Jahrhunderts* i (Stuttgart, 1931), p. 178; predictably, Nerva's coinage and self-representation likewise made much of the *populus*.

balance, Galba's reign seems to me the likelier alternative.⁶² The dramatist is suspiciously vague on everything that lies beyond the fall of Nero: a *vindex*⁶³ *deus* (255) will intercede, the world will be reborn and the *populus* liberated. That his horizon is not clouded by the threat of civil war⁶⁴ or by the unrest of armies is remarkable; that he is silent about the dynasty which emerged victorious even more so.⁶⁵ Avid for praise and respectability the Flavians have seldom otherwise gone short of panegyric.⁶⁶ The complete reticence of the Ignotus on these crucial issues can provide an important, if negative *terminus ante*.

To some the idea of a date as early as this has seemed impossible: the historical tradition would have needed more time to develop.⁶⁷ Commonsensical as the objection may appear, a brief survey of imperial literature suggests that the reality was different. Parallels in A.D. 37, 54, 68, 96 and 193 document the fact that literary activity in periods of transition could be especially hectic. Histories were written *recentibus odiis*; pamphlets, poetry, satire, biography, oratory and re-editions of banned or politically controversial writings soon came into circulation.⁶⁸ While

⁶² *Contra*, Griffin, 260 n. 2, who sees Vespasian's favourable attitude towards the divine Claudius as an argument in favour of a Flavian rather than Galban date. Yet, nothing indicates that Galba was found wanting in that particular respect. Note, on the contrary, *AFA* Henzen, xc: the Arval Brethren and Galba sacrificing to Augustus, Livia and, as it has plausibly been conjectured, *d<ivo Claudio>*, on the third of January A.D. 69.

⁶³ In determining the drama's date the allusion (if such it is) has of course no independent value: seen in hindsight its implications would be clear. There was much play on the ambiguity of the name: Kragelund¹ 81 nn. 176–80.

⁶⁴ V. Ciaffi, art. cit. (n. 51), 257 detected a reference to the Civil Wars in the drama's final verse *civis gaudet Roma cruore* (982); likewise, but with greater caution, Barnes 217. If indeed referring to the wars, the allusion would surely be strangely isolated. Attentive reading points in another direction. The epigram sums up a major theme of the drama: *cives* relegated (242), *cives* treated as *hostes* (443–4; 491–5), *cives* scorned, oppressed, terrorized and murdered (578–9; 856, 982) – these, and not the ensuing wars, are presented as the essential evils of Nero's tyranny.

⁶⁵ Given the drama's teleological bent, the objection that the subject did not lend itself easily to such allusions does not hold water: Silius Italicus felt no difficulty (*Punica* 3.571ff.).

⁶⁶ Note for instance the celebrations of Vespasian as the true conqueror of Britain in Joseph. *BJ* 3.4 and Val. Flac. *Arg.* 1.7f.; similarly Sil. *Pun.* 3.597–8. Octavia and her nurse would of course insist on the glorious role of Claudius (*Octavia* 26ff.; 39ff.), but had he wanted, the dramatist could easily have introduced such flattering references elsewhere.

⁶⁷ Thus e.g. G. Nordmeyer, *Jahrb. f. kl. Phil., Suppl.* 19 (1893), 312, A. Gercke, *ibid. Suppl.* 22 (1896), 199 and R. Helm, op. cit. (n. 21), 329. Some, like Nordmeyer, op. cit. 275ff., Gercke, op. cit., 195ff. and V. Ussani, *Riv. Fil.* 33 (1905), 449ff. claimed to detect traces of either Cluvius Rufus, Fabius Rusticus or Pliny. Like F. Ladek, op. cit. (n. 21), 48 and L. Herrmann, op. cit. (n. 31), 93 I doubt that this approach is methodologically sound, given the extreme fragmentation of the evidence and amount of literature lost. Others have claimed that the Ignotus depended upon Tacitus (in spite of the objections of A. Cima, *Riv. Fil.* 34 (1906), 529f. the notion has rightly been criticized by Ladek, *Z. f.d. Öst. Gym.* (1905), 673ff.), or *vice versa* Tacitus upon the Ignotus (most recently, L. Y. Whitman (ed.), *The Octavia* (Bern, 1978) ad 924ff.); Zwierlein², p. 446 follows R. Helm, op. cit. (n. 21), 339 in postulating a common source. Neither of these conclusions seems cogent. Would any of these authors for instance need a 'source' to hit upon *topoi* like 'wedding = funeral' or *exempla* like the 'fate of one princess = the fate of another'? In any case these hypotheses seriously underestimate the influence of oral and written traditions concerning the lives and *exitus* of Nero's victims. F. A. Marx, *Philologus* 92 (1937), 83ff. argued convincingly that Tacitus betrays acquaintance with such traditions – and there is of course no basis for determining the priority of such traditions *vis-à-vis* the *Octavia*.

⁶⁸ The *locus classicus* is Tac. *Ann.* 1.1; Marcia's re-edition of Crematius Cordus' banned histories antedates Seneca's *Ad Marciam* which seems likely to have come out during the early liberal period of Gaius' reign: K. Abel, *ANRW* II.32. 2 (1985), 705; or perhaps around 39: M. T. Griffin, *Seneca* (Oxford, 1976), p. 397. The *Apocolocyntosis* is commonly dated to within a few months of Claudius' death in A.D. 54: P. T. Eden's edition (Oxford, 1984), p. 5; the first

celebrating the blessings of the new dispensation,⁶⁹ such products were frequently motivated by pious wishes to revive the memory of a victim of tyranny, to extenuate the guilt of oneself or others and to bring down the guilty.

After the fall of Nero this process of defamation and rehabilitation reached hitherto unprecedented heights.⁷⁰ Invective and iconoclasm, the restoration of images and rehabilitation of the tyrant's victims went hand in hand:⁷¹ rumours, ballads, *libelli*, abusive proclamations, imperial edicts and open attack are known to have formed part of the process.⁷² Much like the Senecan *Apocolocyntosis* and the Tacitean *Agricola*, the *Octavia* could well be the representative of one of these periods in Roman literature when hatred and *pietas*⁷³ were given free rein.

Admittedly, we know next to nothing about the theatrical life of the period. However, two pieces of evidence could be relevant. One concerns the anti-Tigellinus riots during the reign of Galba. It was, according to Plutarch,⁷⁴ i.e. in the circus and the theatres that the crowds gave such vociferous vent to their hatred, but we have no means of determining whether any of these manifestations was the result of, or a reaction to, what was being performed.

In this latter respect a brief and difficult passage in Tacitus' *Dialogus* is unexpectedly informative. To judge from Curiatius Maternus' summary of his theatrical career, it was, I have argued, the recital of his drama *Nero* which brought down the infamous Vatinius; if the passage, as is commonly assumed, refers to Nero's jester of that name,

of Helvidius Priscus' renowned attacks on Epius Marcellus dates to the reign of Galba: Tac. *Hist.* 4.6; Martial's rehabilitation of Paris (11.13) to shortly after Nerva's accession: O. Weinreich, *Sitzb. d. heidelberger Akad.* 41.1 (1940), 5; Fannia's re-edition of Senecio's biography of her husband and Pliny's *De ultione Helvidii Prisci* to the same reign (Pliny, *Ep.* 7.19.6; 9.13) and Tacitus' *Agricola* is not much later.

⁶⁹ On the links of praise and denigration, cf. Sen. *Apoc.* 4 and Tac. *Agr.* 3.3; Dio's pamphlet on Severus' dreams (probably out within three months of Severus' usurpation: F. Millar, *A Study of Cassius Dio* (Oxford, 1964), p. 29) was surely a parallel case.

⁷⁰ *Neque erat adhuc damnati principis exemplum*, Tac. *Hist.* 1.16.2 (Galba, of Nero); on the *damnatio* see further T. O. Mabbott, *CP* 36 (1941), 398ff. and D. W. Macdowall, *NC* 1960, 103ff. (countermarks); D. Salzmann, *AA* 1984, 295ff. (portrait in coinage); H. Jucker, *JDAI* 96 (1981), 236ff., M. Bergmann & P. Zanker, *ibid.* 317ff., and J. Pollini, *AJA* 88 (1984), 547ff. (sculpture); and M. P. Charlesworth, *JRS* 27 (1937), 54ff. and E. S. Ramage, *art. cit.* (n. 49), 213–14 (inscriptions).

⁷¹ For the re-emergence of the statues of Nero's victims, see Suet. *Galba* 10 (Spain); Dio 64.3.4c (Rome); in Dalmatia the name of the condemned P. Anteius Rufus was at some point after Nero's fall reinscribed in two dedications: *PIR*² A 731 (Groag) and J. J. Wilkes, *Dalmatia* (London, 1969), p. 444 n. 9; cf. M. Abramčić, *Strena Buliciana* (Zagreb, Split, 1924), p. 222 with clear photo of rasura. Anteius' name would have been effaced after his condemnation in A.D. 66. Given the dedication from Split to the emperor Galba (*ILS* 237) as well as the success of Anteius' friends in ensuring the relegation of his *delator* in January A.D. 70 (Tac. *Hist.* 4.44.2) the reinscription may well manifest contemporary eagerness to make posthumous restitution to Nero's innocent victims.

⁷² Suet. *Nero* 42.2; Plut. *Galba* 4 (pro- and anti-Neronian ballads); Suet. *Nero* 45.2 (anonymous invective, attached to statues and scribbled on columns); *ibid.* 41 (Vindex's abusive edicts); Suet. *Galba* 10.3 (Galba's edicts to the provinces); *OGIS* ii.669 (the edict of the Prefect of Egypt announcing the accession of Galba and the abolition of the abuses of the past); on the attacks in the Senate and elsewhere on the *delatores*, cf. Suet. *Nero* 44.2 (prior to his fall); Plut. *Galba* 8.5; Tac. *Hist.* 2.10; 4.6.2 (under Galba); 2.53 (under Vitellius); 4.43ff. (under Vespasian).

⁷³ To commemorate the dead by epigraphic or literary means was considered a manifestation of *pietas*: J. González (ed.), *Tabula Siarensis*, *ZPE* 55 (1984), 76 (Drusus' for Germanicus); Sen. *Vita patris* fr. 98 Haase; Tac. *Agr.* 3.3; the dramatist's admiring and 'lifelike' portrait of Seneca may well have been similarly motivated. On Seneca's posthumous fame, see W. Trillitzsch, *Seneca im literarischen Urteil der Antike* (Amsterdam, 1971).

⁷⁴ *Galba* 17.4.

the incident is datable to the reign of Galba. Maternus is in his *Cato* known to have given a political edge to historical drama. Moreover, even if it is uncertain whether Vatinius' fall was the intended or merely incidental effect of Maternus' recital, an attack fits in with what is known of his attitude to Nero's creatures.⁷⁵ In this as in other respects his *Nero* therefore seems to constitute an illuminating parallel as well as a contrast to the sole surviving *praetexta*.

In view of the fragmentary state of the evidence, the question of the scope and context of the *Octavia* is of course unlikely ever to find a definitive solution. Still, all the indications are that, like the *Nero*, this drama belongs to the shortlived and anarchic revival of liberty and free speech during the reign of Galba, when for a brief while Roman historical drama appears to have regained some of its old Republican functions, i.e. to express patriotic as well as partisan sentiments.⁷⁶ The interlude proved short indeed; in the mid seventies Maternus ran into serious trouble after the recital of his *Cato*. It was presumably his anti-tyrannical treatment of the subject which had given offence. Bringing down the despicable Vatinius was one thing: in attacking the powers that be, Maternus may well have over-reached himself, fatally.⁷⁷

Pseudo-Seneca betrays no such ambitions. Whether from better judgement or lack of nerve, he chose to concentrate his fire on the dead. And far from joining those who attacked Nero's former Prefect, he even provided an indirect apologia. In this as in other respects his attitude is, if I am not mistaken, easiest to understand if affected by the dilemmas and inconsistencies of a régime which publicly would parade its *pietas*⁷⁸ and concern for the victims of Nero's rule while at the same time extending its protection to some of the fallen tyrant's most notorious associates.⁷⁹

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⁷⁵ For the interpretation of Tac. *Dial.* 11.2, see Kragelund² (with detailed bibliography). The widely held assumption that the attack on Vatinius dates to the last years of Nero (now also L. Duret, *ANRW* II.32.5 [1986], 3208–9 and J. Devreker, *Hommages à J. Veremans*, Coll. Latomus 193 [1986], 102–3) is implausible in view of the dangers involved in attacking a favourite of Nero's, and to judge from Tac. *Hist.* 1.37.5 his fall and death are clearly datable to the reign of Galba. The interpretation of the work in question as a speech (advocated above all by J. Stroux, *Philologus* 86 [1931], 346) is for contextual and linguistic reasons implausible: to judge from parallels, the *cum quidem* sentence is an amplification of Maternus' reference to recitals of his dramatic works: Kragelund² 199.

⁷⁶ For the scope and sentiment of the republican *praetextae*, see R. Helm, op. cit. (n. 24), 1569ff.; the scholia to Cicero's *pro Sestio* 58.123 provide a glimpse of a highly partisan response to a performance of Accius' *Brutus*.

⁷⁷ On Maternus' offence, cf. n. 40; as for his fate, the prosopographical evidence (*PIR*² M 361) is ambiguous, but the text and literary convention suggest that his independent and defiant spirit somehow proved his undoing: Kragelund² 201 n. 33.

⁷⁸ Galba's public veneration for the images of those exiled or condemned by Nero (n. 71) would, to judge from Ov. *Tr.* 1.7.11, be viewed as an instance of *pietas*; the coin featuring Pietas sacrificing at an altar with Aeneas and Anchises (*RIC*² I (Galba), no. 483) probably celebrates the new emperor's *pietas* (cf. Suet. *Tib.* 70.3; *Claud.* 11.2; *Nero* 9) towards his predecessors (n. 62) as well as towards the members of the imperial family murdered by Nero: Dio 64.3.4c.

⁷⁹ On Galba's inconsistency, cf. n. 39. Among those whose survival is known or presumed to have scandalized contemporaries, note Eprius Marcellus (n. 68), Vibius Crispus (promoted to *curator aquarum*: R. Syme, *Historia* 31 (1982), 480) and Nero's freedmen Epaphroditus (Kragelund² 198) and Halotus (promoted to *procurator*: Suet. *Galba* 15.2). In spite of their embarrassing past, neither Nerva (Tac. *Ann.* 15.72) nor Silius Italicus (n. 24) seems to have suffered any setbacks; years later, the latter would in his *Punica* 8.463ff. and 10.403ff. extol the virtue of Galba and Piso and their ancestors: J. Béranger, *Mélanges Carcopino* (Paris, 1966), p. 108.