

WHILE ROME BURNED

Fire, Leadership, and Urban Disaster
in the Roman Cultural Imagination

Virginia M. Closs



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Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	vii
Introduction	1
CHAPTER 1 The Vigilant <i>Princeps</i> : Augustan Responses to Fire at Rome	25
CHAPTER 2 Destruction and Dynasty: Imperial Cremations, Apocalyptic Anxieties, and Book-Burning in the Early First Century CE	69
CHAPTER 3 <i>Sequitur Clades</i> : The Neronian Trajectory into Catastrophe	105
CHAPTER 4 From the Ashes: Post-Neronian Rome and Literary Memory	141
CHAPTER 5 A Rome Restored? Myth, Memory, and Cycles of Destruction in Trajanic and Hadrianic Rome	173
Conclusion Leaders, Conflagration, and Destruction in the Eternal City and Beyond	207
<i>Notes</i>	221
<i>Bibliography</i>	291
<i>Index Locorum</i>	341
<i>General Index</i>	345

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Introduction

Nero fiddled while Rome burned. The tenacity of this image as a cultural touchstone lies in the enduring appeal of its evocative nexus of urban disaster, failed leadership, and creative expression. Nero's storied performance during Rome's conflagration is rendered all the more piquant by the details: Nero sang of the destruction of Troy as he watched the fire's progress from the panoptic vantage point of a tower on the imperial properties. 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.

This book investigates the broader tradition that gives meaning to such images. It is a study in politics and poetics, attending to the intersection of fire, city, and ruler in the first century and a half (the “long” first century) of Rome's imperial era. 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. In the evidence I present, the terror of urban fire looms large not only as a constant accidental hazard but also as a weaponized threat. Real or alleged, arson was primarily understood as a political act, but even accidental fires could have profound ideological significance. My major investigative goal is the exploration of the ways in which Latin authors of the early imperial

period used powerful images of fiery destruction to address contemporary moments of political crisis, as well as to express deep anxieties about leadership and Rome's political future. Considering the developing context of urban life at Rome as a catalyzing force to the broader literary tradition, I trace the critical role that urban conflagration played as both a reality and a metaphor in the politics and literature of the period. Rome's ongoing history of conflict, conflagration, and recovery provides a framework for examining the ways in which incendiary imagery and scenes of destruction came to represent the "unmaking" of Rome and its heritage in Latin literature of this era. This history can be traced most fully and precisely in Roman literature, as authors addressed successive moments of political crisis through dialectical engagement with prior incendiary catastrophes in the city's historical past and cultural repertoire.

In five chapters I offer successive readings of texts from different stages of the era spanning from Augustus to Hadrian (27 BCE–138 CE); all of these texts, in different ways, address and dramatize threats and opportunities posed by fire.¹ In each chapter I concentrate on representations of conflagration that have clear political and civic ramifications during the formation and "long" first century of the Roman principate, exploring the progression of the tensions and anxieties that the image of urban conflagration both reflects and provokes—tensions between divine and human agency, between fantasy and reality, and between literary and historical memory. Roman authors, in turn, respond to this tension by questioning, reframing, and reexamining the messages, implicit and explicit, advanced by the dominant political figures of their day.² Yet the repressive tendencies of many (if not all) of these leaders made open discussion of political issues a dangerous business. Thus authors of the early imperial period frequently employed "figured" speech and mythopoetic narratives to address risky topics.³ Fire offered a productive set of metaphors and figures for addressing moments of political crisis in images of urban destruction.

In response to shifting political and social realities, the literature of this period reimagines and reanimates not only historical fires but also archetypal and mythic representations of conflagration. As Rome attained symbolic status as the center of the expanding Roman *imperium*, and by extension of the cosmos, threats to its physical fabric took on the character of threats to the stability of the empire as a whole, as well as overtones of elemental cosmic dissolution.⁴ The developing sense of Rome's ideological centrality encouraged and validated the emperor's own claims to absolute authority, making conflagration an inviting metaphor for a ruler's capacity to transform or destroy a society; conversely,

however, this perception of the emperor's quasi-divine authority could contribute to the impression that he was personally responsible for any misfortune that befell Rome. For Roman authors well versed in the use of literary allusion as an ideological weapon, this dynamic enlivened old literary, mythological, and philosophical topoi that evoked a similar set of concerns. Equally, Latin authors often describe even everyday fires in terms that evoke the famous destructions of myth and literature. Throughout this book, I consider the progression of several related mythological and artistic motifs that seem to have acquired new ideological dimensions in literature of the early imperial period, including the narrative of Troy's destruction, the myths of Phaethon and the phoenix, cosmic theories of cyclical destruction, particularly the Stoic doctrine of *ekpyrosis*, and the rituals of cremation.

Fire as an artistic image is extremely common and multivalent in its associations, always threatening to leap beyond the bounds of the structures we create around it. To a greater degree than any of the other classic elements (earth, water, air) and the catastrophes associated with them (earthquake, flood, storm), fire suggests a disquieting blurring between human and divine agency, generating a productive tension between the notions of creation and destruction.⁵ An essential of daily existence and the basis for many of ancient society's most significant technological developments, fire was also—as multiple attestations from the historical, material, and literary records show—a ubiquitous hazard of living in a densely settled environment.⁶ The greater—and more overcrowded—the city, the greater the threat of conflagration.⁷ In this sense, Rome, the most politically powerful city in the world, was also the most vulnerable to random destruction by fire; when these destructions occurred, the city's underlying sociopolitical problems and cultural anxieties were starkly exposed.

This book's chapters focus in turn on the Augustan, Tiberian to Claudian, Neronian, Flavian, and Trajanic-Hadrianic eras. The first imperial *princeps* presented himself 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. Chapter 1 examines this theme's elaboration not only in Augustan texts such as Livy's *History*, Ovid's *Fasti*, and Vergil's *Aeneid* but also in the physical fabric of the city's monuments. In chapter 2, by contrast, the cyclicity of disaster—from which Augustus claimed to have rescued Rome—begins to loom large as his successors pondered the reality that the success of this rhetoric actually necessitates further calamity (or at least the

threat of it). Readings drawn from Ovid's Phaethon episode, Manilius's *Astronomica*, the *Consolatio ad Liviam*, and Seneca's *Consolatio ad Marciam* expose the sense of renewed instability as leaders and authors alike faced the long-term implications of Augustus's own claims to having personally reversed Rome's slide into ruin. In chapter 3, I focus 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 rumored response to (and alleged responsibility for) the Great Fire of 64 CE. An extended reading of Seneca's *Epistulae* 91 reveals the letter's potential to be read as a "shadow commentary" on Rome's destruction in 64. Just as Nero is imagined singing of Troy while Rome burned, the authors around him used Rome's literary heritage to mythologize the self-destruction of Nero and his city.

Nero's rumored arson of Rome is a pervasive feature of the hostile historical tradition that developed after his death; yet the popularity of the accusation guaranteed, in effect, that subsequent rulers who experienced similar disasters now risked accusations of becoming another Nero. In chapter 4, I show that this double-edged aspect of Nero's posthumous demonization offered post-Neronian authors significant opportunities to advance new literary and ideological agendas. The post-Neronian drama *Octavia* is the focal reading of this chapter. As I argue, the range of incendiary metaphors used to illustrate Nero's dynastic conflict also anticipates the conflagration in the play's "future." The *Octavia* imagines the 64 fire as the result of a confrontation between the emperor and his people. This aetiology offers an unsettling revision of recent history, foregrounding a source of political tension that no emperor could ever fully resolve. Similarly, in chapter 5 I discuss the fiery vocabulary used to characterize destructive leaders and volatile situations in the text as a way of framing Nero's incendiary actions as a virtual "inheritance" from his imperial predecessors. In my reading of the climactic Great Fire narrative of *Annals* 15, I argue that Tacitus exploits the ambiguity surrounding Nero's alleged arson of the city for a specific ideological purpose. By way of a series of targeted allusions to the Vergilian narrative of Troy's destruction, Tacitus evokes Nero's own storied song of Troy's fall to insinuate what the text refuses to assert outright: the fire was a deliberate attack on the city by the emperor.⁸ This ongoing metaphorical assault upon the city, however, does not originate with Nero but rather with the initial characterization of Augustus. As he establishes the personal authority to introduce the institutional structures of the principate, Augustus is also described at *Annals* 1.10 in terms associated with the construction of the Trojan

horse.⁹ Thus Tacitus ultimately creates the impression that Rome is destroyed “from the inside”—not by Nero’s hubris but by the ideological foundations that Augustus himself had established to bolster his claims to power nearly a century earlier.

Theoretical Approach: Problems and Methodology

This book examines the discourse that emerged around fire and leadership not only after significant fires but also after the political upheavals with which they came to be metonymically associated.¹⁰ In the early twentieth century, the symbolism of fire invited extended study from Gaston Bachelard, a founding figure in the modern study of poetics and epistemology.¹¹ As Bachelard concludes, “[t]o seize fire or to give oneself to fire, to annihilate or to be annihilated, to follow the Prometheus complex or the Empedocles complex, such is the psychological alternation which converts all values and which also reveals the clash of values.”¹² In the later twentieth century, the complex of images and entities associated with fire in the indigenous Australian language Dyirbal inspired the title of George Lakoff’s classic study in cognitive linguistics, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things*, which advances the thesis that human consciousness, as well as our everyday experiences, are powerfully shaped by the central metaphors used to explain complex phenomena.¹³

For inhabitants of Rome destruction by fire was both a lived reality and a powerful cultural touchstone. The literary depiction of fire gained much of its power from the awareness of fire’s constant presence in the physical space of the city, always threatening to strip away the illusion of human control over that space. The susceptibility of ancient urban structures to fire calls attention, in turn, to the vulnerability of the social institutions that create and inhabit those structures. The trajectory of this politics of catastrophe lead to a consideration of the overall potential of Rome, its history, and the very structures that organized its identity to be unmade and undone. Recovering from such an unmaking, however, yields new horizons of perception and social memory as a society constructs new memories.

Jan Assmann usefully defines cultural memory as the “outer dimension” of human memory embracing two different concepts: “memory culture” (*Erinnerungskultur*) and “reference to the past” (*Vergangenheitsbezug*). This type of commemoration manifests itself in various forms: written texts and perfor-

mances can represent events from the past; rituals and ceremonies can commemorate significant days calendrically; and special places such as ancient monuments function as time markers and sites of memory in the physical landscape.¹⁴ Literary authors often reached out to the distant past for guarantees of the city's future survival, especially in response to destructive events that threatened that future. At the same time, though, the inherently uneven and heterogeneous nature of this process generates a competing field of memories and countermemories.¹⁵

To the Romans of each successive moment studied in this book's five chapters, the traces of various civic catastrophes and political collapses were still fresh; yet as new catastrophes occurred, and as dynasties rose and fell, each new trauma echoed and reframed the preceding ones. Societies experiencing the aftermath of a catastrophe engage with the symbols evoking their predicament in a visceral manner.¹⁶ Often the response engenders either a willful forgetting or at least the expression of the desire to do so; as the Augustan author Titus Labienus is said to have remarked, "the best defense against civil war is forgetting."¹⁷ Yet however pronounced this "art of forgetting" became—e.g., in memory sanctions carried out on statues or inscriptions—traces remained to represent the past conflict.¹⁸ Likewise, old symbols and mythic narratives would suddenly take on new meanings in light of recent events; thus conflagrations like the 64 disaster evoked the storied destruction of Troy. Therefore, the experience of an actual conflagration also stimulated the profound unease that Lacan describes as "traversing the fantasy";¹⁹ that is, an anticipated or imagined catastrophe structures our daily reality, infusing mundane experience with a sense of urgency. Yet as an event transpires, the fantasized event becomes a fully realized scenario—one which, perversely, again retreats into fantasy as it is assimilated into memory. Such a symbolic process creates a sort of feedback loop: to achieve any deeper understanding of both the event and the representation of the event, the symbol must be integrated with the experience.²⁰

The progression of Rome's cultural memory of conflagration is predicated on a number of collective understandings that evolved out of the city's uniquely charged nexus of urban transformation, contested ideology, collective memory, and literary production. Roman authors working under repressive leaders were forced to choose, as the elder Seneca put it, between "losing their lives or their speech" (*caput potius quam dictum perdere*, *Controv.* 2.4.13). To a lesser but still significant degree, even comparatively tolerant leaders nevertheless benefited from the memory of their more violent predecessors; the power of any *princeps*

to punish dissident speech or writing, even if it went unexerted, perhaps inevitably provoked self-censorship. In response to this threat, authors turned to metaphors, figures, and fictional narratives to create plausible deniability when they created texts that addressed politically risky topics. This phenomenon resulted in a shift in the value of a range of metaphorical and literary associations of fire, as it came to represent the very forces—political instability, opposition to leadership, and the power of the leader to crush that opposition—that could not be addressed directly. Fire at Rome was as much an expression of human error and inevitable destruction as it was a weapon of uncontrolled political opposition; thus for early imperial authors conflagration became a trope with second-order signification.²¹ Authors across genres seem to have exploited this fresh ideological charge in order to express anxieties about the role of one-man leadership, as well as about the potential for the civil strife to break out once again among competing individual claimants to the ultimate seat of power.

The readings that anchor each chapter demonstrate just how powerful a role Roman literature played in fashioning, overwriting, or reframing political memory and the understanding of the recent past. Fully considering the intertwining politics and poetics of conflagration of Rome, however, necessarily entails aspects of both intertextuality and intermediality.²² The value of analyzing Latin literature for intergeneric gestures grounded in nontextual material or cultural practices has been demonstrated by the work of Emily Gowers on Roman banqueting, Teresa Ramsby's study of embedded inscription in Latin elegy, and the studies of Catharine Edwards and Mario Erasmo on "reading death" in the Roman world, among others.²³ A related line of inquiry animates studies of ekphrasis, as well as of artistic devices and aesthetic impulses shared between literary texts and material objects.²⁴ While urban conflagration is not usually considered an art form (except, as rumor had it, by Nero), it is a human artifact that indelibly marked the city throughout its history. Accordingly, I consider the ways in which texts from a wide range of genres respond not only to each other but also to the built environment of Rome and to the shared memory of the catastrophic events that periodically disrupted the life of the city in material ways. Some of these intertexts are clear verbal echoes, while others work more indirectly to offer a recollection of a historical event. Often these borrowings superimpose literary and historical memory, allowing the presentation of a historical event to construct, via an allusive program, its own historical narrative.²⁵ Thus, although literature shapes the memory of the past,

these texts themselves become objects of memory that can be manipulated, endorsed, critiqued, ironized, or satirized in later texts.

Fire-related metaphors—expressions that connote lighting a flame, a fire spreading or burning, or fires extinguished—are common in Latin. For example, a highly enthused or angry character might be described as burning (*ardens, incensus*) or may flush red with emotion (*rubet, erubuit*); likewise variations of *extinguo* are often used to mean that something (or someone) other than a fire is “snuffed out.” The important role such images play in my argument relies on their power to generate new meanings in light of the historical trajectory or narrative teloi of the texts I discuss. In the field of Latin literary studies, the classic study by Bernard Knox on recurrent imagery in *Aeneid* Book 2, “The Serpent and the Flame,” came at the vanguard of a generation of scholarship that engaged with imagery, metaphor, and allusivity in influential ways.²⁶ In the subsequent generation, readings of fire imagery in New Comedy, Catullan invective, love elegy, and satire, among other genres, offered significant demonstrations of the pervasiveness and flexibility of the metaphor.²⁷ John Miller and Andrew Riggsby have both used Lakoff’s central premise—that metaphor is a fundamental building block of the cognitive process, pervading all manner of styles and topics of discourse—to explore “fiery” descriptions of (respectively) Dido in the *Aeneid* and tyrants in Seneca’s philosophical treatises.²⁸ Thus we should not dismiss the potential of individual words to take on added significance in light of the historical trajectory or narrative telos of characters, objects, or places closely associated with literal conflagrations.

Like any such study, this one can encompass only a limited and specific grouping of the vast network of images that fire evokes; I deal primarily with those in which clear political and civic ramifications are apparent. Within these limitations, however, I do not confine my investigations to a specific generic category; rather I aim to follow the associations between and among leaders, fires, and cities as they develop in texts from a wide range of genres. The promise of examining images and characterizations as they travel between different texts and genres is admirably demonstrated in a 1997 article by James Clauss, which looks at how the *ars allusiva* can be used to suggest not only that Apollonius’s Medea gains sinister power from her points of contrast with the Nausicaa of the *Odyssey*, but also that Livy’s Hannibal draws much of his threatening and “fiery” character from Sallust’s portrayal of Catiline.²⁹ The allusive polarity created between the foreign/citizen figures of Catiline and Hannibal, Clauss contends, “strengthens the similarity between these two ene-

mies of Rome in that both can be seen as representing and opposing the Roman state simultaneously.”³⁰

More recently, scholars including Cynthia Damon and Ellen O’Gorman have further demonstrated the complex relationship between historiography and literary allusion, suggesting that history itself can offer a literary intertext—often without a precise textual model.³¹ Finally, work by Elizabeth Keitel, Timothy Joseph, and Catharine Edwards, among others, has convincingly argued that Tacitus places the literary image of the captured or destroyed city in significant dialogue with his historical accounts of the conflicts that played out in Rome and around the empire in the first century CE.³² All these approaches have informed the selection and reading of the texts discussed in each chapter. To sum up, this book looks holistically at the representation of fire—especially fire that can destroy a city—as a product of the Roman cultural imagination.

In each chapter, Rome’s history of conflict, conflagration, and recovery provides a framework for considering the ways in which incendiary imagery and scenes of destruction came to represent the unmaking of Rome and its heritage in Latin literature of the early imperial period. In order to form an impression of how Rome’s political development and changing physical environment might inform the ways in which cities and leaders are imagined textually, each chapter offers an overview of significant events and images involving fire and leadership at Rome in the era under consideration. Lived worlds stimulate literary production, but scholarship in recent decades has questioned the determining force of urban reality over literary representation, emphasizing instead the ways in which the writer himself becomes the creator of his own city: hence the related trends of reading the city as text and writing the city into text.³³

While acknowledging the fundamentally literary nature of all spaces described in text, I nevertheless examine the physical space of the city as profoundly constitutive of the ways in which these features ultimately appear in various forms of textual representation. Similarly, although I recognize literary authors as the main shapers of the characterizations of leaders in historiography, I maintain that this view underestimates 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. Thus the historical events and material objects that precede each chapter’s discussion of texts are presented not as a way of defining the contemporary world to which the texts then “respond” but rather as a form of

mise-en-scène aimed at reflecting, in palpable form, the prevailing political concerns, aesthetic sensibilities, and recent memories of the contemporary sociopolitical environment that produced these texts.

Caution is always necessary in evaluating the interpretations offered by ancient historical sources for a specific incident; nevertheless, reviewing the bare bones of the events addressed by our sources can help us imagine the constellation of specific events and associated political gestures that may have attracted attention from authors of different eras. In the aftermath of a series of upheavals, leaders sought—in different ways and with varying degrees of success—to configure themselves as protectors of and providers for the urban population. Within this framework, authors working under different sets of cultural and generic pressures used this material in inventive ways to advance their own literary and ideological goals.

To complement the issues foregrounded in these historical sketches, in each chapter a brief selection of literary analyses of different authors from the era touches on the key concepts and developments in literary figurations of conflagration and related imagery. Here, as always, periodization is a device that allows us, as Ian Morris notes, to comprehend “a block of human experience.”³⁴ Dividing the continuum of literature into these sections enables us to grasp and to discuss certain key ideas as they develop over time; the artificial nature of this framework cautions us to keep in mind its provisionality.³⁵ Within each chapter, this provisionality is further highlighted by the difficulty of assigning secure dates to a great many of the texts discussed; in these cases, I offer the material not as part of a definite continuum of texts or events but as representative examples of the ideas and problems with which each chapter is concerned. For example, I include readings drawn from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* in chapter 2 not as “post-Augustan” material in the literal sense but because the text is central to understanding the preoccupation with succession, filiation, and authority that dominates a number of the other readings in the chapter. These readings provide context for the extended discussion of a single text that occupies the bulk of each chapter.

Equally, there is necessarily some variation in the quality and quantity of historical material available. In chapter 1, the comparative wealth of sources dealing with Augustus, his rise to power, and his decades-long reign enables us to consider a great number of events with an abundance of detail.³⁶ The overarching scholarly problem in dealing with these sources is the extent to which imperial control was already stifling debate and criticism as these texts were

produced. Augustan authors were certainly dealing with a wider array of sources, and responding to a broader range of opinions, than we can possibly reconstruct today. Nevertheless, they were also working under the influence of the overwhelming campaign of positive self-representation promoted by Augustus and his supporters. In dealing with accounts of the Neronian era, we have a different 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 so than in the question of his supposedly deliberate torching of the city in 64 CE.

In my fourth and fifth chapters, I dispense with a lengthy accounting of the fires and disasters suffered under the Flavians and the early adoptive emperors, focusing more narrowly on events that seem to address Nero and his legacy, as well as the specific issues identified in earlier chapters concerning Rome's image of itself as a city that repeatedly rises up from the ashes of various physical and political disasters. It is also true, however, that our information concerning events at Rome becomes markedly less rich at the end of the first century. 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 the period of the adoptive emperors under whom they wrote. Moreover, the exact publication dates of much of the literature produced in this era—Tacitus's *Annals*, Suetonius's imperial biographies, and (arguably) Juvenal's *Satires*—are all too highly contested to warrant the specific parallels that are in some cases possible with earlier authors.³⁷

Recurring Motifs: A Thematic Tour

Many of the most significant associations between leaders and fire 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. Other writers, however, engage creatively with the legacy of Greek and republican Roman literature, reworking ancient images to give them current significance. My readings reveal the extent to which not only rhetorical tropes but what we might call the poetics of catastrophe play a part in historiographic accounts of disaster. Although not necessarily sharing an easily categorized or standardized vocabulary, certain recur-

ring thematic elements nevertheless fall under a few recognizable headings. These themes form leitmotifs that move in and out of sequence with each other, sometimes combining in surprising ways, throughout the series of texts treated here. I make no claim to complete coverage; full consideration of the pre-imperial precedents for each of these themes in Greek and Roman literature would be volumes in themselves. But a few examples of each topic will provide a brief sketch of some of this important background in order to prepare readers for the discussion of the major literary themes and sociopolitical issues that recur in each chapter

The *Urbs Capta* and the Fall of Troy

According to Polybius, Scipio Aemilianus tearfully quoted a line from the *Iliad* about the fate of Troy as he watched Carthage burn on his orders; this anecdote offers an early instance of the Roman tendency to treat Troy as way of meditating on the eventual downfall of all great cities, even their own.³⁸ The more abstracted motif of the *urbs capta*, or captured city, was pervasive enough in antiquity to be explicitly catalogued by Quintilian. Standard elements include the wholesale slaughter of men, the destruction of a city by fire, the carrying off of women and children, the plunder of temples, the murder of children in front of their parents, and the sounds of wailing and lamentation.³⁹ As George Paul further points out, however, the influence of the *urbs capta* motif “may be suspected even where there is no explicit mention of a captured city.”⁴⁰ Although the literary exploitation of this type-scene begins with Homer (Hector anticipates the fall of Troy, *Il.* 6.440–66; Demodocus sings of the event itself, *Od.* 8.521–85), it was widely embraced by authors across genres.⁴¹ Scenes of horror at actual captures of cities, as narrated by historians, include many of the same hallmarks.

Nor were representations of *urbes captae* confined to text; they also appeared in triumphal processions and on triumphal arches and columns, making the destructions wrought in Rome’s name abroad vividly real at the capital itself.⁴² Additionally, Romans frequently evoked the first and most signal threat to their own city’s existence, the legendary sack of the Gauls traditionally dated to 390 BCE. Whether the Romans of republic and empire were commemorating an actual event or merely retelling legends, the tale of marauding outsiders plundering and burning their city became an exemplary or synecdochic object of memory. It represented not so much Rome’s humiliating defeat at the hands of

barbarians as it did the city's own capacity to rebuild, recover, and rise up "more fruitfully and fertile" than before, as Livy famously says of the aftermath of the sack.

The memory of Troy's fall, thought to be the ultimate source of the popularity of the *urbs capta* motif, was deeply imprinted on the collective imagination of the ancient world, transcending temporal, cultural, and geographical boundaries.⁴³ For Romans, as Brigitte Libby recognizes, the sack of Troy could be characterized either as the "first step in the teleological advance of Roman Empire or as the first phase in a cycle of destruction that claimed Rome's mother-city and threatened Rome as well."⁴⁴ This interpretive flexibility made it an appealing vehicle for introducing and exploring new complexities in the cultural narratives of Rome as it faced the new uncertainties that came with its own emergence as the dominant power in the Mediterranean world.

The narrative of Troy's capture found newly charged significance as an analogue for Rome's own catastrophic shift from republic to principate. Julian coinage as early as the 40s BCE highlights the link to Troy through Venus: coins bearing a bust of Venus on the obverse feature an image of Aeneas carrying Anchises out of Troy on the reverse.⁴⁵ 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; however, they 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.⁴⁶ The design of Augustus's monumental Forum emphasized that the origin of both Rome and its leading citizen lay in Troy, the sacked city from which Aeneas escaped.⁴⁷ Yet as discussions in several of this book's chapters shows, there are also a number of risks inherent in reading the story of Rome's rise out of Troy's fall as a parallel to emergence of Augustus's new Golden Age amidst the ruins of the civil wars.⁴⁸

Phaethon, *Ekpyrosis*, the Phoenix, and the Roman *Saeculum*

According to the hypothesis of Euripides's *Phaethon*, the title character borrows Helios's chariot to allay his own doubts about his true identity as the progeny of the sun god.⁴⁹ The young prince sets out to prove his own worth (as he says, "whether or not my father begot me"), with disastrous results.⁵⁰ The horses do not obey their inexperienced (and mortal) master, and the flaming solar chariot careens over the earth, causing nearly total destruction. Phaethon's struggle,

encompassing themes of contested paternity and of failed succession, shares some of the underlying anxieties that motivate the actions of other figures of epic and tragedy (e.g., Telemachus or Oedipus).⁵¹ Yet in Plato's *Timaeus* (22b–c), we hear a different version of the story: Critias retails an explanation of the myth, which he claims an Egyptian priest once offered Solon.

According to this priest, Phaethon's fall and Deucalion's flood actually encode real historical catastrophes caused by "a shifting of the bodies in the heavens which move around the earth."⁵² 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, this passage works to obscure the ideological significance of Phaethon as a cautionary tale with societal resonance: excessive personal ambition is the potential downfall of would-be drivers of the cosmic chariot, and by extension, the society that produces such leaders is dooming itself to destruction. The tragic and spectacular aspects of Phaethon's tale would have held considerable ideological appeal for Roman intellectual circles of the middle and late republic; yet the natural-philosophical interpretation advanced in Plato's *Timaeus* can also inform the way in which the story obtained prominence in Roman thought.⁵³

Roman elites recognized the link in Greek science between Phaethon and eschatological doctrine, reinforcing its ideological import as well as its poetic significance. As Alessandro Schiesaro contends, multiple evocations of Phaethon's journey toward the sky recur throughout Lucretius's *De rerum natura*, inviting readers to (re)read the narrative as a probing comment on the metaphorical flight of the poem's "hero," Epicurus, as he aspires to the stars in search of the ultimate truths about the universe (*DRN* 1.72–76).⁵⁴ Lucretius also offers a stirring description of Phaethon's fiery demise (5.396–404), only to condemn the tale as false (5.405–6): "Certainly, that's how the ancient poets of the Greeks have sung of it. It is too far removed from true reason, though" (*scilicet ut veteres Graium cecinere poetae. / quod procul a vera nimis est ratione repulsum*). In euhemerist fashion, Lucretius goes on to propose that such poetry encodes a "real" event: a catastrophic fire that once almost destroyed (or did destroy) the earth—and might well do so again given the right conditions.

According to Lucretius (*DRN* 5.407–10), fire can dominate (*ignis enim superare potest*) when its atoms have the advantage of numbers; then either its forces subside, "defeated by some reason" (*aliqua ratione revictae*), or the world itself perishes, burned up in a firestorm (*pereunt res exustae torrentibus auris*).

Lucretius also famously predicts at 5.92–96 that the world will perish because it is mortal, and that this will happen in a single day (*una dies dabit exitio*).⁵⁵ The notion of the world being unmade by fire in a “single day” evokes the Stoic doctrine of *ekpyrosis*, a cosmological process by which the universe is destroyed in flames and then regenerated in eternally recurring cycles of predetermined length; the destruction of *ekpyrosis* immediately triggers the regenerative process of *palingenesis*.⁵⁶ Stoic cosmology became especially important to Roman political thought in the late republic, and the political disturbances of the 40s BCE were often connected in contemporary literature with the end of the Roman *saeculum*, as well as with the cycle of conflagration articulated in the doctrine of *ekpyrosis*.⁵⁷

The cosmological, political, and poetic interpretations of Phaethon merged to form an influential line of rhetoric around the final collapse of the Roman republic, when rampant political instability led to fears of an end to Rome’s cosmic cycle and an impending apocalypse. The transition from the Roman republic to the monarchical principate replicated and magnified the dynamics of the tragic stage, as the concerns of an unstable family of “brilliant dynasts” again took on a potentially earth-shattering significance.⁵⁸ The “Phaethon complex,” as Schiesaro notes, “translates anxiety about legitimacy into inadequacy to succeed, effectively morphing into a self-fulfilling prophecy: even after these young men have put to rest their genealogical doubts, they are shown to be more or less tragically unable to equal their imposing fathers.”⁵⁹ Thus the Phaethon story—with its focus on a would-be hero whose obsession with proving his worth leads to a massive catastrophe—gained new potential to symbolize the inherent risks of the dynastic system instituted by Augustus.

The phoenix, by contrast, encompasses another kind of periodic destruction and rebirth reminiscent of the *saeculum*, offering a kind of conceptual pendant or rebuttal to the image of Phaethon’s failure.⁶⁰ As early as Hecataeus, the bird flies to Heliopolis from Arabia to bury its father (*FGrH* 324 = *Hdt.* 2.73); the Elder Pliny concurs, mentioning a city of the sun (*solis urbem*, *HN* 10.4). Mythic variants consistently highlight the bird’s long life (calculations range between 500 and 1,461 years) and its serial immortality via a process of regeneration in a pyre laid in its own nest. The bird regenerates after a conflagration that destroys its “home”—that is, its nest, lined with precious herbs and aromatic ointments; in a Roman imperial context, this might evoke the incendiary spectacle of the funeral pyre, which employed many of the same items.⁶¹ Similar to the appearance of comets in the heavens discussed above in connection

with Phaethon, a sighting of the phoenix was traditionally thought to signal the collapse of a dynasty or civilization.⁶² Yet as we will see, in the first and early second centuries CE the motif of the phoenix appears to have acquired new significance as a ready metaphor for the successful transition from one dynastic leader to the next.

Leaders and Fires: Arson and Externalization

For those wishing to wreak destruction upon their enemies on a grand scale in an environment lacking modern safety precautions and firefighting services, arson was the obvious weapon of choice. In Euripides's *Phoenissae*, Tydeus is figured as a kind of anti-Prometheus, coming "torch in hand to burn the town" (*Phoen.* 1121–22); this image itself clearly alludes to a description in Aeschylus's *Septem* of the shield of Capaneus, which displays a naked man with a lighted torch in his hands and the legend "I shall burn the city" (*Sept.* 432–34).⁶³ Similarly, in ancient Rome's "economy of violence," even the threat of incendiary action was a mighty currency.⁶⁴ 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.⁶⁵

As John Ramsey observes in his account of a well-timed disturbance of the Senate by a torch-wielding mob in 57 BCE, such incidents graphically show "how rhetoric alone was by no means the only tool employed by some ruthless senators to control the outcome of a debate."⁶⁶ Fires at Rome frequently were attributed to political motives; political disputes, in turn, often provoked charges of intent to commit arson. Yet accusations of arson (or the intent to commit it) do not stand alone. Embedded in a larger system of invective, fire functions as a material mirror for the sociopolitical devastation that those wishing to preserve existing power structures claimed a change would bring about.⁶⁷ Blame for fires (or at least suspicion of planning them) seems to have formed a powerful indictment of divisive figures of the late republic. Sulla incurred lasting opprobrium for the fire that destroyed the Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus during his march on Rome in 83 BCE.⁶⁸ 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.⁶⁹ Catiline's purported intentions to wreak havoc in Rome with "slaughter and fire" are reiterated over a dozen times in Cicero's *Catilinarians*, effectively turning incendiary attack

into a metonym through which to understand Catiline's radical politics and their potential impact.⁷⁰

Clodius's apparently very real enthusiasm for politically motivated arson attracted the attention of his archenemy Cicero, whose (admittedly hostile and tendentious) portrayal of Clodius fashions the patrician-turned-plebeian tribune as, in effect, a terrorist who uses torch-wielding mobs both to destroy targets and to force political concessions with the threat of arson.⁷¹ Cicero highlights the divine and civic outrage of Clodius's alleged arson of the Temple of the Nymphs, possibly in an attempt to destroy public records stored within it.⁷² Dio tells us that a grain shortage in 57 BCE prompted a mob to surround the Senate in session on the Capitol, threatening to burn the building down around them. Not long afterward Clodius's 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 should do him any violence."⁷³

Finally, when Clodius was slain in a notorious outbreak of gang violence in 52 BCE, a grieving mob (in perhaps a fitting tribute) burned Rome's senate house with their leader's body inside.⁷⁴ Again in 44, crowds were barely restrained from setting alight the Curia 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.⁷⁵ The 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.⁷⁶

During the collapse of the republic, figurations of political entities vying for control of Rome as besiegers of their own cities became ubiquitous; these representations then worked their way into subsequent depictions of civil conflict, as well as into hostile historiographic accounts of emperors.⁷⁷ Ultimately, the damning charge of arson drew its strength from the assimilation between the state and its architectural expression; in fact, the city's physical well-being is so closely aligned in literature with its politics and leadership that collapse in one is often reflected in the other.⁷⁸ Similarly, the plague that besets the population of Thebes at the start of Sophocles's *Oedipus Tyrannus* is the result of their unwitting complicity in Oedipus's accidental crimes of parricide and incest. Likewise, the plague of Athens at the end of Lucretius's *De rerum natura* (6.1138–1286) reads, in accordance with the poet's philosophical principles, as an outer representation of the city's societal ills.⁷⁹ Closer to the period examined in this book, Horace describes a flood descending on Rome (*Carm.* 1.2.1–20) as if the

dire portents of the physical world are the natural companion to the evils of Rome's political collapse in the mid-first century BCE.⁸⁰ Such figurations suggest that the "externalization" of internal flaws can extend over an entire society, leaving a population not just vulnerable to disaster but in some sense culpable for it.

For the Stoics, it is the fiery nature of the soul that makes it want to return to its source in the ethereal regions.⁸¹ Vergil (*G.* 4.219–27) suggests fire is the animating spark of consciousness.⁸² Yet tyrannical or despotic leaders are frequently portrayed as prone to violent outbursts, overwhelming desires, and wasteful extravagance.⁸³ These tendencies, in turn, often invite metaphorically "fiery" vocabulary.⁸⁴ A range of texts examined in this book, however, take this link one step further, suggesting a near-inevitable link between the tempestuous passions of the "bad" leader and the physical fires that break out in their environments. Cicero fashions a telling zeugma in his Verrine orations, contending that "it was on one and the same night that the Roman governor burned with the flame of vile lust, and the Roman fleet [burned] with fire set by pirates" (*una atque eadem nox erat qua praetor amoris turpissimi flamma, classis populi Romani praedonum incendio conflagrabat*, Cic. *Verr.* 2.5.92). 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.⁸⁵ This type of "psychagogic" activity, common to poetry and oratory, unites the themes of fire, leadership, and city.⁸⁶ Often these metaphorical images function proleptically, signaling the imminent (and quite real) conflagration that such a leader is about to unleash on the world.⁸⁷

Fireproof Figures: Protectors of the City and Exemplary Survivors

Pendant to the concept of an "incendiary" leader whose own uncontrollable passions result in civic disaster is the opposite idea: that of a leader who can resist or survive the effects of conflagration—or who can ward off the fires that threaten his people. In such instances, fire becomes a test that proves the worth of an individual; as Seneca claims, "fire is the test of gold; suffering of strong men" (*ignis aurum probat, miseria fortes viros*, *Prov.* 5.10). The problems created by the instability of Rome's urban fabric invited dramatic material and administrative interventions from individual leaders; claims that one could eradicate the threat of fire further bolstered the semidivine self-figurations favored by the period's leading political contenders.

Crassus, in the later decades of the republican period, seems to have realized the potential of exploiting the situation with his notorious private fire brigades, which he only deployed after desperate sellers had sold their property to him at a fraction of its value:

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. . . . [O]bserving 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.

As Plutarch makes clear in this passage, Rome's susceptibility to fire presented significant opportunities for the wealthy and powerful to become even more so. This strategy was instrumental in the future triumvir's consolidation of power during his early career.⁸⁸

Cicero, too, portrays himself as having rescued Rome from incendiary ruin in the opening of his triumphant third speech against Catiline, declaring:

Rem publicam, Quirites, vitamque omnium vestrum, bona, fortunas, coniuges liberosque vestros atque hoc domicilium clarissimum imperii, fortunatissimam pulcherrimamque urbem, hodierno die deorum immortalium summo erga vos amore, laboribus, consiliis, periculis meis e flamma atque ferro ac paene ex faucibus fati ereptam et vobis conservatam ac restitutam videtis. (Cic. Cat. 3.1)

Romans! You see today the republic, all your lives, your property, fortune, wives and children, and this abode of the most brilliant power, the most fortunate and most beautiful city, saved and restored to you, after being snatched from fire, sword, and even the very jaws of fate because of my labors, plans, and perils, and the exceptional love of the immortal gods for you.⁸⁹

Cicero reiterates these claims throughout the speech, insisting he has “extinguished the fires that have been carried against the city” (Cat. 3.2) and announcing that the *supplicatio* that has been awarded him—the first granted to a

civilian (*togatus*, 3.15)—is in thanks for “saving the city from fire, the citizens from slaughter, and Italy from war” (3.15). In the aftermath of the civil wars of the first century BCE, preventing further fires and making good the damage done in the conflict are obvious metaphors for legitimizing the new order imposed by Augustus.

Such metaphors also tap into the Roman exemplary tradition, which exhibits a preoccupation with the notion of a uniquely blessed person or object that miraculously survives a devastating fire unscathed.⁹⁰ The legend of Aeneas’s escape from Troy touches on this fantasy, as does the portent of Servius Tullius’s royal destiny: a nimbus of fire seemed to surround his head as he slept.⁹¹ Similarly, the survival or destruction of sacred items or locations in a fire attracted interpretation as omens. Consider the Sibylline books, destroyed during Sulla’s assault on Rome in 83 CE, in contrast to the Pontifex Maximus Caecilius Metellus’s heroic rescue of the Palladium from the burning temple of Vesta in 241 BCE.⁹² Even more potent is the story of Claudia Quinta, which encodes the notion of a reciprocal relationship between rescuer and rescued. After miraculously dragging the massive sacred stone of Magna Mater from a sinking ship in the Tiber, the Roman matron was rewarded with a statue in the Palatine temple built to house the stone; when the temple later caught fire on two separate occasions, the statue of Claudia Quinta miraculously survived.⁹³ Similarly, if leaders or their images escaped a blaze unharmed, it offered a guarantee of their unique power and status in the Roman cosmos. In this process, the emperor emerges as a “synecdochic hero,” an extraordinary individual who both represents and guarantees the totality of the state in its past, present, and future forms.⁹⁴ Conversely, when fires affected leaders or the objects symbolizing them in the cityscape (not only statues but also inscriptions bearing their names and monuments they dedicated), it was taken as a major indication of divine disfavor, as well as of impending political misfortune.

Book Burning, Destroyed Histories, and the “Unmaking” of Roman Heritage

Just as Rome’s physical fabric could be unmade in a conflagration, book burning represented an attempt to permanently alter its literary landscape. The folktale of Tarquinius Superbus and the Sibylline books marks the “earliest” iteration of book burning in Roman culture: a mysterious old woman offered a set of books to Rome’s last king but burned a portion of them each time he scoffed

at the price.⁹⁵ According to Livy, in 181 BCE a set of books allegedly written by Numa, Rome's second king and (according to legend) a disciple of Pythagoras, were unearthed at the foot of the Janiculum; they were subsequently burned by senatorial order after being deemed a threat to the republic.⁹⁶ Both stories—at least as they appear in the surviving sources—are likely to have been remodeled or reinterpreted in response to Augustus's purge of prophecy when he became Pontifex Maximus. Nevertheless, they encapsulate an important ideological subtext. Livy (6.1.3) equates the eradication of history with urban conflagration at Rome, lamenting the loss of many important early sources in the Gallic destruction. Book burning can also amount to an expression of poetic authority; hence the frequent references to burning one's own work, or the work of others, that is deemed artistically inadequate.⁹⁷ When orders to destroy written material come from Rome's own leaders, however, they become the ultimate expression of control over Rome and its civic identity.

Numerous authors in the early imperial period consider the impact of book burning not just as a gesture of poetic sensibility or as the collateral damage of foreign invasion but as the willed intervention of Rome's own rulers. One such gesture is the burning of personal correspondence by victorious rivals, a practice also attested in the republican era; as Joseph Howley notes, however, this seemingly magnanimous act often bred its own strain of paranoia: "the impossibility of verifying what has been destroyed leaves the act open to subversion and duplicity, exposing it to a kind of scepticism not unlike the response that attended literary burning."⁹⁸ Similarly, Augustus adopted the arresting practice of periodically burning records of old public debt, converting what had been a crime (at least as allegedly practiced by Clodius) into a display of beneficence.⁹⁹ Destroying such records was purported to liberate debtors from the threat of blackmail; symbolically, however, it created a powerful visual representation of a break with the past, as well as a striking illustration of the emperor's authority to make or unmake the world around him in a material sense.¹⁰⁰ Yet even this gesture may have had unintended consequences: a subsequent fire in the Forum is blamed on debtors seeking further remissions.¹⁰¹

Ultimately, the overwhelming influence of Augustus over the city and its literature implicates him in a number of the best-known instances of book burning (or intended book burning) from the imperial era. Vergil's dying wish was reportedly that the unfinished manuscript of the *Aeneid* be burned, but this request was denied by the emperor's agents, who saw to it that copies were made and distributed posthaste.¹⁰² Whether this posthumous story reflects a

historical reality or was invented by readers to account for the text's apparently incomplete state, it marks the widespread sense that the emperor's political influence extended into the world of letters in significant ways.¹⁰³ As my discussion of several emblematic instances of book burning will show, whether authors destroyed their own works in response to imperial interdiction or their works were destroyed in a state-mandated effort to cleanse the record of offensive content, such gestures reflect the distorting effect of imperial will as exerted on contemporary authors.

In Augustus's own version of his transformation of Rome, he asserts that he, in effect, achieved the impossible: without damaging traditional governmental structures (*res publica ne quid detrimenti caperet*, "so the state would not be diminished in any way"), he claimed to have undertaken the task of rebuilding a new Rome out of the ruin of the republic (*rei publicae constituendae*, "establishing the state").¹⁰⁴ Despite these claims, Augustus's catalogue of "restored" peaces, traditions, and buildings demonstrates that during his tenure Rome was radically altered from her prior condition.¹⁰⁵ Implicit within these claims of restoration is the message that without the interventions of the *princeps*, Rome would be all but obliterated by war, moral decline, and physical collapse; this narrowly avoided fate could all too easily become a reality in the hands of a less capable leader. Likewise, 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.

The series of texts explored in this book's five chapters shows how closely linked conflagration and political instability became in the imaginary of early imperial Rome. The principate, from Augustus onward, relied on an effective but dangerous strain of rhetoric claiming the power to control these linked events. Fire signals destruction, but this damage is a necessary prelude to the rhetoric of reconstruction fashioned by Augustus. This sequence is fundamentally shaped by the life of the city itself, yet it is also indebted to a literary tradition in which fire can signal death—literary, mythical, and political—but also everlasting life and fame, if one can endure through destruction.

The evolution of the metaphor of fire shows how layered and complex it became as an ideological motif in the early imperial period. Many of this book's discussions reflect less on specific events than on the infinite replicability and reusability of certain literary and historical models of disaster to advance a range of literary and ideological agendas. Just as much as the famous legend of

Nero's song of Troy, these texts demonstrate not what the reality of fire was in the city itself but how pervasive the associations between and among Rome's historic and cosmic significance, the memory of failed leadership, and urban conflagration became over the course of the first century CE. They also suggest that the discourse surrounding civic disasters more generally was subject to significant manipulation; Nero, the 64 fire, and the legend of Troy's fall are simply the clearest and best-known examples of a much more widespread cultural tendency that neither began nor ended with Nero or his dynasty.

Thus this book's readings demonstrate that the ideological structures and metaphors surrounding fire and disaster at Rome were inherently unstable from the beginning of the principate. Ultimately, claims to rescue Rome from existential threats went hand in hand with accusations of responsibility for destroying it in the first place. As much as Rome's history of conflagration and collapse provided the scope for Augustus to establish a form of government in Rome that lasted for centuries, it also, in a sense, doomed successors who could not, without a catastrophe of comparable magnitude, make claims to rival Augustus's greatness. At the same time, the development of imperial Rome's physical fabric and political structures all but guaranteed that such catastrophes would recur periodically—and that a single leader would ultimately be held responsible.¹⁰⁶

CHAPTER 1

The Vigilant *Princeps*

Augustan Responses to Fire at Rome

Rhetoric surrounding Augustus's rise to power celebrated him as the institutor of a so-called Golden Age, a period of lasting stability after decades of interne-cine conflict.¹ While Augustus himself undertook a comprehensive monumen-talization of Rome's urban fabric as a visual confirmation of his newly imposed order, Augustan authors constructed complex worlds within their texts, striv-ing toward literary monuments with equally universal dimensions.² Uncon-trolled fire becomes the ultimate expression of an existential threat within these elaborate cosmologies, just as it did in the city itself. In an era haunted by the memory of triumviral conflict, authors across genres overlapped the motifs of civil discord and urban conflagration, creating a new set of narratives to justify, to stabilize, and occasionally to call into question the values of the new era. Thus in tandem with the newly refurbished city, Roman authors of the period established a set of literary motifs linking societal survival (or annihilation) to the threat posed by large-scale fires. Vergil's *Aeneid* takes up this theme from the start, tracing the legendary Roman past to its roots in the destruction of Troy. In the *Aeneid*, as John Rexine observes, "fire forms the connecting link from Troy to Rome, from the destructive conflagration of Troy to the eternal flame of the Vestal Virgin."³ Not a single city is actually burned down in real time during the narrative of the *Aeneid*; Troy is burned in storytelling, Carthage by analogy with Dido. Yet fire is pervasive in terms of the text's deep conceptu-alization of fire's relationship not only to the soul, emotions, and passions of its leading characters but also to the destiny of these cities.

The poem's opening lines weave an inextricable thread of destruction and conflagration into this evolution, moving swiftly from the fall of Troy to Italy and "Lavinian shores" (Verg. *Aen.* 1.1–3: *Troiae qui primus ab oris / Italiam, fato profugus, Laviniaque venit / litora*) and on into Latium (*Aen.* 1.5–6: *dum condere urbem / inferretque deos Latio, genus unde Latinum*). Alba Longa briefly rises up next, before yielding in turn to Rome (*Aen.* 1.7: *Albanique patres, atque altae moenia Romae*). These lines trace Rome's rise from its roots in Asia Minor and central Italy. Yet underneath this triumphal narrative lies a history of competition and destruction. Latinus, the king who initially welcomes Aeneas into Latin territory, eventually sees his city walls set ablaze by forces allied to Aeneas's Trojans; upon seeing these flames Latinus's wife, Amata, commits suicide (*Aen.* 12.595–603).⁴ Likewise, Alba Longa, the city Aeneas's son Ascanius is destined to found, is doomed to fall during Rome's first wave of imperial expansion under Tullus Hostilius.⁵ From here, Vergil widens the scope to include Carthage (*Aen.* 1.12–13: *Urbs antiqua fuit, Tyrii tenuere coloni, / Karthago*), the emblematic example of the incinerated enemy city. These lines explicitly recall Carthage's fated fall (*Aen.* 1.22: *sic volvere Parcas*) to Trojan-descended (*Aen.* 1.19: *Troiano a sanguine*) Roman forces, renewing the cycle of destruction begun in line 1.

Thus the cities and kingdoms invoked in the proem each serve as beacon fires, so to speak, of the movement of power and civilization, pairing foundation and regeneration with assault and conflagration—and, ultimately, with collapse—for each of the cities to which Rome owes its origins.⁶ Yet the cyclical nature of such destructions invites speculation on how long it will be until Rome suffers the very fate that it has visited upon so many other cities. For Sallust, the conquest of Carthage becomes the moment from which Rome begins its decline into corruption and civil war.⁷ Seen from this perspective, Vergil's Aeneas ensures Rome's eventual collapse when he leaves Dido in order to found his new city in Italy. As Francis Newton notes, it is fitting that Aeneas's last sight of Carthage is the city's walls illuminated with reflected fire from Dido's pyre.⁸ In the final moments of Dido's life, Vergil uses a simile of the fiery destruction of her home cities—Tyre and Carthage—to offer a vision that might presage further destruction in Rome's own future.

Dido dies on a pyre built from mementos of her past—specifically, of the doomed affair with Aeneas. Vergil's simile here describes the future that her suicide now foreshadows, elaborating a proleptic relationship between the metaphorical fire of Dido's passion for Aeneas and the eventual conflagration of her person and her city:

*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.* (Verg. *Aen.* 4.666–71)

Report goes in Bacchic frenzy through the stricken city. Homes are roaring with the moaning of grief and women's ululation, heaven's burning zone 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.

The influence of *Fama* ("Report" or "Rumor"), the personified figure of popular speculation and uncontrolled narrative, suggests the destabilizing element of mob rule.⁹ Additionally, the image of the *aether* (the "upper air" of the sky's vault, conceived as a fiery layer) resounding with the crisis on earth is one that Vergil uses repeatedly.¹⁰ It expands the scope of the earthly drama to the cosmic plane, evoking the natural-philosophical doctrines connecting the animating fire of life, the *pneuma*, with the fiery sphere of the celestial realm.¹¹ In this passage, the fiery forces of personal emotions and of military destruction appear to have taken control microcosmically within the individual human actors, as well as at the broader civic level. These spheres of influence in turn are linked to the fiery boundaries of the *mundus*, which will one day erupt into general *ekpyrosis*.¹²

Moreover, the image of flames obliterating Tyre and Carthage activates a deeper historical memory, as both cities in turn were razed by charismatic conquerors: Alexander the Great and Scipio Aemilianus, respectively.¹³ Here, however, Vergil's literary image anticipates the ultimately realized (if distant) future of Dido's home cities, imparting a prophetic character to the simile. Polybius, writing in the mid-second century BCE, offers an eyewitness account of the moment when Scipio, gazing upon the smoldering ruin his army has made of Carthage, reflected on the inevitable fall of all cities.¹⁴ The Roman conqueror shed tears as he recited lines from the *Iliad*: "A day will come when sacred Troy shall perish / And Priam and his people shall be slain."¹⁵ Dido's death is closely associated with the disaster that awaits her city at the hands of invaders, much as Hector's death in the *Iliad* presages the eventual destruction of Troy.¹⁶ Both events lie beyond the temporal span of the epic's narrative; such allusions rely on the audience's broader knowledge of these cities and their fates. The complex

of historical memories activated in this simile highlights the Roman cultural concern over leaders and fire more generally.

In Augustan literature, leader figures encounter the threat of conflagration repeatedly. On the one hand, exceptionally gifted leaders can quell the flames that threaten to engulf their communities, becoming godlike suppressors of conflict and redeemers of damage done; equally, however, they can prove inadequate opponents to fire's threat, or even themselves instigate destruction. In presenting narratives and allusions associated with conflagration, Vergil operates under the pressure of a number of aesthetic and generic factors. Yet he also responds creatively to the visual and ideological cues of contemporary Rome, the *urbs* that dominated the *imperium*, indeed the very *cosmos*, as the Romans defined it. In this chapter, an initial exploration of notable incidents involving fires in Augustan Rome treats aspects of the cultural and political milieu, as well as the physical environment in which the era's authors operated. This historical framework will provide a context for a literary overview exploring a number of instantiations of the *urbs incensa* and related concepts in authors, including Horace, Livy, and Ovid. Finally, an extended reading of episodes and imagery in the *Aeneid* will analyze Vergil's use of conflagration as a ready metaphor for commemorating the conflicts of the triumviral era, as well as (in a few select instances) their resolutions; likewise, conflagration becomes a flexible and productive tool for dramatizing ongoing anxiety over Rome's political future.

Divi Filius, *Master of Disaster*

The architectural transformation of Rome formed a significant part of Augustus's legacy; urban fires, however, threatened to undo decades of work in a single day. Apart from the obvious human loss and economic impact, the ideological risk of conflagration would have been clear to a leader whose attention to symbolism and visual rhetoric created nothing less than, in Paul Zanker's words, a "new pictorial vocabulary"; Augustus and his supporters skillfully deployed and combined this vocabulary to construct the political narratives and social agendas they wished to advance.¹⁷ Fire control likewise became a significant benchmark for the new regime and its claims to power.¹⁸ Each destruction further cleared the urban landscape for redevelopment advancing the *princeps*'s 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. Recovering from conflagration and preventing further outbreaks developed into powerful societal metaphors, legitimizing the new order imposed by Augustus after decades of civil conflict and depredations to Rome's urban facade. In addressing incendiary incidents, the *princeps* also made thorough use of the opportunity to manipulate the memories these fires may have evoked of Rome's past upheavals through commonalities of site, assigned cause, or associated figures. Thus 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.

The Circus, the Curia, and Augustan Claims to Power

The inaugural year of Augustus's reign is usually taken to be 31 BCE. In September of that year, naval forces supporting Augustus (at that time, Octavian) defeated the fleets of Antony and Cleopatra, eliminating the last serious threat to his unopposed dominion over Rome's empire. In the same year, however, a fire devastated the Circus Maximus, Rome's most ancient site of public spectacle. In the Circus, elite competition and the city's maintenance of the *pax deorum* were frequently paired during games sponsored by wealthy officials for various festivals in the religious calendar. While the emotional reactions of the crowd on these occasions could be volatile, they could also be politically rewarding.¹⁹ Dio assigns blame for the conflagration to a particularly disgruntled segment of the population: freedmen angry at recent tax increases.²⁰ Thus beyond the intimations of divine disfavor, the fire of 31 also reflected the ongoing lawlessness, civil unrest, and economic instability plaguing the city in the early years of Octavian's rise to power. Despite such concerns, the restoration of the Circus afforded Rome's new ruler a golden opportunity, setting the pattern for his response to incendiary incidents for decades to come.

Plans for the monumentalization of the Circus had, in fact, begun under Julius Caesar.²¹ Regardless of the extent of Augustus's contribution, repairing the damage of 31 and completing the project begun by his adopted (and newly divinized) father created a powerful conduit for advertising his stature to the masses. From the new *pulvinar*, the imperial family surveyed events amid statues of the gods, quite as if they were themselves heavenly rulers.²² 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. In the same year, the twin to this obelisk was dedicated as the *gnomon* of the extraordinary new solar complex on the Campus Martius.²³ Evoking dynastic rule and solar worship as practiced in Egypt, these obelisks shared the same epigraphic text inscribed on their bases, further linking the two sites historically and conceptually. The obelisks commemorated the annexation of Egypt, which also reminded the public of Augustus's key role in securing Egypt's grain supply (a decisive factor in gaining and maintaining public support for any Roman *princeps*). The sheer manpower and implied authority necessary to appropriate these items from Heliopolis and transport them to Rome was an enormous feat suggestive of the conflation of *urbs* and *orbis*, as well as of a *translatio imperii* from one great empire to another. Within their settings of cosmic grandeur, Augustus's two obelisks were part of regular demonstrations of time measurement and cyclical spectacle, reinforcing the new regime's promotion of the *aureum saeculum*.²⁴ Through the presence of spectacularly Egyptianizing objects, with their great exoticism, antiquity, and solar associations, Augustus iconographically represented his control not just over civil unrest of the sort that had led to the fire in the Circus but also over Rome's newly expanded and enriched empire—and indeed over the very cosmos that ordered time.²⁵

The destruction of the Circus was implicated by synchronicity in the culminating moment of the year 31 and the battle of Actium. Within the twenty-one years from the fire in the Circus (or perhaps some thirty years from the putative plans of Julius Caesar) to the decoration of the obelisk and *spina*, the state and its attendant structures were transformed under the direction of Augustus. The *princeps* himself underwent a transformation during these years: from the threatened (and threatening) Octavian, ruthless inheritor of Caesar's bloody conflict, to the divinely appointed Augustus, institutor of lasting peace. Augustus's reconstructed Circus inscribed into the urban fabric a powerful analogue for the struggle to control Rome and its empire. His ability to control the incendiary element within the city is thus analogous to the order imposed on Rome with this new program of monumental rhetoric. The close connection between social unrest and incendiarism that evolved in the late republic, in fact, continued vigorously through the triumviral years and into the early principate; in rebuilding sites of willed destructions in monumental style, Augustus also implicitly claimed to have vanquished the social and political forces that led to the previous destruction.

Like the new Circus, the rebuilt Curia served as a reminder of past incendiary conflict; it too became embroiled in the mutually threatening and depen-

dent relationship between the leader and population. Dedicated in 29 BCE, Octavian's new Curia, as well as his Temple of Divus Julius, finally redeemed the fiery destruction wrought by rioting mourners during two funerals: Clodius's in 52 and Caesar's in 44. Moreover, more recent confrontations between Rome's population and its leadership had taken a near-catastrophic turn. In the 30s BCE, Appian reports that famine and a new set of taxes drove a mob to a frenzy in which they threatened to burn and plunder the homes of those who did not join them against the triumvirs; when Octavian went out to meet the crowd, he was met with a volley of stones that left him bloodied and might well have killed him had Antony not dragged him to safety.²⁶ Thus these dedications both reminded Rome of past instability and signaled the start of a new era in politics.

Yet in 22 BCE, rioting broke out afresh amidst a series of natural disasters and an ensuing grain shortage.²⁷ A mob surrounded the new Curia during a Senate meeting, threatening both the building and its distinguished occupants with incineration: according to Dio, the crowd demanded that Augustus be appointed dictator and "forced [the Senate] to vote this measure by threatening to burn down the building over their heads."²⁸ During the showdown of 22, Augustus may not have instigated the crowd as Clodius once had.²⁹ Nevertheless, he appears to have benefited mightily from the people's unrest, exploiting their apparently very real threats of arson and mass murder to accomplish a colossal power grab. 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.³⁰ Instead taking over the immensely influential *cura annonae* to relieve the food shortage, he distributed food and supplies at his own expense.³¹ His summation in the *Res Gestae* clearly conveys the political capital he had gained from this disturbance: "In a few days, I freed the entire city from the present fear and danger by my own expense and administration."³² Augustus thereby rescued his new Curia from suffering the fiery fate of its predecessor, signaling a definitive break with the late republic's cycle of violence. In so doing, he also assumed control over a major component of the city's day-to-day operations. During this period, Augustus may also have drawn inspiration from the fire control measures of a significant political opponent, Egnatius Rufus.

Firefighting and Social Control: Egnatius Rufus and the *Vigiles*

The importance of claiming authority over fire prevention is illustrated by the specialized efforts of Egnatius Rufus, an aedile of the 20s BCE.³³ Egnatius, by Dio's account, used his aedileship to win the favor of the public by assembling

and managing an unusually effective firefighting force, augmenting the efforts of his own slaves with hired workers. As discussed in the introduction, Crassus's private fire brigades had served both as a propaganda tool and as a method of profiteering some decades earlier; these activities may have provided Egnatius with a model. Egnatius, however, seems to have approached the enterprise with the express objective of political rather than financial gain, with notable success. According to Dio, the people reimbursed the money he spent on the fire brigades and the following year pushed through his election to a praetorship "contrary to law."³⁴ The exact date and nature of these actions is disputed.³⁵ Nevertheless, it seems clear that Egnatius demonstrated the potential of a political operation that based at least part of its claims to authority on control over urban fires. As with the better-known case of Asinius Pollio, who stole the march on Augustus in endowing Rome's first library, any gesture of public provision could easily lend itself to interpretation as a preemptive strike against the expanding influence of the *princeps*, or even as the creation of an alternative forum of public activity and elite competition.³⁶ Dio reports that Egnatius's popularity made him "so contemptuous of Augustus" that the former issued a bulletin stating that he "had handed the city over unimpaired and intact to his successor," idealizing not the Augustan vision of a newly adorned capital, but of a city that had no need of rebuilding (i.e., that had not suffered any major fires).

The vision of Rome that Egnatius advanced in his bulletin seems related in conceptual terms to Augustus's own famous claim to have "found a city of brick and left it one of marble." With Augustus and his supporters relentlessly seizing opportunities to replace damaged structures with glittering monuments to a new era, Egnatius's expressed mission to keep the city unchanged takes on a distinctly defiant tone. Regardless of the exact sequence of events, both claims evoke 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.³⁷ Perhaps unsurprisingly, Egnatius was charged with conspiracy and executed in 19 BCE. Augustus, always astute enough to learn from the example of his defeated rivals, appears to have adopted and reworked not only Egnatius's major claim to fame (the fire brigade) but also his rhetoric linking Rome's physical and political aspects. The famous "brick to marble" boast erases and replaces the value of preservation with the promise of monumental improvement. In the 20s BCE, the *princeps* also made the first steps toward addressing fire in the city, establishing a corps of six hundred state slaves to serve as a fire brigade.³⁸

Augustus's first fire services came as a temporary measure following a specific crisis, but like so many of his apparently ad hoc changes they were subsequently expanded and made permanent. These forces remained under the official control of the curule aediles for more than two decades. Yet the consolidation and organization of manpower under state funding nevertheless suggests that Augustus perceived the practical and political value of their work.³⁹ In 7 BCE, by Dio's account, a blaze that was set by the "debtor class" in expectation of imperial payouts in its aftermath rendered the Forum unsuitable for games honoring the late Agrippa.⁴⁰ This incident became the precipitating event for a second round of reforms, creating a new, more centrally controlled fire service in Rome, this time under the management of the *magistri vicorum*, a newly created class of civil servants.⁴¹

The urban reforms that Augustus carried out in 7 BCE effectively neutralized the fractious, loosely affiliated urban networks that had carried out much of the violence and arson of the late republic. These reforms expanded his administrative reach enormously, establishing fourteen official regions of the city, with a flexible number of *vici* delineated within each region.⁴² These *vici* were now uniformly managed by a set of officials drawn from the resident freedmen of the city's officially designated districts.⁴³ According to Dio, then, civil unrest led to an incendiary incident; this event in turn led directly not only to a new and greater level of control over fire prevention but also to the massive reorganization of the city's division and management in the same year. Regardless of how much (or little) we can trust Dio's sequence of causation, the reorganization both of Rome's *vici* and of the fire brigades (the precursors of the *vigiles*) reflects the *princeps*'s motivation to assert a more forceful and centralized control over the city and its inhabitants.⁴⁴ The identification of incendiary debtors as the proximate cause of such a definitive urban reorganization may seem far-fetched, yet Dio consistently associates fires in this period with debtors, the poor, and the politically disaffected.⁴⁵ This tendency reflects, if not the actual causes for each incident, then certainly the political light in which incendiary events were often viewed. Rome's well-being increasingly was seen as contingent not upon defense against external enemies, or even the will of the gods; instead the city's security was guaranteed above all by the relationship between the emperor and the urban population.

The establishment of the *vigiles* late in Augustus's reign further signaled the *princeps*'s willingness to invest seriously in providing order and security to urban life in the capital. In 6 CE, following a day on which a number of serious

fires broke out all at once,⁴⁶ Augustus put in place the *vigiles*, the first firefighting force appropriate to the scale and complexity of Rome's urban environment. Like the *magistri vicorum*, the *vigiles* were drawn exclusively from the ranks of the city's freedmen, and the improvements in societal status they enjoyed were owed directly to the *princeps*; uniquely among formerly enslaved workers, the *vigiles* could even claim quasi-military honors.⁴⁷ Working beyond the localized boundaries of the *vici*, the *vigiles* were a totalizing and regularizing entity, both demonstrating and authorizing Augustus's broad reach across the city. Their very presence, even as it preserved the effect of Augustus's urban achievements, deepened his administrative and organizational imprint on Rome.

Whether or not the *vigiles* regularly acted as a kind of police force is a disputed point, but some 3,500 uniformed troops dispersed around the city and patrolling neighborhoods would have sent a message regardless of their day-to-day activity.⁴⁸ In effect, they were a paramilitary force: they dressed in military attire, were organized into cohorts, and operated more or less permanently within the city's boundaries. Night watches, which had been instituted only in serious emergencies during the republic, became standard practice.⁴⁹ In a period when Rome no longer feared invasion by a hostile army, the *vigiles* offered a tangible reminder of the ruler's commitment to protecting Rome's population, if only from itself. In their nightly rounds, the *vigiles* served as living monuments to the ruler's granular knowledge of the city, its risks, and its needs.

Conflagration and Divinity: The *Domus Augusti*, the *Aedes Vestae*, and the *Pignora Imperii*

The clear importance that Augustus accorded fire control in his urban agenda suggests that conflagrations had a symbolic as well as a practical significance. No fires were more pointedly open to symbolic interpretation as portents than those that threatened sacred spaces, including the ruler's own home, which Augustus invested with numerous intimations of divinity. In 36 BCE, lightning struck the spot on the Palatine that Octavian had designated for his new house. This unlucky sign evokes the legendary end of Tullus Hostilius, Rome's bellicose third king. In retribution for an imperfectly accomplished sacrifice, Tullus's house was struck by lightning; Tullus and his proto-palace were reduced to ashes.⁵⁰ On the advice of *haruspices*, Augustus abandoned plans to build his home on the same land, instead dedicating it to Apollo for a new temple and

building his home adjacent to this new site of worship.⁵¹ The new Augustan architectural complex united the domestic and the divine, clearly symbolizing the ruler's close conviviality with his chosen avatar among the Olympians. Later in his reign, Augustus went on to coopt two other powerful signifiers of Rome's security, each with its own vexed history of incendiary destruction.

The *Aedes Vestae* in the Forum exhibited a notable historical susceptibility to fire. Ovid's *Fasti* (6.349–436) goes on for some hundred lines on the topic, reminding us of the temple's destruction in the Gallic sack of 390 BCE, as well as of the powerful significance of the Palladium, an effigy of Minerva housed in the *aedes*. The Palladium was believed to have been rescued from the flames of Troy and brought to Italy by Aeneas; as discussed in the introduction, this was a legend that Caesar had promoted on his coinage in 47–46 BCE. The Palladium counted as one of Rome's chief *pignora imperii*, sacred tokens of Roman rule, and it was kept in the temple along with other hallowed items that likewise symbolized Rome's security and continuity with the distant past.⁵² Within the temple burned the sacred fire that represented the eternal security of the Roman state. Yet the fire itself, along with the other objects that guaranteed Rome's future, was repeatedly threatened with obliteration in urban conflagration. According to legend, when the temple caught fire in 241 BCE Caecilius Metellus, the Pontifex Maximus, rescued the Palladium at the cost of his eyesight.⁵³ In more recent history, incendiary battles in the Forum between Dolabella's Caesarian faction and that of Trebellius had similarly occasioned the rescue of the sacred objects in 47 BCE. In 14 BCE, a fire that started in the Basilica Julia spread through the Forum until it again menaced the *Aedes Vestae*.⁵⁴ While damage from this fire occasioned even more monumental rebuilding on the part of Augustus and his supporters, Vesta's temple evidently survived.⁵⁵ According to Dio, however, the threat of destruction had nevertheless prompted yet another evacuation of the sacred objects—in a repetition not only of Aeneas's legendary rescue but of more recent events involving signal moments in Rome's leadership as well.

Upon assuming the role of Pontifex Maximus in 12 BCE, Augustus transferred the pontifical residence from the *Domus Publica* to his own house on the Palatine; he then inaugurated a secondary shrine to Vesta within his Palatine residence and in all likelihood transferred the *aeterni ignes* of Vesta herself in the process.⁵⁶ In transferring Vesta's cult to his home, Augustus again symbolically “rescued” Rome's future security, effectively duplicating and even, as Diana Kleiner and Bridget Buxton point out, “partially usurping the state cult

of the *pignus Troiae*.”⁵⁷ As Geraldine Herbert-Brown comments, Ovid’s reference to the image of the flames, now controlled by Augustus, as “united pledges of empire” (*Fast.* 3.421–22: *imperii pignora iuncta*) conveys the notion that “the eternal flame, the Palladium, and Augustus form a very tight-knit trinity.”⁵⁸ This move also conflated the hearth of the state with Augustus’s own family hearth, further contributing to the aura of divinity that he cultivated in his Palatine residence. At the close of the fourth book of his *Fasti*, Ovid remarks that three gods now have their residence under Augustus’s roof: Vesta, Apollo, and Augustus himself.⁵⁹

Like Vesta’s cult, the Sibylline texts were important guarantors of Rome’s destiny and historically had suffered even more catastrophically from fire.⁶⁰ The oracles and the temple are further linked by a purported prophecy in the former that linked the leadership of the world with descent from Troy through the preservation and possession of the Trojan *sacra*.⁶¹ According to Suetonius, Augustus authorized a collection of all Rome’s oracular texts, taking up and destroying (presumably by fire) other copies of Greek and Latin prophetic verse.⁶² He kept only the Sibylline books, but not without editing even this collection (*Suet. Aug.* 31). The newly edited Sibylline text was deposited under the base of the statue of Apollo in his temple on the Palatine, and after that time, according to Tacitus, it was unlawful for private citizens to possess oracles.⁶³ Arguably, Augustus’s power was such by this date that he needed little pretext to effect such sweeping changes to the objects, places, and rituals that had long stood as talismanic symbols of Rome’s safety. Nevertheless, the Forum fire in 14 BCE, as well as one that burned the ancient Hut of Romulus in 12 BCE, perhaps helped to elevate the saliency of these risks, strengthening Augustus’s authority in intervening to “protect” them from further depredations. Once again, as with the imperial *pulvinar* in the Circus Maximus and his Apollo/Domus complex, Augustus coopted a major site of worship and public ritual into his own household and family; and once again, fire (or the threat of it) seems to have played a precipitating role in this change.

The risks of such consolidation might have become apparent when a blaze in 3 CE destroyed most of the *princeps*’s house, yet Augustus was able to translate even this misfortune into a major public relations coup.⁶⁴ Both Dio and Suetonius emphasize that the *princeps*’s house was rebuilt with funds drawn entirely from public donation.⁶⁵ Augustus’s reluctance to receive more than a minimal sum from any single donor implies that an enormous number of donations poured in from individual subjects around the empire. Converting

even this potentially grave omen to his benefit, Augustus's reconstructed *domus* bound *princeps* and *populus*, as well as *urbs* and *imperium*, into a reciprocal relationship of new and greater proportions. Augustus saw to it that his commitment to Rome's ongoing safety found expression not only his own Palatine complex but also in smaller dedications all over the city.

Stata Mater and the Rebranding of Divinity

Stata Mater was 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.⁶⁶ Documentation is sparse, but nevertheless we know that she was propitiated in Italy and in the provinces, as well as at Rome;⁶⁷ that her cult was celebrated by the plebs in various districts; and that the worship was directed by freedmen and slaves. Her most common appellation is Stata Mater, but the abbreviated version *Stata* is also attested. *Stata* appears to be derived from *sistere*: "to stop" or "stand still."⁶⁸ Jupiter was worshiped with a related title, Jupiter Stator, at the spot in the Forum where according to legend Romulus and his army of Romans held off the attacking Sabines.⁶⁹ Similarly, Stata Mater appears to have been venerated at sites where the progress of a fire had been checked. The functional name suggests she belongs to the category of abstract tutelary deities that ward off specific destructive forces, such as Lua Mater (primarily an anti-rust deity) or Robigo (anti-mildew). Alternately, we might find in Stata Mater a feminine subsidiary counterpart to Vulcan, the chief fire god; she may have constituted a variation on Maia Volcani, an earth mother worshiped as part of Vulcan's cult.⁷⁰ Stata Mater may have preceded Vesta in symbolizing the hearth fire, constantly attended and carefully controlled.⁷¹

Putative origins aside, Stata Mater apparently once had a shrine with a statue in the Forum; this shrine seems likely to have been near the Vulcanal, a sacred precinct of Vulcan dating to the earliest phases of the Forum.⁷² Festus, however, mentions this shrine in the past tense, and a number of republican inscriptions demonstrate that at some point the worship shifted to individual *vici*.⁷³ It seems probable that at the end of the republic her propitiation was assigned to the *vicomagistri*.⁷⁴ Inscriptions associated with dedications to Stata Mater often name local magistrates as their sponsors; they appear to mark instances in which individual neighborhoods succeeded in suppressing fires, or at least in preventing them from spreading into their own districts.⁷⁵ Frequently

in these inscriptions, Stata Mater is paired with Volcanus Quietus, her divine “superior,” who relents and calms his fires after suitable mollification.⁷⁶ Stata Mater also appears to have lent her name to two urban *vici*: the so-called Vicus Statae Matris on the Caelian Hill, and the Vicus Statae Siccianae in Regio XIV.⁷⁷

From the time of Augustus onward, however, the dedications are to Stata Mater *Augusta*, staking the *princeps*’s claim on even these small-scale successes.⁷⁸ Semantically, “Stata Mater Augusta” unpacks as, more or less, “the power to stop fires—Augustus’s power,” a message neatly summed up, monumentalized, and distributed throughout the city on a presumably ever-growing number of local dedications. 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. Significantly, one inscription dateable to this period, which comes from Regio IV, is from the *magistri vici Sandaliari* to the goddess Stata Fortuna Aug(usta).⁷⁹ This text is the first to connect Stata Mater, an obscure specialist in the suppression of fires, with Fortuna, almighty mistress of chance: they unite as a single divine figure bearing the same epithet: Augusta.⁸⁰ As Mauricio Pastor points out, within the historical moment of this dedication, fire was the daily risk that held the local population’s future in the balance; Fortuna could be imagined as playing an important role in starting fires, as well as in putting them out.⁸¹ Pairing the two goddesses together bespeaks a wish to elevate the matter of firefighting on the list of divine priorities, perhaps by harnessing the power of a divinity elsewhere connected with Augustus’s own charismatic cult.⁸² In addition to acknowledging Augustus’s control over local fires and local cults, this dedication suggests an interest in connecting the city’s everyday safety with the high-level cosmic forces that Augustus was actively promoting elsewhere as part of his imperial persona.

Ultimately, Augustus’s provision of firefighting forces around the city, no less than the dedications to Stata Mater that now bore his personal imprimatur, served as daily reminders to Rome’s residents of the two essential components of fire-related propaganda: first, that urban residents were at constant risk of destruction from forces beyond their control; and second, that their ruler was intimately involved with reducing, if not in eradicating, that risk. Likewise, Augustus’s shrine to Vesta on the Palatine Hill seems inspired by a wish to bring the potent (and incendiary) memories that her cult evoked under his control. The transfer of the Sibylline books to his Palatine complex demonstrates that

this pattern extended not just to cult activity but to written texts imbued with the potential to reveal (and thus, in a certain sense, to determine) Rome's future course. In this way, Augustus's efforts to rebuild a city diminished by decades of neglected infrastructure and civil conflict assumed the character of a divinely appointed cosmic reorganization, introducing an age of civic, spiritual, and literary renewal; his gestures toward fire control were part and parcel of this endeavor. Likewise, the era's literary authors used the tropes of destruction and renewal to create a potent yet mediated context for examining the risks, uncertainties, and rewards of life at Rome under the new regime.

Deceptive Flames beneath the Ash: Urban Disaster and Imperiled Histories

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. Urban conflagration in turn was as much an expression of human error and inevitable destruction as it was a weapon of uncontrolled political opposition. Thus fire in this period became a trope with the potential to signify current cultural anxieties about the role of one-man leadership in a society still recovering from the civil strife wrought by a series of competing claimants to power. Accordingly, authors of the period often turned to metaphors, figures, and fictional narratives to address politically risky topics.⁸³ This very phenomenon resulted in a shift in the value of a range of metaphorical and literary associations of fire. Conflagration thus took on a new ideological charge, which authors exploited in order to comment on the nature of imperial rule. Many of the images and narratives employed by Horace, Vergil, Livy, Ovid, and their successors had precedents in Greco-Roman literature. Here, however, I focus on the new charge of meaning these selections gained in light of the city's recent history. To the Romans of the early imperial period, the traces of societal catastrophe and political collapse were still fresh. The risks of approaching this past too directly were considerable; as I will show, authors of the period often allude to this danger with their appeals to conflagration.

Ovid plays upon a rich literary tradition celebrating Rome's phoenix-like resurgence in the *Fasti* when Carmentis, newly arrived in Latium, prophesies a vision of Rome rising anew from the ashes of destruction:

*victa tamen vinces eversa que, Troia, resurges,
 obruet hostiles ista ruina domos.
 urite victrices Neptunia Pergama flammae;
 num minus hic toto est altior orbe cinis?* (Ov. *Fast.* 1.523–26)

Though conquered and overthrown, Troy, you will yet rise again and you will conquer! That destruction overwhelms enemy homes. Torch Neptune's Troy, you victorious flames; surely this ash doesn't tower any less over the whole world?

These lines allude both to Propertius (at 4.1.87, Cassandra prophesies: *dicam: Troia cades, et Troica Roma resurges*, "I will say: Troy, you will fall, and you will rise again as Trojan Rome") and to Vergil (before Ovid, only the *Aeneid* applies (*e*)*verto* as a verb and *Neptunia* as a name for Troy in the context of its destruction); more generally, the image of a plant growing back after its limbs are damaged appears repeatedly in texts that celebrate Rome's ability to come back time and again from disaster.⁸⁴ Vergil—albeit in a general agricultural context rather than an explicitly Roman one, whether urban or political—also promotes the possible benefits of fire, reminding readers that fire can purify blighted earth and clear out useless stubble (G. 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 strength (G. 1.86: *occultas viris*); "through fire," the text continues, "every defect bakes away and useless fluid sweats out," *omne per ignem / excoquitur vitium atque exsudat inutilis umor* (G. 1.87–88).⁸⁵ These lines all come from densely allusive contexts that complicate and perhaps even undermine the apparently triumphant message of their imagery. Nevertheless, they are broadly illustrative of the impulse to valorize conflagration as a productive metaphor for improving a world suffering from destruction or decline.

Livy's famous image of the city of Rome following the semilegendary Gallic sack of 390 BCE further foregrounds the motifs of postcatastrophic urban renewal and spiritual revival. The city's condition after the event 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 insists that out of this destruction there may yet spring a more definite and confident form of historical writing; thus Roman literature seems to parallel the city's physical revival in the wake of the devastation: *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," Liv. 6.13). Rome, as well as its history, grows back with renewed vigor, like a plant that flourishes all the more for having been cut.⁸⁶ Yet while Livy promoted his publication as a new efflorescence of historiography, other forms of commemoration and historical memory began to wither under the threat of imperial retaliation against the "wrong" kind of history. Augustus's removal of the Sibylline books to Apollo's shrine on the Palatine suggests more than a straightforward interest in safeguarding and preserving these sacred remnants of past conflagration. It conforms with a much wider strategy of controlling written texts containing messages about Rome's past and future alike.⁸⁷ Timagenes of Alexandria provides one of the earliest illustrations of the imperial suppression of a historical voice deemed unflattering to the *princeps*.

Timagenes came to Rome as an enslaved war captive around 55 BCE and later gained prominence under the patronage of Augustus and Asinius Pollio.⁸⁸ Though we cannot precisely date the sequence of events, both Senecas write of Timagenes's penchant for bitter quips that risked offending the powerful, and both recall how Timagenes was barred from the imperial residence after falling out with Augustus.⁸⁹ This form of social exclusion in Rome had profound political consequences for its targets.⁹⁰ Coming from the emperor, it was tantamount to an act of censorship. As Seneca the Elder has it, Timagenes burned his works as a reprisal for the imperial interdiction;⁹¹ yet this gesture might also have been viewed as an attempt at conciliation or self-censorship, on the model of Ovid's alleged destruction of poetry deemed offensive (or perhaps merely artistically inadequate) at the time of his exile.⁹² Either way, Timagenes's work was destroyed as an indirect result of his contrarian stance. This fire anticipated the compulsory destructions that awaited the work of Timagenes's intellectual successors under later emperors. Timagenes also appears to have bitterly inverted the rhetoric of triumphant recovery promoted by other Augustan authors, claiming that "the only thing that upset him [Timagenes] when conflagrations occurred in Rome was his knowledge that better things would arise than those which had burned."⁹³ In sum, Timagenes's story suggests how even at this early stage the historical record was becoming subject to distortion of various kinds under the overwhelming influence of the emperor's supreme authority.⁹⁴ It also suggests that fire represented more than just an instrument of urban warfare or

political violence; equally, it could be viewed as a tool for suppressing subversive speech or erasing inconvenient history.

Timagenes, upon expulsion from the court, went to live with the noted literary authority Asinius Pollio, a figure well known for several anecdotes that bespeak an underlying concern with the *princeps's* ever-growing capacity to promote or suppress the voices that would be heard in Rome's political, literary, and historical spaces. Like his guest Timagenes, Pollio also wrote a historical account of a volatile subject.⁹⁵ Pollio's choice to write a history of Rome's recent civil wars provokes the following comment from Horace:

*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
suppositos cineri doloso.* (Hor. *Carm.* 2.1.1–8)

[You] deal with the civil disturbance starting with Metellus's 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 dicey-ness, and you tread over fires set beneath deceptive ash.

These lines explicitly equate Rome's recent political history with a conflagration that has just (and in fact not quite) died down.⁹⁶ 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.⁹⁷ 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.⁹⁸ This gesture, like the similar ceremony of leaping over bonfires performed annually at the Parilia, seems to have dual cathartic and apotropaic purposes.⁹⁹ In the most optimistic reading, Horace perhaps expresses hope that Pollio's written record of Rome's recent conflict will settle the phantoms of civil unrest, offering hope for the future through a con-

frontation of the traumatic past. More obviously, however, the image equates writing history with the risk of being “burned,” an early suggestion of the threat of reprisal that would, in fact, jeopardize the process of recording Rome’s recent history in years to come.

Finally, authors writing under Augustus’s auspices continued to point out the actual risks of fire faced by residents of the city, as well as to commemorate sites devastated by conflagration. Ovid’s discussion of Vesta’s susceptibility to fire continues for some 180 lines, finally arriving at the Pontifex Maximus Caecilius Metellus’s heroic actions 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 piae;
attonitae flebant demisso crine ministrae:
abstulerat vires corporis ipse timor.* (Ov. *Fast.* 6.437–42)

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

Ovid brings out the paradoxical nature of fire’s positive and negative connotations through polyptoton (439: *ignibus ignes*; 440: *flammae flamma*), and Caecilius Metellus’s heroism is equally ambiguous. Ovid’s audience could be expected to pair this legendary rescue with memories of the temple’s more recent evacuation of 47 BCE, as well as the outbreak of 14 BCE, which had again occasioned a precautionary removal of the sacred items. As I suggested earlier, these events may have provided the *princeps* with a pretext for relocating the Vestal shrine to his home on the Palatine. The lines that conclude the Metellus episode read as an oblique nod to this event: *factum dea rapta probavit / pontificisque sui munere tuta fuit* (“The goddess whom he carried off approved the deed and was saved by the service of her pontiff,” Ov. *Fast.* 6.453–54). Provocatively, Ovid’s narrator here characterizes the rescue of 241 BCE as a virtual abduction by the Pontifex Maximus.¹⁰⁰ This charge in turn seems suggestively close to accusations that Augustus might have faced when he transferred Vesta’s

worship to his home on the Palatine.¹⁰¹ In the praise of Augustus that follows, Ovid's narrator nods at the new shrine to Vesta on the Palatine: *nunc bene luctis sacrae sub Caesare flammae; / ignis in Iliacis nunc erit estque focus* ("Now you shine brightly under Caesar's control, sacred flames; / The fire now will be, and is, on Ilian hearths," *Fast.* 6.455–56). These lines construct an image of the ruler's unchallenged control over the Vestal flames. They also neatly delineate the close association between Rome's roots in Troy (*Iliacis* . . . *focus*) and the city's cosmic destiny under Augustus's leadership (*sub Caesare*). Yet the preceding narrative of Vesta and her temple has vividly advanced the city's troubling history of political instability, contested leadership, and susceptibility to destruction.

Likewise, these same themes were inextricably linked to the *princeps*'s self-representation in the city: orbiting around the *spina* of the new Circus; marching alongside the *vigiles* in streets of the newly monumentalized city; and silently proclaiming themselves in perpetuity with every new dedication to Stata Mater Augusta. In manipulating narrative strands surrounding Rome's history of conflict and conflagration, Ovid comments on the *princeps*'s own capacity to create striking images that convey their own truths.¹⁰² Crafting irresistible analogies between these ancient events and more contemporary Roman concerns, the poet suggests both the *princeps*'s program of associating the city's ancient symbols of security ever more closely with himself and Rome's persistent vulnerability to conflagration (despite the *princeps*'s best efforts). Similarly, Horace and Livy convey the risks both of recording history and of losing it in terms associated with fire, even as political realities made book-burning an inviting metaphor for the *princeps*'s increasing capacity to remake (or unmake) Rome to suit his own agenda.

Vergil would not live to see many of the changes chronicled in the later Augustan texts discussed here; when Augustus dedicated the twin obelisks from Heliopolis in 10 BCE, Vergil had been dead for nearly a decade. It is not necessary, however, to insist on specific references to these events to suggest that both Augustus's interventions in Rome's urban fabric and these later texts address many of the ideological issues most salient in the Vergil's work. As the next section demonstrates, Vergil shows similar forces competing for primacy in the epic space inhabited by his divine and human figures. Vergil displays a keen awareness of the inherent affinity of some materials for conflagration, 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.

And Now Torches Fly: Vergil's Aeneid and Rome's Incendiary History

In response to the volatility of Rome's recent history, Vergil devised a dynamic yet flexible mode of expression for filtering the concerns of contemporary Rome through the lenses of the legendary past, remote locations, or oblique topics. In Vergil's work, a number of literary devices so prevalent as to approach cliché become newly charged thematic tools that he uses to evoke history, rhetoric, and statecraft as well as ancient poetic, dramatic, and philosophical models.¹⁰³ In the course of the *Aeneid*, Vergil returns repeatedly to the image of a city aflame, as well as to the image of leaders and populations "inflamed" to violent, often self-destructive action.¹⁰⁴ These passages indicate the powerful hold of this image over the Roman imaginary, pointing toward the roots of epic in the classic narrative of Troy's destruction. In a few crucial instances, however, Vergil hints that certain uniquely blessed figures are capable not just of escaping urban conflagration but of subduing and mastering fire's destructive power. The *Aeneid*'s initial simile signals Vergil's ambition to forge old texts, topoi, and images into a new vision of Roman politics and poetics. It also suggests that the existential threat that once engulfed Troy and Carthage alike is alive and well in Rome, burning in the hands of an incendiary mob.

This simile features an anachronistic importation from the Roman political sphere, here used to dramatize the imperiled state of Aeneas and his fleet. As has often been remarked, in these lines Vergil stakes a definitive claim for his mythic narrative's relevance to contemporary events at Rome; simultaneously, he establishes the polarity of two of the *Aeneid*'s most thematically significant concepts: *pietas*, the defining virtue by which Aeneas is primarily distinguished, and *furor*, the irrational violence that threatens to overwhelm his progress toward a new state.¹⁰⁵ The beleaguered Trojans risk obliteration yet again as their fleet swirls in a storm sent by Juno, the relentless adversary of their progress toward a refounding in Italy. When Neptune appears and summarily dismisses the winds causing the storm, Vergil likens him to a statesman, respected for his personal prestige, who subdues a seditious mob assembled with stones and firebrands at the ready:

*levat ipse tridenti;
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 volgus,
 iamque faces et saxa volant—furor arma ministrat;
 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
 flectit equos, curruque volans dat lora secundo.* (Verg. *Aen.* 1.145–56)

[T]he master lifts [ships] with his trident, opens up huge sandbars, and calms the sea's surface, and then skims along the top of the waves in his light vehicle. And just as when (so often amongst a great people) civil strife emerges: the lowly crowd is running wild with opinion, and now torches and stones are flying (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 stand with ears pricked up; he guides their opinions with his statement, and he subdues their hearts. Just so did the whole roar of the sea subside; afterwards, the father, gazing across the surface of the waters and conveyed across the open sky, wheeled his horses and gave free reins to his obedient chariot.

In an elegant Empedoclean parallelism, the air and water of the storm find their counterparts in the fire and stone of the mob's weapons;¹⁰⁶ Juno's wrath, the precipitating power behind the storm, is channeled into the popular unrest (*seditio*) that motivates the mob to action. Just as the simile attending Dido's death activates the historical memory of Carthage's destruction, the *ignobile volgus* of this simile elicits memories of urban political disturbance and mob violence that had recently threatened to destroy Rome during the collapse of the republic and the ensuing decades of triumviral conflict.

Fears of rioting mobs and politically motivated arson were still a part of current discourse in the years of the epic's composition, as the disturbances of 31 and 22 BCE suggest. Thus for Vergil's contemporary audience, political incendiarism was not an especially distant memory; nor was the city ever truly immune to destruction from within. Vergil's imagery here evokes a specific set of memories, even as it presents a perennial source of concern to Rome's population. Roman society was born out of Troy's flames and propelled to greatness by the fiery destruction of rival cities around the Mediterranean; yet in this

simile, a great people (*magno . . . populo*) frequently (*saepe*) risks incineration at its own hands. Fire, an element always at hand, an essential of human existence, is all too easily weaponized against the state: *furor arma ministrat* (*Aen.* 1.150). The worst-case conclusion to such a conflict is a massive conflagration, destroying the very civic environment over which the contention began. Moreover, Neptune's appearance here functions as a sequel or closure to a highly ideologically charged simile from Vergil's own literary history.

At the end of the first book of the *Georgics*, the key moment of transition between books replicates and amplifies the uncertain atmosphere of political instability addressed in the text. In simile, the narrator likens 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
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.* (Verg. *G.* 1.509–14)

The Euphrates is mobilizing from one side, from the other, Germany; neighboring cities, the compacts between them broken, are bringing war; faithless Mars lays waste across the globe, just like the times when the chariots dive out of the gate, they speed up lap by lap, 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.

Vergil deploys a charioteer image in *Georgics* 1 to complement an allusion to Caesar's death at the height of his power, as well as a prayer fraught with anxiety over the newly empowered Octavian's still-precarious bid to restore order. This simile shares several important factors with the passage from *Aeneid* 1: the reference to leadership and elite-sponsored or heroic competition inherent in almost any chariot image from Homer and Pindar onward;¹⁰⁷ the potentially calamitous societal outcome; and the sense of frenzied threat as the uncontrolled horses bound around the track, much as torches and rocks fly in the statesman simile. Finally, the unusually personified nature of the chariot in the *Georgics*, refusing to listen to (or obey: *neque audit*) the commands of its master, finds reflection in the rather equine characterization of the mob attending the states-

man (*arrectis . . . auribus adstant*) in the *Aeneid*. The collocation of civic disaster and chariot racing in the final lines of *Georgics* 1 may have evoked not only the global conflict that gripped the empire but also the more localized outbreaks of violence at Rome that often led to destructive fires. In *Aeneid* 1's statesman simile, the threat of fiery destruction comes to the foreground as an imminent catastrophe; the possibility is instantly evoked in the reader's mind, yet just as swiftly is it averted by the well-timed intervention of a leader. Neptune's capable management of his horses suggests that this simile offers us a vision of a leader capable of controlling not only Rome's volatile politics but even the elements themselves. In both similes, Vergil suggests a concatenation between and among the potent factors of charismatic leadership, divine control of both physical elements and earthly events, and a restive population.

Moreover, Vergil's charioteer simile in *Georgics* 1 incorporates a sequence of cosmic and solar references within these lines, suggesting a further potential association between and among unstable leaders, failed charioteers, and the mythical fate of Phaethon.¹⁰⁸ The chariot simile follows a list of portents that accompanied the death of Caesar, and it is this catalogue of unnatural horrors that initiates the disastrous outbreak of civil war (G. 1.489–92) that closes the first book of the *Georgics*. At G. 1.466–68 the sun hides his head in mourning in a gesture that evokes both an expected response to the loss of a loved one and the solar eclipses recorded at the time of Caesar's assassination.¹⁰⁹

*Ille etiam exstincto miseratus Caesare Romam
cum caput obscura nitidum ferrugine textit
inpiaque aeternam timuerunt saecula noctem.* (Verg. G. 1.466–68)

[The sun] pitied Rome when Caesar was snuffed out, when he hid his shining face in gloomy darkness, and a faithless age feared endless night.

Caesar himself, "extinguished" (*exstincto . . . Caesare*, G. 1.466) or "eclipsed" by death, is thus subtly associated with the fate of Phaethon: inflamed, then extinguished. Yet there are also hints that Caesar is to be identified with the veiled sun: as Suetonius tells us, the dying Caesar covered his head with a fold of his toga at the end of the assassins' attack.¹¹⁰ Thus Octavian, Caesar's heir, succeeds him in the Phaethon role. Much like Phaethon, this young contender advertised himself as the "son of a god."¹¹¹

Finally, the list of portents also includes the violent overflow of the Eridanus (Po).

*proluit insano contorquens vertice silvas
fluviorum rex Eridanus camposque per omnis
cum stabulis armenta tulit.* (Verg. *G.* 1.481–83)

The Po, king of rivers, washed away forests, twisting them in his crazed swell, and he carried off cattle along with their shelters across the fields.

The literary tradition credits the Eridanus River with finally extinguishing Phaethon's chariot as he falls to earth.¹¹² Phaethon is perhaps a natural narrative to reference in connection with any time of trouble; furthermore, as Damien Nelis notes, the allusive presence of Phaethon "easily lends itself to metapoetic readings concerning generic boundaries," a major preoccupation of the *Georgics* as a whole.¹¹³ Yet given the political circumstances of the second triumviral period and the still-shaky recovery of the 20s BCE, unusual astral occurrences attending Caesar's death may have invested the myth with new meaning.

While Vergil does not specifically discuss comets here, he does bring the cosmic realm into the picture with the allusion to the obscured light of the sun; such phenomena had a traditional association with Phaethon and were often taken as dire portents. In particular, the meaning of the comet(s) that appeared after Caesar's death was later discussed as a harbinger of the grisly conflicts that his assassination reawakened.¹¹⁴ These phenomena—combined with early doubts as to the capabilities of Caesar's young successor and Octavian's own claims to divine parentage—may well have conspired to portray him as a Phaethon figure.¹¹⁵ By implication, fiery destruction emerges as the near-inevitable outcome of the race for hegemony in which Octavian was engaged as Vergil composed the *Georgics*.

Returning to the statesman simile from *Aeneid* 1, it becomes apparent that this simile and the charioteer image from *Georgics* 1 present a kind of intertextual diptych, two snapshots of Rome's political landscape from temporally distinct perspectives. Neptune's decisive settling of the crisis at sea, no less than his unquestioned control over his chariot, suggests that the political chaos so memorably chronicled in *Georgics* 1 has finally met its match. This poetic doubling creates the sense that worlds are colliding—and that the realms of politics and poetics, simile and narrative, and past and present are inextricably linked. In this way, then, the *Aeneid's* opening simile signals Vergil's larger figurative and metapoetic agenda. Just as events, metaphors, and images have migrated from the world of the *Georgics* to that of the *Aeneid*, within the *Aeneid* itself

they continue to leap from history to simile to narrative and back again. By implication, the poet invites readers to compare the events he narrates to the larger world they inhabit. Within this program, fire imagery plays a dualistic role, symbolizing not only conflict and violence but (in the right hands) power and renewal as well.

The fire imagery in *Aeneid* Book 2, in relation to the closely associated motif of the serpent, is the subject of a classic 1950 study by Bernard Knox; this influential reading nevertheless leaves a few points open for further thought, which I will briefly outline before discussing a few key examples.¹¹⁶ Just as the proem's sequence of cities destroyed by fire suggests the transfer of power from one people to the next, certain qualities of fire and fire imagery appear in Book 2, the chronological period from which Aeneas's narrative departs, and are elaborated in later books. The first important pattern recurs throughout the epic: metaphorical terms for fire represent a form of destructive energy, often appearing to leap from one character or group to another in times of crisis. Eventually, the metaphor is realized as an actual conflagration, often after a further mediating step of a dream or portent.¹¹⁷ The second, related point is that this narrative, presented through the lens of Aeneas's own recollection, portrays a character still hampered by incorrect thinking and an apparent inability (or unwillingness) to comprehend fully the events that in his telling contributed to Troy's downfall. Aeneas consistently reports negative reactions to fire and fire-related omens, characterizing the narrative's most misguided and violent figures (including himself) in incendiary language; he displays no awareness of the potential for fire or for "fiery" emotions to lead to any positive outcome. Nevertheless, Vergil signals between the lines (so to speak) of Aeneas's narration that this imagery is far more complex and promising than Aeneas himself appears to recognize.

The notion of fire as a weapon in Book 2 is first introduced in the Trojans' reaction to finding the massive horse on the beach apparently deserted by the Greeks. Some Trojans suspect danger and argue that it should be burned (Verg. *Aen.* 2.35: *iubent subiectisque urere flammis*) or otherwise destroyed. At this point, fire is only a suggestion—and only one of several ways that violence might be enacted. Disagreement over the horse's meaning leads to division and strife with a population previously united against a common enemy (*Aen.* 2.39: *scinditur incertum studia in contraria vulgus*). Then Laocoön, described as "burning" (*Aen.* 2.41: *ardens*), rushes in to warn the crowd about the threat presented by the Greeks' "gift" and is soon devoured, along with his sons, by

serpents with fiery, blood-filled eyes (*Aen.* 2.210: *ardentisque oculos suffecti sanguine et igni*). After the lying speech of Sinon, the Trojans “burn” to learn the real (that is, false) significance of the horse (*Aen.* 2.105: *tum vero ardemus scitari et quaerere causas*). In an ironic prolepsis that looks back (or ahead) to the statesman simile from Book 1, this crowd’s burning excitement ultimately leads to their city’s conflagration.¹¹⁸

Aeneas’s own narration consistently describes not just the captured city but the human struggles within it in incendiary language. The irrational and self-destructive impulse that leads the Trojan crowd to trust Sinon and to bring the horse into their city finds its ultimate expression in the city’s literal destruction by fire, as Sinon exults in his victory and stirs the flames (*Aen.* 2.329–30). Aeneas characterizes his own initial response to this catastrophe in equally incendiary terms suggestive of senseless violence. His mind burns (*Aen.* 2.316: *ardent animi*) to take up arms and fight alongside his comrades; the Trojan troops whom he joins are also “burning for battle” (*Aen.* 2.347: *ardere in proelia*). Fired by this mad impulse, Aeneas seeks glorious death in futile fighting (*Aen.* 2.317, 353). Likewise, the narrative’s prime embodiment of pure, remorseless violence is Achilles’s son Neoptolemus, here primarily referred to as Pyrrhus (“flame-colored, red-haired”).¹¹⁹ Aeneas describes Pyrrhus, too, as “burning” (*Aen.* 2.529: *ardens*) in his eagerness to deal a death blow to Priam’s son Polites, introducing the book’s crowning paroxysm of bloodshed as Pyrrhus first slaughters Polites in front of his elderly parents and then kills Priam himself.¹²⁰ Despite the consistently destructive energy with which Aeneas imbues himself and others when he signals their association with fire, there are hints in the narrative that fire has a more positive role to play in the epic overall.

In the dream sequence immediately preceding Troy’s destruction, Hector’s ghost alerts Aeneas to Troy’s imminent fall. The ghost then offers Aeneas the tokens of empire—fillets, great Vesta, and the undying fire (*Aen.* 2.296–97: *vitae Vestamque potentem / aeternumque adytis effert penetralibus ignem*)—and urges him to seek the walls in which he will at last (*denique*) establish their new cult. In his own telling, Aeneas gives no immediate sign of heeding these warnings upon waking, even though the first person he meets is Apollo’s priest Panthus, who is himself carrying sacred relics off as he flees the city.¹²¹ Yet the flame transferred to Aeneas’s care by Hector’s ghost represents not destruction, violence, and madness (*furor*) but endurance, tradition, and reverence (*pietas*).¹²² These qualities, though Aeneas himself may not yet acknowledge it, become the exceptional merits through which he prevails as a leader—not by avoiding

flames or the conflict they metonymically represent but by embracing these qualities while carefully limiting and managing their scope.

When Aeneas awakens from his dream and climbs to his rooftop, he discovers Troy already ablaze; thus the imagery that suffuses the preceding narrative is actualized. His neighbors' houses are already consumed in a towering fire (*Volcano superante*) and even the waters of Cape Sigeum appear aflame with the reflected light of blaze (*Aen.* 2.312: *igni . . . relucens*).¹²³ This spectacle prompts Aeneas to compare himself in a simile (*Aen.* 2.304–8) to a shepherd caught off guard (*inscius . . . pastor*) by an approaching disaster. Aeneas offers two possible comparisons for this catastrophe: either a crop fire driven by raging winds (*in segetem veluti cum flamma furentibus Austris / incidit*) or a torrential mountain flood (*rapidus montano flumine torrens*). The fire is propelled by winds like those that Aeolus sends to attack the Trojan fleet in *Aeneid* 1 (cf. *furentibus Austris*, *Aen.* 1.51); Aeneas's image of the flood is also highly reminiscent of Vergil's own recollection of the overflowing Po in *Georgics* 1 (*G.* 1.481–83, discussed earlier).¹²⁴ The image of the shepherd as an analogue for a leader of men is as old as the *Iliad*, and on one level this simile foreshadows Aeneas's future role as a leader and protector of the Trojan survivors; after the devastating loss he witnesses here, he is perhaps all the more determined to lead survivors to safety.¹²⁵ Yet the images of the shepherd as the naive target of impending threat (e.g., the herdsmen about to be ambushed on the Shield of Achilles, *Il.* 18.525) or as the barbaric outsider who attacks unsuspecting travelers (e.g., Polyphemus in *Od.* 9.360–412) are just as old and arguably more influential in shaping the Roman literary trope of the *pastor*. Certainly in Vergil's world shepherds often carry connotations of risk.¹²⁶ An emblematic simile in the *Georgics* compares a nomadic herdsman to a Roman soldier, suggesting that shepherds can evoke military power, or perhaps violent political action more generally (*G.* 3.339–48).¹²⁷ Aeneas reports that it was shepherds, in fact, who found and brought Sinon to the crowd of Trojans gathered around the horse (*Aen.* 2.57–58). At several other key junctures in the epic to be explored shortly, shepherds are portrayed as directly or indirectly responsible for destroying (or threatening to destroy) landscapes—and the communities within them—with various forms of fire. Here, when he snaps out of the shock that occasions the *pastor* simile, Aeneas too takes up arms and springs to violent (if ultimately futile) action.

After Aeneas finally gives up fighting, it is again a fire-related portent that offers him guidance toward his true path. As Aeneas's family quarrels about

whether they should, as Aeneas's father Anchises asks, leave the old man behind to die, Aeneas's son Ascanius/Iulus suddenly manifests an extraordinary portent (*Aen.* 2.680: *mirabile monstrum*).¹²⁸ Aeneas describes the sight:

*namque manus inter maestorumque ora parentum
ecce levis summo de vertice visus Iuli
fundere lumen apex, tactuque innoxia mollis
lambere flamma comas et circum tempora pasci.* (Verg. *Aen.* 2.682–84)

For amidst the hands and faces of grieving parents, behold: a thin point of flame seemed to pour out light from the top of Iulus's head, and with its touch, the harmless fire seemed to lick his fine hair and graze around his temples.

As Knox notes, Iulus's flame "licks" and "feeds" like the serpents who attack Laocoön and his sons (*Aen.* 2.684: *lambere . . . pasci*; cf. 2.211, 215: *lambebant . . . depascitur*), albeit with no ill effect. Likewise, this flame appears to "pour forth" (*fundere*) light from the top of the boy's head, wreathing it with a crown, as his distressed parents stand nearby (*inter maestorumque ora parentum*), much as Priam's son Polites, fatally wounded by Pyrrhus, "poured out his life along with copious blood before his parents' very eyes" (*Aen.* 2.531–32: *ante oculos . . . et ora parentum . . . multo vitam cum sanguine fudit*). Earlier virtual or metaphorical manifestations of fire in *Aeneid* 2—not just the literal fires that Aeneas sees flaring up around Troy but also the flaming-eyed serpents and Pyrrhus' rampage in Priam's palace—suggest insurmountable opposition, both human and divine, to Troy's survival. Understandably, then, the boy's parents are unable to interpret this new omen as a positive sign, panicking (*Aen.* 2.685) as Iulus appears poised to become yet another youthful casualty of the calamitous sequence narrated in Book 2.¹²⁹ This portent, however, reframes and redefines the possibilities for the relationship between fire and the future of Aeneas and the Trojans.

With the benefit of hindsight Vergil's readers can see what Aeneas himself cannot: as Philip Hardie has argued, the point (*apex*) of fire above Iulus's head prefigures the *apex* of the flamine that Iulus will later institute at Alba Longa.¹³⁰ Likewise, the flames around Iulus's temples resemble the *vittae* worn by Laocoön (the headbands are soaked in gore and venom as he succumbs to the serpents: *perfusos sanie vittas atroque veneno*, *Aen.* 2.221); but they also symbolize the traditional headdress of Rome's future priests, as well as the flaming crown that (as legend has it) marked Servius Tullius as a future king.

Anchises, himself a sometime target of divine fire, is the first to realize this portent's significance.¹³¹ His request for a divine confirmation is soon answered with literal fire from the heavens: a comet streams down through the darkness, drawing a streaking trail with a brilliant light (*Aen.* 2.693–94: *de caelo lapsa per umbras / stella facem ducens multa cum luce cucurrit*). The “flaming head” that Ascanius displays also seems dangerously close to “flaming hair” of Phaethon, a traditional interpretation of the long “tail” of a comet or meteor; as I noted earlier, the comet(s) that attended Caesar’s death were subject to dire interpretations. Yet in later Augustan propaganda, they also were promoted as proof of Caesar’s apotheosis.¹³²

Just as with the similes comparing Dido’s pyre to the destruction of Carthage or comparing a storm at sea to a rioting mob, understanding the true meaning of these portents requires a knowledge of the history that the *Aeneid*’s narrative precedes, predicts, and sets in motion. These passages draw on a lengthy pedigree of “incendiary” imagery ranging from the Homeric and post-Homeric accounts of Troy’s fall, to externalized passions as the cause of a civic calamity, to Cicero’s fire-tinged attacks on political enemies like Catiline, Clodius, and Antony.¹³³ Thus they further suggest on a literary level that the “fiery” character traits embodied by literary models—no less than the crises that these texts narrate or envision—can themselves carry over like a torch, igniting each text with an ember from its predecessor. The tragic arc of Dido’s narrative in the *Aeneid* blends all of these processes, extending the metaphorical inflammation of her spirit to the corporeal and eventually to the civic and cosmic realms.¹³⁴

Traces of the Old Flame: Dido’s Passion and Carthage’s Fall

Aeneas’s initial contact with Dido, in which he offers his recollection of the flames of Troy, in effect brings about her own eventual fiery end, linking Troy’s fall and Carthage’s eventual destruction in a chain of causality.¹³⁵ Moreover, when Aeneas abandons Dido after their affair, he initiates a lasting enmity between their two states that ultimately results in the obliteration of Carthage and its empire. The intermediary link between these conflagrations is Dido herself, whose self-immolation is precipitated by a set of overdetermined influences—not only the encouragement of Cupid in disguise, charged by Venus with the task of “capturing” her and encircling her with flame (*Aen.* 1.673: *capere . . . et cingere flamma*), but also Aeneas’s own compelling self-representation as the survivor of incendiary catastrophe in Book 2. This

sequence elevates the stock-repertoire imagery of Dido's romantic conflagration, developed since her first contact with Aeneas, into a proleptic illustration of the ultimate consequences for her city and its global ambitions.

When Dido utters her famous line at *Aen.* 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 engaging, as well as the many models in literature for her tragic undoing. Vergil further reinforces Dido's status as a vehicle of literary memory when she burns atop a pile of mementos (*Aen.* 4.598: *monimenta*) of Aeneas, including his gifts rescued from Troy.¹³⁶ These gifts are themselves "remainders of Troy's flames" (*Aen.* 1.679: *flammis restantia Troiae*). Dido's Eastern identity and her initial attraction to the bearer of gifts that survived the flames of Troy seem to recall the phoenix myth here.¹³⁷ Yet the sense of cyclical renewal she exemplifies is not one of rebirth and restoration but of an inevitable return to violence. Having thoroughly aired out the image of a city literally in flames in *Aeneid* 2, Vergil further develops the proleptic metaphor of the *urbs incensa* to great effect at 4.300–301: *saevit inops animi totamque incensa per urbem / bacchatur* ("[Dido] rages, bereft of her wits, and she goes aflame in Bacchic frenzy through the whole city"). Here Vergil divides the fire from its expected referent of the city and instead applies it to Dido, strengthening the association between leader and city that ultimately informs the shared destruction by fire envisioned in the simile at *Aen.* 4.667–71.

Dido seems to exemplify a connection between fire and female eroticism, a point often emphasized in scholarship.¹³⁸ While many examples do fit this description, I suggest that focusing so exclusively on the gendered aspect of Dido's undoing obscures her importance to Vergil's development of larger patterns connecting fire and leadership.¹³⁹ Dido's initial distinction in *Aeneid* 1 is her brilliant capability as a politician and leader. This talent is evident in Venus's description of Dido's escape from Tyre (*Aen.* 1.341–68) and further emphasized in the memorable phrase *dux femina facti* (*Aen.* 1.364). The formidable start to Dido's new city further testifies to her effective leadership (*Aen.* 1.419–40), as does her first speech, an elegant response that defuses a tense initial confrontation with the shipwrecked Trojans (*Aen.* 1.561–78). With Dido's image as a gifted leader firmly established in Book 1, the tragic narrative of Book 4 offers an object lesson in the risks of leadership destabilized by personal passions.

Dido's commitment to protecting Carthage does not simply evaporate as the flame of desire takes hold. In fact, the queen's concern for her city is central

to the appeal that Aeneas holds for her. Her sister Anna reminds her of the array of enemies apparently poised to attack Carthage (*Aen.* 4.39–44), clinching the argument for a union with Aeneas by pointing out the political security such a partnership would ensure. Vergil's summation of the effect of Anna's words emphasizes the incendiary: *his dictis impenso animum flammavit / amore* ("with this speech she inflamed the heart with weighty love," *Aen.* 4.54–55). Flame imagery in the context of political persuasion signals danger, as evidenced by the exchange between the Trojans and Sinon in Book 2. Likewise, the flame of passion that torments Dido for the brief remainder of her life spells doom not just for her but for her city as well.

The simile comparing Dido in the throes of desire to a wounded deer once again unites fire (this time in metaphorical form) 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
pastor agens telis liquitque volatile ferrum
nescius: illa fuga silvas saltusque peragrat
Dictaeos; haeret lateri letalis harundo.* (Verg. *Aen.* 4.66–73)

the supple flame consumes her marrow, and all the while, the wound lives silently within her chest. Wretched Dido burns, 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, toying with his weaponry, abandons his flying arrow, clueless: she, in flight, zigzags Dicté's forests and glades, the death-dealing shaft stuck fast in her side.

Erotic poetry frequently threatens pastoral/agrarian figures with love's metaphorical fire.¹⁴⁰ A Greek epigram attributed to Philodemus further connects these themes with hunting and the arrows of desire:

Your summer crop has not yet shed its husks, nor has the grape darkened and brought forth its first virgin charms, and already the young Cupids are sharpening their swift arrows, Lysidice, and a hidden fire is smoldering. Let us run, we unlucky lovers, before the dart is on the string. I foretell soon enough a great fire.¹⁴¹

A Latin epigram by Porcius Licinius (fl. 100 BCE) more directly connects fire and shepherds:

*Custodes ovium teneraeque propaginis, agnum,
quaeritis ignem? ite huc <totus hic> ignis homost.
si digito attigero, incendam silvam simul omnem,
omne pecus; flammast omnia quae video.*¹⁴²

Guardians of the flocks and of lambs, their delicate progeny, is it fire you're after? Get over here; <this> man is <all> fire. If I touch it with my finger I'll set the whole forest, the whole flock instantly blazing; all I see is flame.

Vergil adapts the playful pastoral discourse surrounding elements such as shepherds, groves, fire, and arrows to foreshadow the unfortunate fate awaiting both Dido and her city: the groves and forest (*nemora, silvas*) of the simile appear as explicit analogues for Dido's city (*urbe*).¹⁴³ Moreover, the elements of a grove and an inattentive (or unaware) shepherd, along with the image of love's fire consuming Dido's person, invite comparison with Vergil's description of a fire in an olive grove in *Georgics* 2.

The grove fire in *Georgics* 2 incorporates a number of themes that Vergil reworks and elaborates in the *Aeneid*. The poem's narrator warns that careless shepherds frequently are responsible for destructive fires (G. 2.303: *nam saepe incautis pastoribus excidit ignis*), a troubling echo of his earlier claim that fire can often (*saepe*) serve productive purposes for agriculture (G. 1.84–85). Due to the risk posed by shepherds' incendiary activity, he advises against grafting the domestic olive onto the wild oleaster (G. 2.302: *oleae silvestris*). Oleaster, he elaborates, invites flame with its oily bark in which a fire can smolder, stealthily gathering strength (G. 2.304: *qui furtim pingui primum sub cortice tectus / robora comprehendit*) before erupting into the whole grove (G. 2.308: *totum involuit flammis nemus*). Similarly, Dido's concealed passion (*Aen.* 4.67: *tacitum vivit sub pectore vulnus*) will lead to her undoing as she wanders over the whole city (*Aen.* 4.68–69: *tota . . . urbe*).¹⁴⁴ In her simile-form of the stricken doe, Dido is characterized as *incauta*, aligning her with the careless shepherds of *Georgics* 2. In the deer simile, however, the shepherd who shoots the fatal arrow is not careless but clueless (*nescius*), pairing him with Aeneas himself.

As we saw earlier, at *Aeneid* 2.303–8 Aeneas compares his own shock at witnessing Troy's conflagration to that of a *pastor inscius* watching a fire or a flood as it consumes crops and livestock. The implied (albeit unwitting) respon-

sibility for Dido's plight placed on the Aeneas/shepherd figure here invites a rereading of the shepherd simile from *Aeneid* 2. Much like the Trojans themselves in *Aeneid* 2, the *nescius* shepherd in deer simile of *Aeneid* 4 and the *incauti* shepherds who cause the grove fire of *Georgics* 2 may not have been able to anticipate the disasters they set in motion; yet they triggered them just the same. When read against Vergil's further examples of *pastores* who are clearly implicated in the harm or violence unfolding in the text, the stunned shepherd in the simile from *Aeneid* 2 appears naive, and perhaps even disingenuous in his shock. Unlike Vergil's audience, this *pastor* seems ignorant (*inscius*) of the close connection between shepherds and incendiaryism clearly posited in the erotic epigrams discussed above, as well as in the *Georgics*. Thus within the text's overall discourse on the theme of leaders and disasters, these two similes form a significant starting point in a subdiscourse exploring the relationship between leaders and fire. On the one hand, Dido is a leader undone by the *incendium* instigated by the *pastor* Aeneas; for this personal and political catastrophe, Aeneas bears at least some measure of blame. On the other, Aeneas appears to learn (partly perhaps from Dido's negative example) to harness *incendium* and the violence it metonymically represents to his advantage. This point returns to salience at various junctures in Vergil's narrative.

The motif of a leader's spirit "inflamed" by the words of others reappears when the neighboring King Iarbas, one of Dido's rejected suitors, learns of her union with Aeneas (*Aen.* 4.196–97). *Fama* delivers this news, which "inflames his spirit and banks up his wrath" (*Aen.* 4.197: *incendit . . . animum dictis atque aggerat iras*), just as Anna "inflames" Dido's heart with love at 4.54. Dido and Iarbas, then, are 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 under the influence of *eadem impia Fama* ("that same wicked Rumor," *Aen.* 4.298) launches her initial rhetorical attack upon Aeneas, he responds levelly: *desine meque tuis incendere teque querelis* ("stop inflaming me, and yourself as well, with your complaints," *Aen.* 4.360). Again, in Book 6, Anchises's tour of great Roman leaders-to-be in the underworld culminates at 6.888–89: *Anchises natum per singula duxit / incenditque animum famae venientis amore* ("Anchises led his son through them one by one, and inflamed his spirit with the love of future fame").¹⁴⁵ The reformulation of *fama* and *incendium*, now with an ostensibly optimistic spin, remains unsettling in its echo of the situations of Dido and Iarbas: can leaders, fire, and *fama/Fama* ever coexist peacefully? A crucial

intervention in Book 5 seems to suggest that such forces of destruction can be checked by a uniquely capable leader. This sequence, yet another instance of fire's close association with civil unrest, implies that Aeneas's affinity with fire differs from that of the flawed leader figures who steer their peoples toward disaster.

Vulcan Lets Loose: The Trojan Fleet in *Aeneid* 5 and 9

The long-awaited funerary games for Anchises in *Aeneid* 5 begin with a description of "Phaethon's horses" (*Phaethontis equi*, *Aen.* 5.105) bringing the dawn.¹⁴⁶ As William Nethercut points out, this is an image designed to suggest themes of transitions in leadership, the risk of "losing control at the helm," and the inevitable outcome: a conflagration.¹⁴⁷ As the Trojan men and their Sicilian hosts conclude the sporting competitions at Anchises's funeral games, Aeneas's son Ascanius leads the Trojan youth in a resurrection of the *lusus Troiae*, a display of horsemanship that renews the Trojans' hope of reviving their destroyed city's power: *Troia nunc pueri, Troianum dicitur agmen* ("The boys are now [called] Troy, the line called Trojan, too," *Aen.* 5.602). The Trojan women's attempted burning of their ships represents an abrupt shift in tone but nevertheless plays its part in this book's larger scheme as a showcase for competing models of leadership—some of which must fail.¹⁴⁸ The vengeful Juno dispatches her heavenly errand-maid Iris to stall the Trojans' progress toward Italy. Iris, disguised as the respected matron Beroe, urges a premature establishment of a new Troy on the spot in Sicily. Iris-as-Beroe's instigation is fraught with rhetorical urgency: *iam tempus agi res / nec tantis mora prodigiis. en quattuor arae / Neptuno; deus ipse facies animumque ministrat* ("now is the time get on with it, and no more delay with divine signals so clear. Look at the four altars to Neptune: the god himself is supplying the firebrands and the sentiment!" *Aen.* 4.638–40). The image of the women stripping altars and hearths for torches (*Aen.* 5.660–61: *rapiuntque focus penetralibus ignem / pars spoliant aras, frondem ac virgulta faciesque*) is distressing; as in Vergil's famous description at *G.* 1.508 of plowshares being refashioned as blades, an object usually associated with peace and productivity becomes a weapon of internecine conflict. Moreover, these lines echo the *Aeneid*'s first simile (*Aen.* 4.640: *deus ipse facies animumque ministrat* ~ *Aen.* 1.150: *iamque facies et saxa volant—furor arma ministrat*), but the image is disquieting in its multiple reversals of the situation described in Book 1.

Neptune rescues the Trojan fleet from the *furor* of the tempest in Book 1, and his referent in simile stares down an incendiary riot. Here he is falsely identified as the instigator of a mob attack against these same ships. Beroe, the persona chosen by Iris for this speech, is another analogue of the statesman from *Aeneid* 1; she is invested with authority in her community due to her advanced age and distinguished family (*Aen.* 5.620–21). Yet now her stature is exploited to advance Juno's counteragenda to Aeneas's goal of a new kingdom in Italy. This pseudo-Beroe, rather than using her position to defuse the situation like the statesman of the Book 1 simile, becomes a vocal proponent of insurrection: *quin agite et mecum infaustas exurite puppis* ("come then, and torch these luckless decks with me," *Aen.* 5.635). Her eyes burn (as Pyrgo will note at *Aen.* 6.548: *ardentisque notate oculos*) like those of the attacking serpents in *Aeneid* 2. Soon fire manifests itself physically: the false Beroe distributes the torches (*Aen.* 5.637: *ardentis dare visa faces*) and flings the first firebrand: *prima infensum vi corripit ignem / sublataque procul dextra conixa coruscat et iacit* ("she was the first to snatch up the hostile fire with violent intent, and with her hand lifted high she brandished it and hurled it from a distance," *Aen.* 5.641–42).¹⁴⁹ Thus the figures who represent restoration and security in the epic's initial simile are channeled here by the instigators of mayhem.

In another kind of memory game, key moments in the narrative of Troy's fall are reenacted.¹⁵⁰ Following Iris/Beroe's example, the women seize flaming branches from the altars at which they had just been sacrificing and fling them upon the sterns of the ships. As Nethercut argues, this could be "a symbolic reenactment of Troy's burning" in Book 2.¹⁵¹ Yet the women's activity more closely imitates not the destruction of Troy but the Trojan counterattack in the *Iliad* against the ships of the invading Greeks, Troy's greatest moment of hope.¹⁵² At *Il.* 16.112–24, Hector sets fire to the Greek ships beached on the shores of his homeland, struggling to end his city's lengthy period of quasi-captivity at the hands of the besieging army. 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 this parallel as he tries to curb their frenzy: *quis furor iste novus? quo nunc tenditis*" inquit / "heu miserae cives? non hostem inimicaque castra / Argivum, 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,'" *Aen.* 5.671–73). Ascanius uses terms with powerful civic connotations (*furor novus*, *cives*, *spes*), highlighting the

women's failure to recognize the reality of their situation. His reproach holds in check a literary memory about to take control of the scene. On an ideological level, these lines suggest that those eager to renew the violence of the late republic—or even specifically to (re)deploy incendiary tactics to achieve their political ends—are (as it were) “reading from the wrong script,” unaware that their actions are no longer appropriate in a changing world.

As in the charioteer simile from *Georgics* 1, the grove fire in *Georgics* 2, and the mob from the Neptune/statesman simile in *Aeneid* 1, a destructive force appears poised to overwhelm any efforts to check it. The image of uncontrolled fire at 5.662 (*furit immissis Volcanus habenis*, “Vulcan rampages with reins let loose”) recalls the destructive army let loose in the *urbs capta* simile from Dido's death scene (4.467, *immissis . . . hostibus*).¹⁵³ The metaphor of control implicit in the mention of reins connects this moment with the charioteer simile from *Georgics* 1 and the mob from the Neptune/statesman simile in *Aeneid* 1. The phrase here appears as a direct reversal not only of Neptune's mastery of his chariot at the conclusion of the storm scene from *Aeneid* 1 but also of Ascanius's equestrian skills implied in the spectacle of the *lusus Troiae* that directly precedes this episode. Thus the Phaethon-esque future suggested in the portents of Ascanius's flaming head and the comet in *Aeneid* 2 threaten to overwhelm his attempt at leadership here.

When Aeneas and the other Trojans arrive, the women come to their senses. Vergil's comment on their scattered contrition is wry and gnomic: *Sed non idcirco flamma atque incendia viris / indomitas posuere* (“But not for this did flames and firestorms relinquish their untamed power,” *Aen.* 5.680–81). The disaster continues at 5.681–83: *udo sub robore vivit / stuppa vomens tardum fumum, lentusque carinas / est vapor* (“under the damp wood lives [lit pitch], billowing sluggish smoke, and fumes slowly consume the keel”). As with the internal flame of love that eats away at Dido (*Aen.* 4.66–67) and the flame that feeds beneath the bark of the grove fire in the *Georgics* (G. 2.303–9), Vergil's image here suggests that fire, even when unseen, is always ready to erupt. 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.

At *Aen.* 5.687–91, Aeneas calls out to the heavens with upraised hands. This gesture recalls his desperate first speech amidst the storm at sea (*Aen.* 1.92–101), but the authority with which he speaks here suggests how far he has come as a leader responding to crisis: *Iuppiter omnipotens, si nondum exosus ad unum / Troianos . . . da flammam evadere classi / nunc, pater, et tenuis Teu-*

crum res eripe leto ("Almighty Jupiter, if you don't yet hate all Trojans down to the last man . . . let the flame depart from our fleet, father, and snatch the weakened Trojan state away from its doom"). He challenges the god to deal them the same coup de grâce that (according to legend) dispatched Phaethon: *vel tu, quod superest, infesto fulmine morti / si mereor, demitte tuaque hic obrue dextra* ("or else hurl what's left of us down to death with your violent thunderbolt, if I deserve it, and wipe us out with your own smiting hand!" *Aen.* 5.691–92). Here *si mereor* calls to mind the *merita*, "services," that distinguish the statesman in the simile at *Aeneid* 1, suggesting that Aeneas offers himself as the sole redeemer by whom his people's worthiness of rescue should be measured. In response, a miraculous raincloud appears, quenching the fires and saving the ships. Like the dedications to Stata Mater discussed above, this episode commemorates a community's deliverance from a fire that threatened to wipe out its "home."¹⁵⁴ Yet Aeneas's power here is more than just an ordinary prayer with a vow of some token to be offered if a community's wish is granted—it is predicated, like the notion of Stata Mater Augusta, on the notion of the leader's special gifts and personal authority to intervene in a crisis. Aeneas in this passage seems to claim more than the human authority of a statesman over a crowd, as in the simile from Book 1; he is more like Neptune, the god whose ability to calm the storm in *Aeneid* 1 occasioned the statesman simile; or even like Juno, the storm's instigator. Like these deities, he appears able to command the elements themselves.

In *Aeneid* Book 6, the vision of Rome to come and the exhortations of Anchises in the underworld "inflamm" Aeneas with a patriotic passion that spurs him toward his militaristic trajectory in the epic's second half. In Books 7–12, a number of the themes explored above find new iterations. Notably, Aeneas's future bride, Lavinia, manifests a flame portent (*Aen.* 7.71–81) very like the one that marks Ascanius for glory in Book 2; this flame, however, portends war for the people of Italy and inspires dread among its witnesses.¹⁵⁵ In Book 7, Aeneas's chief antagonist, Turnus, is invested with a destructive inner fire when the infernal goddess Allecto plunges a blazing torch into his heart (*Aen.* 7.456–57, *facem iuveni coniecit et atro lumine fumantis fixit sub pectore taedas*); this action recalls the images of hidden flame erupting from within discussed above with reference to Dido in *Aeneid* 4 and the grove fire in *Georgics* 2. The effects of Allecto's torch are detailed in a simile comparing Turnus to a cauldron boiling over with heat (*Aen.* 7.462–67).¹⁵⁶ Book 8 offers an account of the heroic demigod Hercules's victory over a monstrous alternate version of himself: the

demigod Cacus, a subterranean, smoke-belching monster who represents both darkness and fire (e.g., *Aen.* 8.198–99: “spewing [Vulcan’s] black fires from his mouth,” *illius atros ore vomens ignis*). Yet it also offers us Cacus’s father Vulcan, whose brilliant use of fire’s creative force constructs a vision of Rome’s future on the shield of Aeneas.¹⁵⁷ On this shield’s central panel, Augustus, whose “blessed temples spew forth twin flame” (*geminas . . . tempora flammās laeta vomunt*, *Aen.* 8.861–62), appears as the ultimate example of a leader who can command the power of fire toward a positive objective.¹⁵⁸

The attempted arson of the Trojan ships in Book 5 is repeated in Book 9 by Turnus and his allies in lines 71–76.¹⁵⁹ Turnus, pivoting his frustrated attack on the camp of the Trojans to focus on destroying their fleet, is characterized in simile as a wolf stalking a well-stocked sheepfold, thirsting for blood (*Aen.* 9.59–64: *pleno lupus insidiatus ovili . . . siccae sanguine fauces*).¹⁶⁰ The scene continues at 9.65–66: *Rutulo muros et castra tuenti / ignescunt irae, duris dolor ossibus ardet* (“the Rutulian’s wrathful passions flame up as he scans the camp walls, resentment burns in his rugged bones”). Turnus’s incendiary tendencies are further signaled in the red-crested golden helmet he wears (*Aen.* 9.50), and even in the recurrence of his tribal affiliation at 9.65: *Rutulū*, as Hardie notes, “perhaps puns on *rutilus* [red-gold].”¹⁶¹ The metaphorical association with fire in the wolf’s thirst and the passage’s “fiery” color palette soon take literal form in the hands of Turnus and his followers:

*classem, quae lateri castrorum adiuncta latebat,
aggeribus saeptam circum et fluvialibus undis,
invadit sociosque incendia poscit ovantis
atque manum pinu flagranti fervidus implet.
tum vero incumbunt (urget praesentia Turni),
atque omnis facibus pubes accingitur atris.
diripuerunt focos: piceum fert fumida lumen
taeda et commixtam Vulcanus ad astra favillam.* (Verg. *Aen.* 9.69–76)

He attacks the fleet, nestled close to the flank of the camp, penned in by earthworks and the river’s current, and from his cheering supporters he calls for fire; burning, he arms his own hand with blazing pine. Then they really surge forward (Turnus’s presence inspires them) and the youth all equip themselves with dark torches. They’ve stripped the hearths: the smoky torches offer pitchy light, and Vulcan bears swirling cinders to the stars.

Turnus's enthusiastic troops cheer on their instigator (*sociosque . . . ovariantis*) as he takes up his improvised weapon, and soon they all follow suit with fire-brands plundered from nearby hearths (*diripuerunt focos*). Commentators as far back as Servius have questioned what kind of "hearths" might have been conveniently burning to supply the Rutulians with torches; possibly these are the sacrificial altars set up at *Aen.* 7.133–47, which would connect this scene with the sacrilegious misuse of sacred fires by the Trojan women at 5.660–61.¹⁶² That the besieged Trojan camp in Italy appears as yet another Troy *redux*, with many hallmarks of the classics *urbs capta* motif, is clear enough.¹⁶³ Turnus's arson recollects a type of urban calamity, however, that was well known to readers of Vergil's generation not from literature but from life. Just as with the Trojan women's attack on the fleet in Book 5 and the statesman/riot simile in Book 1, this image of incendiarism invites reimagining as a mob scene in Rome—if not the current Rome of Vergil's contemporary audience, certainly that of the recent past.

The Trojan ships' miraculous transformation into nymphs in the lines that follow (*Aen.* 9.77–122) may be even more specifically targeted for a Roman audience in light of the city's recent brushes with willed destruction in the late republican and triumphal decades of the mid-first century BCE. This episode's surprise ending is apparently a Vergilian invention; its tonal incongruity has troubled critics since before the time of Servius.¹⁶⁴ The very oddness of the passage, then, signals that Vergil deemed this crisis worthy of a personal (as it were) intervention. As I argue, this strange miracle may thematize the historical reality of nymphs and fires in Rome's urban landscape. The poet abruptly suspends Turnus's attack on the fleet to offer an inset narrative with its own proem:

*quis deus, O Musae, tam saeva incendia Teucris
avertit? tantos ratibus quis depulit ignes?
dicite: prisca fides facta, sed fama perennis. (Aen. 9.77–79)*

What god, O Muses, turned away such fierce flames from the Trojans? Who drove such great fires from the ships? Speak: belief in the deed is old, but its fame is eternal.

The nymphs, despite their literary reputation for beauty, play far more than a fanciful or ornamental role here in Vergil's text, much as they did in urban life

at Rome.¹⁶⁵ As goddesses associated with water they seem to have been part of the complex of gods worshipped for protection against destructive fires.¹⁶⁶ Thus the fire damage done to their temple in the mid-first century BCE at the hands of a rioting mob can be imagined to have left a lasting impression, especially since Clodius, political arsonist extraordinaire of the late republican era, is blamed for instigating the crime.¹⁶⁷ As Penelope Davies observes, “The ready symbolism of the Clodians’ targets makes it unlikely that these acts of vandalism were random. . . . Where conservatives built, they destroyed; and their actions drew reactions.”¹⁶⁸ The incident was vividly characterized by Cicero as an attack not just on Rome’s political stability but on the goddesses themselves.¹⁶⁹

The Trojans’ ships represent Rome’s future as long as they remain unsettled refugees; burning the ships represents in turn an existential threat to the city’s existence that is deeply intertwined with the Roman understanding of urban fires as a fundamentally political event. Vergil’s rescue of the half-burnt ships and their transformation into nymphs with *virgineae* . . . *facies* (“virginal faces,” *Aen.* 9.120–22) could evoke not just the famous beauty of the living goddesses but perhaps the fresh image of their rebuilt temple.¹⁷⁰ This temple’s rebuilding could be seen as an architectural rebuttal to the politics that promoted the vandalism perpetrated by Clodius and his ilk.¹⁷¹ The memory of these campaigns of politically motivated arson can be expected to have lingered in the Roman imagination, and it is this memory that Vergil exploits to bring urgency and poignancy to his scenes of incendiary disaster averted in Books 5 and 9.

Vergil’s engagement with various iterations of fire as opposing forces of creation and destruction continues to the epic’s final lines. A simile in Book 10 (399–411) compares the young prince Pallas’s leadership of his army to a shepherd deliberately burning a field in a high wind, an image alarming for its melding of the imagery from the shepherd simile from Book 2 with Turnus’s attack on the ships in Book 9. This moment also anticipates the youth’s own imminent death and cremation (*Aen.* 11.1–224), an extravaganza of fire imagery that reiterates and amplifies features of Dido’s pyre from *Aeneid* 4.¹⁷² Finally, at *Aen.* 12.521, a simile compares Aeneas and Turnus moving toward each other for their final confrontation on the battlefield to twin forest fires sweeping toward convergence.¹⁷³ It is the sight of Pallas’s plundered baldric on Turnus’s prostrate frame that incites Aeneas’s final killing rage, when he “ignites with wrath” (*furiis accensus*, 12.946). Aeneas characterizes Turnus’s death as a sacrifice performed by Pallas (*Pallas te . . . immolat*, 12.948–50) using a verb (*immolare*) that literally denotes a burnt offering.¹⁷⁴

These closing images—especially fire/Pallas as a motivating force behind Aeneas's slaughter of Turnus—are no less ambiguous and controversial than the episodes discussed at greater length in this chapter. Each episode, whether considered on its own or as part of the larger complex of conflagration in the epic, strikes a delicate balance between suggesting the ultimate necessity of violence and destruction to resolve certain conflicts and insistently exposing the human cost and inherent risks of employing such forces. As Michèle Lowrie argues of the relationship between violence and foundation in the *Aeneid*, "Vergil's commentary on violence pertains not only to Rome's legendary history, but to the immediate and intense concerns of his age: the transformation of Rome from a period of civil war, in which the future emperor Augustus played a signally bloody role, and the transformation under Augustus to a period of peace."¹⁷⁵ Lowrie's insight provides an avenue for considering the history of violence that Rome had faced within Vergil's memory. It is this history that Vergil reworks and reimagines as the literal and metaphorical power of conflagration in the *Aeneid*. The destruction in these images, in other words, points toward the necessity of rebuilding even as it underlines the importance of what is being lost.

Rome's first emperor and the literary authors discussed in this chapter were equally preoccupied with the business of redefining categories. They established new hierarchies that blurred the boundaries of myth, history, and contemporary life at Rome. After establishing sole hegemony, Augustus made his city into an advertisement for the accord that he claimed to have established among gods, people, and ruler. He 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 symbols, events, and rituals that promoted his ascent to power and associated him with figures from myth and history. Likewise, the readings in this chapter all draw a tight figurative nexus between and among these same components. Conflagration was the most tangible and terrifying expression of urban collapse and political instability; against this backdrop, mythic narratives, historical *exempla*, and philosophical doctrines involving fire found new meaning. Roman authors of the period reanimated these archetypes, associating legendary leaders and cosmic forces with the Roman *princeps* and contemporary concerns.

This chapter outlines a number of examples demonstrating how closely Vergil associates fire not only with societal collapse but also with the volatility

of characters who harbor destructive tendencies such as Dido in Books 1 and 4; the Trojan women in Book 5; and Turnus in Books 7–12. These readings also show, however, that Vergil carefully develops another set of associations for fire. The conflagration that destroys Troy is revealed, through a prophetic dream and a fiery portent, to be the starting point for Rome's refoundation. Miracles like Iulus's immunity to the mysterious flames in Book 2, Aeneas's success in quelling the fire consuming his ships in Book 5, and the transformation of the burning ships into watery nymphs in Book 9 suggest that certain uniquely blessed individuals (as well as divinely protected structures) can withstand the challenges represented by fire—indeed, some can even bring this element under their own control.

In the face of the realities of Rome's recent past, Vergil shows a keen awareness of the potential dangers in any political scenario. His ideological stance emerges as not simply optimistic or pessimistic; rather, he unflinchingly recognizes the costs even of an inevitable destruction and displays a nuanced sensitivity to the tensions inherent in his blend of cosmological and historical material. Vergil's manipulation of fire imagery ultimately advances a vision of politics, as well as of poetics, that is rooted in mythology and history. These images and references signal a deep engagement with the ideological and literary debates of his day. 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. The successful leader, no less than the outstanding poet, portrays himself as capable not just of facing the catastrophic but of embracing these challenges to his genius and turning them to his advantage.

CHAPTER 2

Destruction and Dynasty

Imperial Cremations, Apocalyptic Anxieties, and Book-Burning in the Early First Century CE

In anticipation of Augustus's demise and under his successors, the nexus of flawed leadership, cosmic collapse, and general anxiety over imperial succession again found expression in images of conflagration. Chapter 1 provided an account of the development of the Phaethon myth as a metaphor for contested succession. The motif of self-immolation exemplified in Phaethon's tale had an appeal as a ready analogy for leaders undertaking politically risky endeavors of various sorts.¹ Primarily, these images arose in tandem with recollections of the triumviral conflicts, but Augustus's string of doomed prospective heirs may well have catalyzed a reanimation of the archetype in the late Augustan and early Tiberian periods. As this chapter's readings of Ovid, Manilius, and Seneca will show, in Rome's literary realm the related motifs of Phaethon, *ekpyrosis*, and the phoenix all seem to have played major roles both as ideological emblems and as figures for metapoetic competition, for literary filiation, and for political succession. As Rome's new model of dynastic rule became further entrenched, Phaethon's story offered a poignant way of conjuring civic distress over promising heirs who died too soon.² The series of imperial princes marked out as successors to Augustus served, in turn, as symbols of the future security of Rome through the maintenance of her dominant military and political position.³ As each heir died and was cremated, every successive death represented another lost future for Rome and its empire. Thus such funerals came to symbolize thwarted dynastic ambition: "a curious amalgam of private mourning and public performance

played upon the Roman stage,” as Thomas Jenkins notes.⁴ The *Consolatio ad Liviam*, a purported poem of consolation to the empress after the death of her son Drusus, is attributed to the late Augustan or early Tiberian periods; the dramatic date of the poem is 9 BCE, the year of Drusus’s death.⁵ In the texts discussed in chapter 1, Phaethon imagery appears to have signified concern that the vast power of the principate would fall into the wrong hands. The *Consolatio* suggests, however, that Phaethon could now represent a presumed heir whose loss in and of itself constituted a civic catastrophe.

The unknown author’s account of the pyre’s progress as it consumes the corpse is graphic and memorable, providing perhaps our most realistic surviving account of the sensory impact of this profoundly significant ritual.⁶ Yet the poet of the *Consolatio* elevates the event to the mythic realm, comparing Livia’s grief to the mourning of several mythological figures; among these figures are Phaethon’s mother and sisters: *Sic flevit Clymene, sic et Clymeneides, alte / cum iuvenis patriis excidit ictus equis*, “Thus wept Clymene, and Clymene’s daughters too, when a youth fell stricken from his father’s lofty steeds” (*Consolatio ad Liviam* [hereafter, *Cons.*] 111–12). These lines elide Phaethon’s name, describing his predicament in abstracted terms as, essentially, a fall from an elevated position of command bestowed by his father. This abstraction, rather than softening the edges of the message, actually allows for a closer identification between Phaethon’s demise and that of Drusus, a potential heir to the principate.

Later in the poem the personified River Tiber announces his plans to flood the zone in order to “extinguish the pyre’s flames with the impact of a swell” (*rogi flammam extinguere fluminis ictu*, *Cons.* 227) and to “take away the corpse unharmed” (*corpus . . . intactum tollere*, *Cons.* 228). Though prevented by Mars from carrying out this plan (*Cons.* 230–38), the Tiber’s would-be role here is reminiscent of the role of the river Po (Eridanus) in the traditional Phaethon narrative. In the literary generation roughly contemporary with the presumed date of the *Consolatio*, lines by both Ovid and Germanicus further attest to the significant part the river plays in Phaethon’s story, reinforcing the impression that the Tiber’s impulse here to quench Drusus’s pyre is a likely allusion to the Phaethon myth.⁷

Thus the familiar contours of Phaethon’s fateful journey can be imagined to have acquired new dimensions in the late Augustan and early Tiberian periods. Yet Phaethon also appears as a metaphor for the opposite situation—an heir who survives long enough to seize control and inflict real damage upon the world. The final readings in this chapter will examine book burning, funeral

pyres, and Phaethon as significant motifs in Seneca's philosophical work. These readings function both as a metaliterary coda to the explorations of these themes in Ovid, Manilius, and the *Consolatio ad Liviam*, and as a transition to the next chapter's focus on the later years of Nero's reign. Within the city's physical fabric, leaders further developed the symbolic vocabulary that Augustus had pioneered concerning fires at Rome. This repertoire encompassed not only the routine yet unanticipated catastrophe of urban conflagration but also periodic, carefully planned "statement" fires. In addition to the imperial cremations discussed here, politically motivated book-burnings would have sent messages to the public about the emperor's command over the world they inhabited.

Imperial Cremations and the Display of Imperial Power

A massive cremation spectacle marked the beginning of the post-Augustan era. Set in a purpose-built monumental complex, Augustus's enormous pyre provided a demonstration of pyrotechnical virtuosity that was implicitly a massive display of power. The carefully orchestrated ignition of the pyre, for which Augustus himself had drawn up detailed plans, included a number of gestures that appear to be calculated parallels to the memorable occurrences and prodigies attending Caesar's death.⁸ Like Julius Caesar's memorably disruptive funeral in 44 BCE, Augustus's funeral was marked by thronging crowds, incendiary coups de théâtre, and a monument marking the site in perpetuity. Yet there is a vast difference between extemporaneous cremations such as those of Caesar and Clodius, within the *pomerium* (indeed, in the Forum itself), and the practice of imperial cremation outside the *pomerium* in the Campus Martius, particularly in regard to the agency and role of the populace within these spaces. The overwhelming public expression of grief apparent in the riotous funeral of 44 BCE, with its overtones of mystical deification, was a powerful memory—one that Augustus would have seen the advantage of activating at this crucial point of transition. Yet in pointed contrast to Caesar's funeral, the rites for Augustus were exquisitely orchestrated and tightly controlled.

The release of an eagle as the pyre burned represented the apotheosis of Augustus; this ritual evidently was imitated in the funerals of numerous later emperors.⁹ The image of the eagle streaking heavenward from the fire imitated the portent of Caesar's comet, while also suggesting the symbolism of the phoenix.¹⁰ Augustus's funeral also reportedly featured an empty triumphal

quadriga signifying his apotheosis.¹¹ As Trevor Luke notes, however, given the proximity of the funerary complex to the solar-themed obelisk complex of the Campus Martius—and given the chariot’s prior associations with Apollo—the empty *quadriga* may well also have suggested the solar chariot and the emperor’s own path heavenward after his cremation.¹² Augustus, it would seem, would succeed where Phaethon had failed in his attempt to become a divinized master of the cosmos.

Though outside the boundary of the *pomerium*, over the course of Augustus’s tenure the Campus Martius had become, in effect, an urbanized theme park of Julio-Claudian monuments commemorating the achievements of his reign.¹³ Augustus’s funeral ceremonies enshrined and inscribed his transformative impact within the monumental landscape he had groomed throughout his reign. Augustus had initiated the immense project of building his massive mausoleum on the Campus almost immediately after taking over Rome.¹⁴ He had already deposited the remains of several short-lived potential heirs and other close relatives in it before his own death, and the sites of these earlier cremations, monumentalized as *ustrina*, also stood close by.¹⁵ Designed as sacred enclosures 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.¹⁶ The complex of imperial *ustrina* remained as a perpetual commemoration of the rituals, spectacles, and risks of staging funerals for significant figures in the regime.

Moreover, as Tacitus tells us, the management of Augustus’s funeral rites on the Campus Martius formed an important cornerstone for Tiberius’s claim to power, an impression reinforced by the overwhelming military presence at the funeral.¹⁷ It seems likely that the threat of renewed civic unrest attendant upon the death of a leader, along with 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. The *Consolatio ad Liviam* mentions armed cohorts at the funeral of Drusus the Elder in 9 BCE (*Cons.* 219–20), and there is little reason to believe that this did not become the norm at state funerals.¹⁸ Indeed protection in some cases may have been warranted, due not to the risk that the pyre presented to the public but rather to the risk the public presented to the corpse.

After Tiberius’s death, his enemies demanded that his body be taken to the amphitheater at Atella to be “half-burned” (*semiustilandum*, Suet. *Tib.* 75.3) as a mark of dishonor, while at Rome people chanted *Tiberius ad Tiberim*. Never-

theless, the corpse was “transferred to Rome and cremated in a public funeral” (*Romam . . . deportatum est crematumque publico funere*, Suet. *Tib.* 75.3).¹⁹ Thus with each successive state funeral, the Julio-Claudian cremation precinct and the various tombs on the Campus Martius became more prominent parts of Rome’s “mental map,” as well as of its religious and commemorative life.²⁰ At the same time, a Roman leader’s response to actual instances of urban conflagration continued to lend itself to broader interpretations of the performance of his duties. As a result, Julio-Claudian state funerals became instrumental in linking emperors and fires in the early imperial era, offering leaders a chance to activate imagery of fire and death as a mediated spectacle in which order was strictly imposed.

Leaders and Disasters: Moments to Shine

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 survivors. Tacitus sums up one such fire from late in Tiberius’s reign:²¹ “Caesar adapted this damaging incident to benefit his reputation, covering the cost of houses and apartment blocks” (*quod damnum Caesar ad gloriam vertit exolutis domuum et insularum pretiis*, Tac. *Ann.* 6.45). Stimulating long-term reconstruction, as well as providing for immediate needs in the aftermath of a destruction, these financial payouts were a tangible expression of imperial concern after a disaster. These efforts reinforced the bond between the ruler and the ruled, authorizing individual residents to rebuild as they saw fit while fostering an ever-greater sense of dependency on 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 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’s 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.

Nondum ea clades exoleverat cum ignis violentia urbem ultra solitum adfecit, deusto monte Caelio; feralemque annum ferebant et omnibus adversis susceptum principi consilium absentiae, qui mos vulgo, fortuita ad culpam trahentes, ni Caesar obviam isset tribuendo pecunias ex modo detrimenti. (Tac. *Ann.* 4.64.1)

The impact of this disaster [at Fidenae] had not even dissipated, when an outbreak of fire caused extraordinary harm to the city, totally burning out the Caecilian hill. 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 making payments in proportion to losses suffered.²²

Tacitus's language clearly illustrates two important points. The first is the extent to which Tiberius's initial absence rankled popular sentiment, which was already distressed after the Fidenae incident. The second is the apparently natural reflex of blaming the emperor for an ostensibly random disaster. The unity of the sentence's sequence may further suggest that Tiberius distributed funds to silence suspicions of the emperor's culpability. Yet the regularity with 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.

The leader's physical presence and initiative in fighting outbreaks of 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. At the scene of another fire in 29 CE—one that again threatened the temple of Vesta—Tiberius's already diminished image as protector of the city and leader of the urban cohort was further undermined by his mother's vigorous response to the incident.

Sed et frequenter admonuit, maioribus nec feminae convenientibus negotiis abstinere, praecipue ut animadvertit incendio iuxta aedem Vestae et ipsam intervenisse populumque et milites, quo enixius opem ferrent, adhortatam, sicut sub marito solita esset. (Suet. *Tib.* 50.3)

Then too he frequently cautioned her to stay out of more serious affairs inappropriate for women—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 for the troops to 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 of crisis 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's empress, suggest again that the leader's response to fires was a matter of some importance, especially when they threatened symbolically significant structures.

Along with the growing significance accorded to the emperor's behavior in 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. This propitious event invited association with the similar survival of the Claudia Quinta statue when the temple of Magna Mater had burned down under Augustus, an incident that seems already to have provided convenient material for praising Augustus and his Claudian-descended wife, Livia.²³ This reoccurrence smacks of a gesture designed to respond to critics of Tiberius's tendency to retreat from Rome. Supporters of the *princeps* even went so far as to use the parallel to argue for changing the name of the hill from Caelius to Augustus:

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. (Tac. Ann. 4.64)

[It was said that] the same had once 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 toward the *princeps*.

Each image offered a localized expression of the emperor's *genius*, projecting an almost infinitely replicable expression of his authority.²⁴ This anecdote illustrates how monuments and statues saturated the city with the emperor's influence, divine favor, and eternal presence; they could become either a liability, if damaged, or a mark of distinction, if spared by a conflagration.

Caligula, despite his reputation for courting disaster, seems to have been well aware of the importance of projecting a message of concern for the city in times of risk. Only one recorded fire took place under his auspices, when he was newly minted as *princeps*; Dio praises his energetic assistance to the mili-

tary in extinguishing it.²⁵ This fire broke out in the Aemiliana district, an area with probable links to the *cura annonae*; the effort to protect it highlights the connection between care of the city and management of the grain supply, criteria closely linked in the public's estimation of a ruler.²⁶ The Aemiliana district again succumbed to conflagration under Claudius—who, not to be outdone by his now-disgraced predecessor, established a command center of sorts from which he personally directed the firefighting for two days. He also oversaw construction initiated by Caligula to provide Rome with two new sources of fresh water, the Aqua Claudia and the Anio Novus.²⁷ In a similar vein, Claudius dispatched units of the *cohortes urbanae* to fight fires in the ports of Ostia and Pozzuoli, vital centers for the grain supply of the *Urbs*.²⁸ Caligula gained more notoriety as a result of his penchant for the outrageous than he did for his civic-minded efforts, and Claudius is better remembered for his conspicuous gaffes than for his fairly robust provisions to protect Rome's urban environment. In a sense, their legacies as urban reformers suffered from a relative lack of truly calamitous threats for them to overcome.

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

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. (Suet. Calig. 31)

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's 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.

Caligula is not likely to have won many fans with statements like this, which perhaps fits in a little too well with the literary tradition of depicting tyrannical leaders wishing destruction on their people. At its heart, however, is 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. The ruler's figurative capacity to make or unmake his city and subjects alike was both dramatized and jeopardized in moments of crisis, when forces outside his control could at least (or at last?) be imagined to take precedence over the ruler in shaping Rome's future. Caligula simply recognized that he could not portray himself as the people's "rescuer" if they needed no rescue.

Phaethon and the *Princeps*: A Disaster Foretold?

Perhaps as a consequence of the forty-five years of relatively unopposed rule that preceded Augustus's death, a powerful strain of apocalyptic anxiety seems to have beset the early imperial period, starting before Augustus died and gaining momentum under Tiberius. The tumultuous events surrounding the final collapse of the republic and the ensuing triumviral conflicts had required Augustus to address similar concerns regarding the finite allowance of time allotted to Rome's existence. Rome's first *princeps* had responded with a series of monuments and celebrations suggesting a resetting of the cosmic clock, which would allow the Romans yet another multicentury span of glory. Romans naturally speculated on the inevitable power vacuum his death was expected to create after such a lengthy span of unchallenged rule; the harrowing saga of Augustus's series of doomed heirs, however, did not inspire confidence. The anxieties over Rome's future took the form of widespread interest in astrology and distress after a series of negative omens surrounding the time of Augustus's death. Dio reports that portents in 14–15 CE included a solar eclipse, a meteor shower, and a fire in the imperial residence on the Palatine.²⁹ Additionally, in response to a widely disseminated oracle presaging Rome's imminent collapse, Tiberius took the opportunity to "edit" the remaining oracles, just as Augustus had done a generation earlier.³⁰

The prophecy of doom in 15 CE and others like it may have darkened the outlook on Julio-Claudian succession from the outset. Late in Tiberius's tenure, a reported appearance of the phoenix in Egypt again suggested to many an imminent change in leadership, if not the collapse of the entire dynastic line.³¹ These portents set the tone for a number of dire quips attributed to Tiberius in his later years, such as his frequent (according to Dio) quoting of a line possibly from Euripides: "When I am dead, let the earth be engulfed in flame!"³² Dio

also reports his habit of describing Priam as blessed because “all at once, along with both country and rule, he met his end.”³³ According to Suetonius, Tiberius also recognized in his presumed heir, Caligula, a terrible outcome: “that he was raising [Caligula as] a viper for Rome, and a Phaethon for the planet” (*se natricem populo Romano, Phaethontem orbi terrarum educare*, Suet. *Calig.* 11). If this quotation, one of many comparable anecdotes about Caligula, can be accepted as genuine, it lends support to the readings of Ovid’s Phaethon as a potential metaphor for imperial succession to be discussed in the next section.³⁴

The anticipation of Rome’s end had been a pervasive literary trope at least since the middle republic.³⁵ The difference here seems to be Tiberius’s disconcerting capacity to see such visions realized. The idle wish of an emperor was perhaps becoming a bit too close to a command; likewise, incendiary imagery and rhetoric threatened to transcend their metaphorical frames and invade Rome’s lived reality. As with all our evidence from later historiographers, we must bear in mind the gusto with which these authors 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; nor were they afraid to flirt with a dangerously double-edged message. Tiberius’s remarks offer insight into the ideological and aesthetic 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 rather the mode of expression in which they (and Rome) had been conditioned to think and respond to events.

The power to punish that the *princeps* now possessed was such that it was assumed to inspire fear and resentment, especially when that power was bestowed as an inheritance. Such a presumption of hostility, in turn, appears to have created a volatile atmosphere in which—while open criticism was unthinkable—almost any form of speech or writing nevertheless required scrutiny for possible subversive messages. This unwieldy destructive power thus placed the *princeps* in a mutually threatened and threatening position within the world he aspired to control; his disastrous measures of self-protection could, in principle, require eradicating the entirety of the Roman population if they (and he) were not careful. Thus conflagration became all the more inviting as a metaphor for a ruler’s capacity to transform or destroy a society: to remake Rome in his image, perhaps, but equally to unmake it in a Phaethon-esque attempt to grasp the reins of power more forcefully.

in chaos antiquum confundimur: Ovid's *Phaethon* and the Poetics and Politics of Succession

The text of the *Metamorphoses* creates a comprehensive network of allusions and associations that simultaneously celebrates the Augustan cultural achievement and emphasizes the fragility and mutability of that vision. Augustus was *princeps* for the majority of Ovid's life, but the poet grew up during the turbulent events of the second triumvirate and the uncertain years of the newly established principate; this history is likely to have again loomed large in Augustus's later years, as Romans pondered their future in the absence of the ruler who had controlled the city's destiny for over four decades.³⁶ Perhaps as a result of this atmosphere, as well as of Ovid's own sense of belatedness in relation to poets of the earlier Augustan era, the text of the *Metamorphoses* overall displays an intense awareness of the stakes of political succession, as well as of poetic epigonality.³⁷ Much as Ovid writes to match and surpass the legacy of his poetic predecessors, he also works in the shadow of—and in a certain sense, in competition with—Augustus, as a constructor of worlds and a controller of destinies.³⁸ As Denis Feeney has observed, attempting to frame the ideological aspects of Ovid's work in narrow pro-Augustan or anti-Augustan terms is too reductive; Ovid “writes not against or for but *about* Augustus.”³⁹ As we saw in chapter 1, the Augustan principate's attempt to present transformative political events as returns to the past was echoed and reinforced by the era's architectural and monumental rhetoric.⁴⁰ Likewise, the shape-shifting characters and speaking statues of the *Metamorphoses* propagate ancient narratives through constant disruption and transformation.⁴¹

As Alessandro Barchiesi has stated, in this era the themes of imperial succession, the education of the *princeps*-to-be, and the overwhelming weight of the responsibility that now came with the conferral of the ever-expanding *imperium* were becoming central to the Roman imaginary and to epic poetry.⁴² From the dispute over lineage that begins the episode to the extravagant monumental epitaph commemorating the boy's lost promise that concludes it, Ovid's Phaethon narrative, the longest single episode in the *Metamorphoses*, reworks well-worn models to address the specific cultural preoccupations and dynastic rhetoric of late Augustan Rome.⁴³ 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.⁴⁴ The Phaethon narrative is embedded in a wider

sequence that repeatedly stresses the potentially disastrous consequences of combining family dynamics and global politics.⁴⁵ Conflicts between and among human and divine agents lead up to the Great Flood in *Metamorphoses* 1, a chain of events that scholars explicitly analogize with the cycle of civil conflict at the end of the republic.⁴⁶ Seneca's criticism of the flood sequence is often cited: he objects to it as strangely detached or even playful in its presentation of world-wide calamity.⁴⁷ Yet Ovid's focus on the epic and cosmic magnitude of the event allows for a degree of abstraction that itself invites a number of literary parallels. Likewise, the universal aspects of the catastrophic flood and fire sequence presented in *Met.* 1–2 also suggest several important ideological subtexts.

As Barchiesi notes, Ovid's flood narrative both corresponds to the Lucretian prediction of universal destruction and prefigures the characterization of the Phaethon episode as a kind of Stoic *ekpyrosis*.⁴⁸ Other scholars have shown that Phaethon's destructive tour de force also provides Ovid with an opportunity to rework a number of Vergil's most famous scenes in a pointed fashion. Yet as James O'Hara reminds us, the tale of "a son's inability to handle his father's duties" is among those that "easily lend themselves to political interpretations on various levels."⁴⁹ The imminent death of Augustus—along with other destabilizing events, including conspiracies to overthrow the *princeps* and the untimely deaths of several presumed heirs—can be imagined as paramount concerns in the minds of Romans during the era of this text's composition.

In Book 1, both the lightning that Jupiter hurls against the bloodthirsty king Lycaon and the catastrophic flood that Lycaon's crimes invite upon the earth anticipate Phaethon's near-universal conflagration in Book 2.⁵⁰ Jupiter, as he plans his destruction of life on earth, refrains from using his thunderbolt to wipe out humanity because he "recalls" (*reminiscitur*, *Met.* 1.256) that the world's greatest destruction will be incendiary: *tempus, / quo mare, quo tellus correptaque regia caeli ardeat*, "a time when the sea, the earth, and the heavenly palace would catch fire and burn" (*Met.* 1.257–58). As Brooks Otis and others have shown, Jupiter's "recollection" here functions intertextually, looking back to Lucretius's prediction of Phaethon's disaster; at the same time, it offers an intratextual clue, looking forward to the upcoming conflagration in the next book.⁵¹ As the catastrophe of the flood unfolds, the Phaethon-esque image of chariots becomes prominent in the language used to characterize the destruction.⁵² The upheaval of the flood sequence serves 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. By analogy, then, the earth's

recovery from the flood (*Met.* 1.381–437) becomes a textual proxy for Rome's recovery from the destructive events of the mid-first century BCE.⁵³ Into this freshly recovered world, Ovid introduces the agent of its next destruction: Phaethon, the son of Sol/Helios (here syncretized with Phoebus Apollo, Augustus's patron deity).⁵⁴

Phaethon's anxieties over his parentage are activated during a spat with his age-mate Epaphus; as Llewelyn Morgan observes, Phaethon's story is "obviously fundamentally concerned with the relationship between son and father," since Phaethon originally sets off on his mission to disprove taunts about his "false father" (*genitoris . . . falsi*).⁵⁵ It is his contested status as the "son of a god"—and ultimately his desire to prove himself a worthy heir—that drives Phaethon to his catastrophic end. At *Met.* 2.21–23, when he first arrives at the palace, he cannot approach his father because the sunlight is too strong for him. At 2.31, he is described as *rerum novitate paventem* ("alarmed at the novelty of things"). Phaethon's overwhelmed reaction is understandable in a mortal who has just crossed the threshold of a divinity, yet it seems unpromising in terms of the youth's ability to measure up to his divine parent's radical vision of the world.⁵⁶

When Phaethon enters the *regia Solis* (*Met.* 2.1), he enters Ovid's artistic representation of the same ordered cosmos that Augustus claimed to control. The ekphrastic description of this space offers visual and verbal echoes of several of Augustan Rome's most ideologically loaded sites and texts; the many points of correspondence between the Augustan Temple of Apollo Palatinus and the Ovidian Palace of the Sun have inspired detailed analysis from a number of scholars.⁵⁷ Barchiesi too reads the literary topography of the *Metamorphoses* in terms of Roman urban space: Olympus is mapped upon the Palatine, while the Palace of the Sun and the Flight of Phaethon represent a cosmic version of the Circus Maximus.⁵⁸ As Andrew Feldherr argues, when Phaethon passes through the doors of the *regia Solis*, he moves into a world of animated artistic figures, beginning with the *pater* himself, the Sun-god.⁵⁹ The Sun is surrounded by an array of personifications of the hours and seasons: a "living" sundial/solar calendar that functions as a finely drawn allegorical portrait of the alleged control over time itself that Augustus so avidly promoted in his complex of monuments on the Campus Martius.⁶⁰ All of these suggested analogies are compelling, and given Ovid's multivalent style of allusion, they need not cancel each other out. Speaking in general terms, it is clear that all these structures offered major value as symbols of renewed cosmic order: just as

Augustus's Palatine/Circus complex and Campus Martius monuments functioned in concert as emblems of Rome's recovery from the chaos of civil war, so Ovid's *regia Solis* represents the restoration of the earth after the flood.⁶¹ Importantly, however, Ovid provides a number of hints that this glorious new vision of the *cosmos* (and, by implication, the *imperium*) is not as stable as it first appears.⁶²

The collocation in lines 1–3 of *Solis erat . . . fastigia* calls to mind Propertius's description of the solar chariot atop Augustus's Palatine temple to Apollo (*Solis erat supra fastigia currus*, Prop. 2.31.11).⁶³ Thus an image from the pictorial vocabulary of Rome's triumph over disorder—rendered as poetic art by Propertius—stands poised to take on “a life of its own” as a proponent of chaos in Ovid's poem when Phaethon takes flight.⁶⁴ Likewise, the architectonic ivory (*ebur*, *Met.* 2.3) picks up the glow from the golden stone pillars and rosy bronze-alloy fittings that flash like fire (*clara micante auro flammās imitante pyropo*, 2.2); this may well have evoked Augustus's gleaming temple.⁶⁵ They also, however, echo characterizations in republican tragedy of Troy's oriental splendor, doomed to a fiery fate.⁶⁶ Thus these lines tap into the connection in the Roman imagination between material splendor and impending demise, as these glowing decorations foretell the flames that will soon threaten to consume the cosmos.

In another illustration of the orderly world that Phaethon is destined to disrupt, Vulcan's handiwork on the palace doors is celebrated as an improvement over the earthly realm that it represents (*Met.* 2.5: *materiam superabat opus*, “the work surpassed its inspiration”).⁶⁷ The claim that this art “surpasses its model” offers not only a metapoetic swipe at the Vergilian model of Aeneas's shield, which this description recalls, but also a reminder that cosmologies always carry political implications.⁶⁸ Thus the scene suggests connections between the virtual world of the text and the concrete historical events surrounding the text's creation. There is, moreover, an important intratextual allusion in this line that forms part of a larger proleptic pattern in the Phaethon episode. The Palace of the Sun exists in a cosmic realm that presumably cannot be threatened by fire, but as Robert Brown points out, “it is precisely the universe portrayed on the doors which Phaethon almost brings tumbling down.”⁶⁹ The world upon which Vulcan's masterpiece is modeled will soon be aflame, providing nothing more than fuel (another possible meaning of *materiam*) for an overwhelming conflagration (*materiam superabat opus*, *Met.* 2.5 ~ *ignis enim superavit*, Lucr. *DRN* 5.396).⁷⁰ Such proleptic use of fire imagery and metaphor

also calls attention to Phaethon's function in *Metamorphoses* 1–2 as paratragic figure.

Like Vergil's Dido, Ovid's Phaethon is doomed by the externalization of his own innate passions.⁷¹ Hints of Phaethon's future begin in Book 1: at 755 he is reported to have "flushed red" (*erubuit*) in response to Epaphus's taunt.⁷² This metaphorical heat is poignantly recalled when his lifeless body falls to earth, his face still smoking (*fumantiaque . . . ora*, *Met.* 2.325); at 1.766, when he leaps joyfully in response to his mother's confirmation of his divine parentage, the metrically striking *emicat* ("he flashes forth") uses imagery that commonly describes flames or sparks, anticipating the streak of his flaming hair as he is hurled headlong from the chariot by Jupiter's lightning (*rutilos flamma populante capillos*, *Met.* 2.319);⁷³ and at *Met.* 1.777, where the sly phrasing of *concipit aethera mente*, "he grasps the heavens with his imagination," suggests another double entendre: *aether* is etymologically related to fire, while *concupere* frequently suggests both catching fire and contracting disease.⁷⁴ Finally, when Phaethon's father tries to deter him by detailing the journey's risks, the youth clings fixedly to his original purpose; "he is aflame with desire for the chariot" (*flagrat . . . cupidine currus*, 2.104) as he insists on his prize.⁷⁵

While Phaethon's Dido-esque externalization of his inner fire shapes him as a tragic hero, other features of this scene mark him out specifically as a failed leader—and as such, unsuitable candidate for deification. Ovid's Phoebus displays his own superior abilities as a divine leader, laying out a well-ordered series of arguments against his son's irrational goals.⁷⁶ Phaethon, either unwilling or unable to engage in rational discourse, refuses to address the logic of these reasons. Thus, the use of the Homeric calque *magnanimus* to describe the boy (*Met.* 2.111) no longer seems as lofty, as in Lucretius's more rationalizing version of the myth.⁷⁷ Rather, the obstinacy and overconfidence that Ovid has conveyed in his construction of Phaethon's character form an ironic comment on the blatantly unrealistic ambitions of our "great-souled" protagonist.⁷⁸ Nonetheless, when we arrive at the episode's climactic conflagration, Ovid denies the possibility of reading Phaethon's rise and fall as an abstracted object lesson.

Ovid gives us access to Phaethon's point of view and his sensations as he loses control of the cosmic chariot and is consumed by flames. The text unfolds a map of the world scorched by Phaethon's flight, suggesting the universal consequences of his personal tragedy. The sequence is narrated from Phaethon's perspective, however, and the focalization prevents us from coming through its reading as detached observers.⁷⁹

*magnae pereunt cum moenibus urbes,
 cumque suis totas populis incendia gentis
 in cinerem vertunt; silvae cum montibus ardent;
 ardet Athos Taurusque Cilix et Tmolus et Oete
 et tum sicca, prius creberrima fontibus, Ide
 virgineusque Helicon et nondum Oeagrius Haemus:
 ardet in immensum geminatis ignibus Aetne
 Parnasosque biceps et Eryx et Cynthus et Othrys
 et tandem nivibus Rhodope caritura Mimasque
 Dindymaque et Mycale natusque ad sacra Cithaeron.
 nec prosunt Scythiae sua frigora: Caucasus ardet
 Ossaque cum Pindo maiorque ambobus Olympus
 aeriaeque Alpes et nubifer Appenninus.
 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;
 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
 Aethiopum populos nigrum traxisse colorem;
 tum facta est Libye raptis umoribus aestu
 arida. (Ov. Met. 2.214–38)⁸⁰*

Great cities perish along with their walls, and the flames turn whole nations, along with their peoples, to ash. Forests burn, and hilltops, too. Mount Athos is on fire, Cilician Taurus, Tmolus, Oete and Ida—once covered with fountains, now dry—and Helicon home of the Muses, and Haemus not yet known as Oeagrius. Aetna blazes into something colossal, double-flamed; the twin peaks of Parnassus are ablaze—as are Eryx, Cynthus, Othrys, Rhodope (which will now lack snow), Mimas and Dindyma, Mycale and Cithaeron, ancient in rites. Scythia's cold weather does it no good. The Caucasus burns, and Ossa with Pindus, and Olympos greater than either, and the lofty Alps and cloudy Appennines. 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 withstand the ash and embers 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 fleet horses. It was then, so it's believed, that Ethiopians got their dark coloring, blood summoned to their bodies' surface. That's when Libya became a desert, her moisture stolen in the wave of heat.

Readers are invited to see and feel events from Phaethon's perspective (*adspicit*, 228; *sentit*, 230; *neque . . . ferre potest*, 231–32), as he essentially becomes witness to his own cremation.⁸¹ He is encircled (*involvitur*) and concealed in pitchy smoke (*picea caligine tectus*) in the same language used to describe the grove fire at *Georgics* 2.303–9 (*ignis . . . totum involuit flammis nemus et ruit atram / ad caelum picea crassus caligine nubem*).⁸² As I argued in chapter 1, the simile in *Aeneid* 4 comparing Dido to an injured deer contains several telling parallels to this passage from *Georgics* 2. Here, then, Ovid's Phaethon, already so Dido-like in his psychic inflammation, becomes even more so in his manifestation of a "Vergilian" conflagration as his chariot catches fire.

The panoramic view of the earth aflame recalls the lines on the global ramifications of civil conflict introducing the charioteer simile from *Georgics* 1 (509–11).⁸³ Phaethon's death is shown as a global catastrophe with a lasting impact on the landscape. Notably, it is Phaethon's home territory in Africa that is most affected by his failed ambitions. Phaethon's own people in Ethiopia (*Aethiopasque suos*, *Met.* 1.778), the text claims, are transformed by the heat of his chariot (see above, *Met.* 2.236–37). The effect of fire's heat on Libya's damp earth (*raptis umoribus*, 237) again seems to invert another fire image from the *Georgics*. Although fire's drying effect on damp earth is described as salutary at *Georgics* 1.87–88, the extraction of dampness in Libya does not improve its soil but instead leaves it a permanent desert. Phaethon's failure as a charioteer thus simultaneously reverses the regeneration of the earth from *Metamorphoses* 1 and negates Vergilian poetics; the imagery of the *Georgics* appears as a negative model that, like the earth itself, is "unmade" in the course of Phaethon's ride.

These lines also include a series of reversals of famous scenes from the *Aeneid*. Unlike Vergil's Neptune at *Aen.* 1.155–56, who rides triumphantly away from the scene in his "obedient vehicle," Phaethon is at a loss as to how to proceed here and has no idea where he is: "himself in a panic, he knows neither how to turn the reins, nor which way to go" (*ipse pavet nec qua commissas flec-*

tat habenas / nec scit qua sit iter, *Met.* 2.169–70). Nor, even should he know, could he command his panicked horses (*nec, si sciat, imperet illis*, 2.170). Vergil explicitly compares Neptune's stabilizing influence over the sea at *Aeneid* 1.151 to that of a Roman statesman "heavy" in his *pietas* and distinctions (*pietate gravem ac meritis*); here it is Phaethon's fatal lack of hefty balance (*gravitate carebat*, 2.162) that leads to his undoing.⁸⁴ Rather than the authoritative Vergilian Neptune, Phaethon resembles Vergil's hapless *pastores* of the similes from *Aeneid* 2 and 4, described as uninformed or unaware (*inscius* and *nescius*, respectively; cf. *nec scit . . . nec, si sciat*, *Met.* 2.169–70) about the dangers around them and the damage they cause.⁸⁵ Ovid drives home the comparison to Vergilian models of leadership with the actions of Neptune himself in this passage.

The flood at *Met.* 1.330–42 has already alluded to the *Aeneid*'s paradigmatic opening simile with its image of Neptune restoring the sea's equilibrium.⁸⁶ Here, in the description of Phaethon's rampage, Neptune rises up again from the deep, apparently poised to "reprise" his heroic moments from *Aen.* 1 and *Met.* 1: three times he tries to break the surface of the boiling sea, and three times he fails (*Met.* 2.270–71: *ter . . . ter*).⁸⁷ 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*, *Aen.* 2.792–93). These lines collapse the linear progression of the *Aeneid* back onto itself; thus they suggest both a return to the past and a troubling forecast for the future. In essence, Neptune's threefold retreat depicts the failure of Vergilian statecraft to meet the challenges posed by the Ovidian future, imagined here as a confrontation between water and fire. By implication, the political catastrophe averted in Vergil's paradigmatic Neptune/statesman simile from *Aeneid* 1 again emerges as an imminent possibility.

Phaethon's chaotic trajectory returns the earth to disorder, undoing the divine work that followed the previous cycle of destruction and renewal represented by the flood in Book 1. The possibility of *ekpyrosis* emerges indirectly in the episode's conclusion. Suffocating from the smoke (*vapor*, *Met.* 2.283), Tellus (Earth) begs Jupiter to pay attention to her burnt hair (*tostos en adspice crines*, *Met.* 2.283) and the ashes (*favillae*, *Met.* 2.284) floating around her face. She warns that her parlous state anticipates a universal conflagration, not just a terrestrial one: the fires will soon threaten sea and sky as well as earth (*Met.* 2.290–95), recalling the tripartite division of the (re-)ordered cosmos depicted on the palace doors at the beginning of Book 2.⁸⁸ As a result of Phaethon's ride, Tellus now says, "we are thrown into the old chaos" (*in chaos antiquum confundimur*, *Met.* 2.299), and the poet seems to bring the narrative progression of the *Meta-*

morphoses back to its beginnings in cosmic chaos. Tellus urges the ruler-god to take action and deliver the universe from imminent destruction at 299–300: *eripe flammis / si quid adhuc superest, et rerum consule summae*, “rescue from the flames whatever still remains, and consider our common survival.” This language, highly inflected with notions of civic responsibility, also echoes Aeneas’s escape from Troy in *Aeneid* 2.⁸⁹ Tellus’s appeal to Jupiter’s responsibility for the cosmos finally compels him to act. After taking careful aim (*Met.* 2.304–10), Jupiter fires a thunderbolt that stops the chariot, paradoxically quenching “fire with fierce fire” (*saevis conpescuit ignibus ignes*, *Met.* 2.315) and striking Phaethon out of the sky. In other words, the vehicle with which Phaethon’s father has endowed him (*currus . . . paterni*, *Met.* 2.327) is a form of *force majeure* that can only be checked by the even greater power of an even more authoritative figure.

Jupiter’s checking of Phaethon’s destructive trajectory ultimately forms part of the poem’s larger scheme of presenting universal disorder followed by recovery, playing upon familiar cosmological themes of destruction and renewal.⁹⁰ Yet it also represents an escalation in violence; here Jupiter’s lightning slays not just a human transgressor (as before, with Lycaon in Book 1) but the child of one of his own fellow gods—an adolescent, moreover, who did not intentionally do harm—bringing the force of his punishment distressingly “close to home.” In the aftermath of Phaethon’s death, Sol/Phoebus covers his face as a sign of mourning (*obductos . . . condiderat vultus*, *Met.* 2.329–30); he fails to rise the next day (*Met.* 2.331–33) and threatens further eclipses (*Met.* 2.381–85). These phrases echo Vergil’s use of these motifs (a veiled sun, a possible eclipse) to dramatize the cosmic ramifications of Rome’s political turmoil in *Georgics* 1; in effect, Ovid simply returns these images to their “original” mythic setting, but their debt to the *Georgics* nevertheless tinges them with distinctly ideological undertones.⁹¹

In Italian territory, the impact of Phaethon’s fall is inscribed in the landscape. The grandiloquent epitaph (*Met.* 2.325–32) that the Hesperian Naiads offer to the *vestigia currus* that fall from the sky at 2.318 recalls the heirs entombed at the Augustan funeral complex in the Campus Martius.⁹² Several of Augustus’s potential heirs were commemorated with a mass of ceremonies, inscriptions, and monuments around the city.⁹³ Together, these sites could be said to form a trail of memorials to lost imperial youth, scattered across Rome much as Phaethon’s crash debris dots the mythic landscape.⁹⁴ Ultimately, however, the problem that Ovid’s Phaethon embodies did not live or die with any

single individual. Rather, Phaethon represents the risks inherent in any form of inherited power—especially power as concentrated as that of the Augustan principate. For Vergil, the upheavals of the past are remembered as the price at which a secure future was won for Rome. For Ovid, whose career took flight amidst the security of Augustan hegemony, the triumviral conflicts are a distant memory, but imperial succession is the new crisis of legitimacy. Accordingly, the glimpse of the future that Ovid's 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 effected.

Neither Jupiter's Wrath nor Fire: Iterations and Alterations in *Metamorphoses* 15

In the last book of the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid offers a final demonstration of the cyclical nature of fiery destruction to balance out the conflagration at its beginning. For the benefit of Numa, the future second king of Rome, Pythagoras gives an account of the workings of the universe that becomes the poem's primary vehicle for explanation of the nature of the world, the workings of the soul, and the trajectory of history.⁹⁵ As Philip Hardie points out, the Speech of Pythagoras "may be seen as a microcosmic recapitulation of . . . the whole of the *Metamorphoses* in its span of time from the memory of the Golden Age (cf. 1.89–112) to prophecy of the greatness of Rome."⁹⁶ Yet the authority of Pythagoras's vision appears questionable at various junctures.⁹⁷ The narrator even prefaces the speech with the comment that Pythagoras's words are "learned indeed, but not actually believed," and Pythagoras's lofty speech does occasionally veer into wittily exaggerated seriousness.⁹⁸ As he propounds his theory of constant physical change and regeneration, Pythagoras offers the incendiary death and rebirth of the phoenix as an exception to the ordinary cycles of life at *Met.* 15.391–417.⁹⁹

According to Pythagoras, the bird is of Assyrian origin, although elsewhere it is more commonly associated with Egypt or Arabia.¹⁰⁰

*Haec tamen ex aliis generis primordia ducunt,
una est, quae reparet seque ipsa reseminet, ales:
Assyrii Phoenicia vocant; non fruge neque herbis,
sed turis lacrimis et suco vivit amomi.* (Ov. *Met.* 15.391–94)

Yet these creatures all have origins from others of their kind; there is one, a bird, that renews itself and itself reproduces: Assyrians call it the phoenix. Not on seeds nor herbs does it survive, but on drops of incense and cardamom sap.

Since Ovid's Pythagoras often proves something of a confabulator as he recounts several lifetimes of memories, he may be misremembering or misrepresenting the bird here.¹⁰¹ Alternately, the variation could reveal a chauvinistic carelessness regarding the nomenclature of non-Roman peoples.¹⁰² Yet Assyria is often imagined in Greco-Roman literature as one of the earliest kingdoms to achieve preeminent status.¹⁰³ Attributing the naming of the phoenix to the Assyrians, therefore, extends the Pythagorean theme of hegemony and collapse back to its putative origin, reminding us again of the cyclical, phoenix-like nature of dynastic power. In Pythagoras's description of the phoenix's death and rebirth, when the bird has completed the five *saecula* of its life (*haec ubi quinque suae conplevit saecula vitae*, *Met.* 15.594) it builds an elaborate nest at the top of a palm tree, which it lines with an assortment of spices and ointments (items also often associated with funeral pyres).¹⁰⁴ After the bird self-incinerates on its nest/pyre, it is said, "a tiny phoenix is reborn from its father's body, bound to live as many years" (*totidem qui vivere debeat annos / corpore de patrio parvum phoenica renasci*, *Met.* 15.402–3). So the Assyrian origin of the bird here—as well as its allotted span of *saecula*—aligns this myth with the sequence of successive empires to which Rome imagined itself the heir, a topic Pythagoras turns to in earnest a few lines later.

The description of the phoenix, the king of birds, is thus preparatory for the conclusion of Pythagoras's speech, in which he ruminates on the rise and fall of great nation-states.¹⁰⁵ In Pythagoras's formulation, supreme power is transferred from one great people to the next, only to collapse as another power rises in turn (*Met.* 15.420–22): it travels from Troy to Mycenae and various Greek cities before finally settling on Troy's "descendant," Rome (*Met.* 15.424–33).¹⁰⁶ This young city, Pythagoras tells Numa, "is changing as it grows and one day will be the capital of the whole wide world" (*Haec igitur formam crescendo mutat et olim immensi caput orbis erit*, *Met.* 15.434–35). As Miller notes, Pythagoras's "one great exemplar of an emerging nation will rise from the ashes of his principal illustration of a formerly grand city now destroyed."¹⁰⁷ Thus Rome itself becomes a phoenix figure. Yet as William Anderson has argued of this passage, "Ovid . . . knew (and showed it) that there was no such thing as *Roma*

aeterna: his juxtaposition of rising Rome to the fallen cities of the past, nothing but names . . . , indicates clearly what he foresaw for his city.”¹⁰⁸ Pythagoras’s speech links the cyclical, ever-shifting nature of dynastic power with the life cycle of the phoenix: in some respects eternal but periodically reborn in a new form.¹⁰⁹ Pythagoras’s musings on the pyre of the phoenix and the immolation of great cities also offer a thematic anticipation of the poem’s concluding episode, the death and deification of Julius Caesar.

By Ovid’s account, the process of Caesar’s deification mimics the regenerative self-immolation of the phoenix, even as it reverses the failed catasterism of Phaethon’s flight. Ovid avoids narrating the chaotic spectacle of Caesar’s assassination and subsequent cremation; instead he presents the former as a crisis averted by divine intervention, while the latter is evoked in the image of Caesar’s flaming form as he ascends to heaven.¹¹⁰ As Venus carries Caesar’s soul to heaven, it takes on a glow and begins to catch fire (*Met.* 15.847: *lumen capere atque ignescere*). As the goddess releases her descendant’s spirit from her embrace, he shoots forth as a comet, drawing fiery tresses across the open sky (*Met.* 15.849: *flammiferumque trahens spatioso limite crinem*) on his way up—much as Phaethon did on his descent (*Met.* 2.319–21: *rutilos flamma populante capillos / volvitur in praeceps longoque per aera tractu / fertur*). As I argued in chapter 1, as early as Vergil’s *Georgics* we see analogies drawn between the calamitous events of the triumviral era and Phaethon’s fall, an event marked by the comet-like streak of his flaming chariot as he fell to earth. Unlike the mortal Phaethon, Caesar’s spirit withstands the potentially calamitous transformation in style; although this image acknowledges Caesar’s Phaethon-like qualities, his ultimate fate exemplifies not Phaethon’s fatal ambition but a form of catasterism that grants him immortality as his mortal form is incinerated.¹¹¹

The unique way in which the phoenix was imagined to continue its line also appears to inform the way power is imagined passing from Caesar to Augustus to Tiberius. The text asserts at *Met.* 15.760–61 that Caesar’s assassination and apotheosis is necessary to provide Rome with a leader not born from “mortal seed” (*mortali semine*), echoing the description of the phoenix as a bird that reproduces itself (*se . . . ipsa reseminet*, *Met.* 15.392).¹¹² None of Caesar’s accomplishments in war or statecraft did more “to change him into a new heavenly body, a crested star / than his own family line” (*in sidus vertere novum stella-mque comantem / quam sua progenies*, 15.749–50). Greater still than Caesar’s *acta*, the narrator continues, is the fact that he “emerged / arose / came into being” (*exstitit*) as Augustus’s *pater* (15.750–51). This ambiguous phrasing pres-

ents Caesar's adoption of Octavian as almost an act of creation, a nonbiological form of paternity with mystical overtones.¹¹³ The phoenix also embodies filial piety, since it emerges from the pyre as a perfect replica of its father, and mourns him extensively.¹¹⁴

Thus cosmic cycles of destruction and rebirth represented by Phaethon and the phoenix become clearer as analogues for political chaos and urban collapse, the twin evils that plagued Rome in the two decades that followed Caesar's death. By implication, however, Ovid invites us to recall the conclusion demanded by Pythagoras's own logic of progression and collapse: that Rome, too, will one day be reduced to ashes, giving rise to some new power.¹¹⁵ In the final lines of the *Metamorphoses*, a similar ambiguity undercuts Ovid's praise of his own work. Ovid celebrates his poem as an accomplishment that "Jupiter's anger cannot erase, nor fire, nor sword, nor consuming time" (*Met.* 15.871–72: *nec Iovis ira nec ignis / nec poterit ferrum nec edax abolere vetustas*).¹¹⁶ He hitches his work's fate to Caesar's fiery star, predicting that after his own death he, too, will be borne into the astral realms (*super alta . . . astra*, *Met.* 15.875–76), and that Rome's own dominance of the earthly plane will ensure that he lives on the lips of her people (*Met.* 15.875–79). Ovid's poetic self will imitate Caesar's catasterism, avoiding the fate of Phaethon suggested by Jupiter's wrathful retribution (*Iovis ira*). Yet even within his own lifetime, a nebulous combination of poetry and politics made Ovid subject to imperial reprisals.¹¹⁷ In Ovid's exile poetry, his depictions in the *Metamorphoses* of both Phaethon and Pythagoras fall subject to reinterpretation from his new vantage point on the outskirts of the empire.

The Ovid of the *Tristia*, like the Pythagoras of the *Metamorphoses*, has become displaced, reliant on powers of memory that occasionally prove faulty; likewise, his own legacy of poetic accomplishments has become subject to reading in hindsight as anticipations of his own career's unhappy conclusion.¹¹⁸ Ovid recounts burning some of his own poems in response to the decree of his banishment in 8 CE, in a gesture reminiscent of Timagenes's burning of his histories after being banned from Augustus's household: "Then also, when I was escaping, I burned certain verses which would have been pleasing, wrathful with zeal for my verses" (*tunc quoque, cum fugerem, quaedam placitura cremavi / iratus studio carminibus meis*, *Tr.* 4.10.63–64). At *Tristia* 1.1.79–82, Ovid's account in the *Metamorphoses* of Phaethon's self-inflicted ruin becomes, in retrospect, a cautionary anticipation of his own fall from the peak of Roman poetic renown:

*vitaret caelum Phaethon si viveret, et quos
optaret stulte, tangere nollet equos.
me quoque, quae sensi, fateor Iovis arma timere:
me reor infesto, cum tonat, igne peti.*

Phaethon would avoid the heavens, if he were alive, and he would not want to touch the horses that he foolishly desired. I admit that I too fear Jupiter's weaponry, which I have felt. I imagine myself sought out by hostile fire whenever it thunders.

As Michael Putnam observes, here Ovid "allegorizes the folly which laid him low," portraying himself as a victim of an avenging global (even cosmic) authority.¹¹⁹ The "wrath and fire" of Jupiter (*nec Iovis ira nec ignis*) of Ovid's concluding boast in the *Metamorphoses* (*Met.* 15.871) may not be able to touch his poetic accomplishment overall. Yet their political analogue, imperial punishment, has jumped from its literary frame and attacked the poet himself. Thus the fires that Ovid so compellingly uses to allegorize imperial authority in the *Metamorphoses* are reinterpreted in the *Tristia* as the instruments of Ovid's own undoing. Ovid's remembrances of Phaethon in the *Tristia*—tendentious though they may be—reformulate the signature catastrophes of the *Metamorphoses* into a more personalized meditation on creative ambition, as well as on the price that authors may pay for overreaching.

Phaethon's apparent aesthetic, literary, and even philosophical appeal was inextricable from the ideological impact his story carried in the early first century CE. Among Ovid's literary successors, Phaethon repeatedly takes to the skies; my discussion earlier of the *Consolatio ad Liviam* has already suggested the impact of Ovid's Phaethon upon poetry explicitly concerned with doomed imperial heirs and conflagration. By the end of Ovid's career, the myth was even more freighted: not just with its clear parallels for the risks of imperial succession but also with Ovid's reimagining in the *Tristia* of Phaethon as an emblem of poetic ambition brought low by imperial authority. Manilius, coming late in the Augustan sequence, seems both to distill and to amplify the lessons and imagery offered by his predecessors. Fire continues to insist on its own essential uncontrollability—and thus to function as a continual challenge to the authoritative (or would-be) figures in the text.

And the Whole Universe Would Burn: Manilius and Astral Conflagration

Manilius's *Astronomica*, a lengthy didactic poem on celestial phenomena, finally seems to lay bare the ideological subtext that his models treat in more muted and elliptical terms. Probably composed between 10 and 20 CE, Manilius's text repeatedly links Roman leadership to fire, cosmic dissolution, and civic upheaval in transparent ways that suggest the centrality of this rhetoric to the cultural discourse from which his predecessors drew.¹²⁰ Like Vergil's *Georgics*, the *Astronomica* advertises itself as a didactic text that can help explain the world around us; Manilius asserts the value of his text to leadership in overt terms, beginning with an explicit dedication to the *princeps*. At 1.13, he acknowledges his own work as a product of the peace established by Augustus. The intellectual heir to Ovid and Vergil as a writer of long-format epic, Manilius is no less totalizing in his vision than these writers, going to some lengths to establish 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 (in all likelihood) was witness, for Manilius the survival of the state through times of transition is a major thematic concern.

Manilius's citations of Roman authors invite us to consider the ideological subtext with which these models are freighted, as he fuses the leadership themes raised by his Latin predecessors with Greek technical and philosophical models. Especially in moments of digression from his primary model, Aratus's *Phaenomena*, Manilius often reveals the contemporary concerns and specific literary and ideological debates of the readership for which he was shaping his material.¹²¹ Likewise, as Monica Gale has shown, special attention is due to sections of the poem without any obvious technical relevance; indeed, their very "tangentiality" should alert us to the importance of other poetic and cultural agendas.¹²² This is especially true of references to recent Roman history, since these obviously deviate from the poem's Hellenistic Greek model. His first book begins with an extended cosmology, describing the formation of the cosmos and the division of the elements in a sequence with clear debts to the first book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The very first line, however, advertises the author's debt to Vergil. Offered in support of Manilius's programmatic argument that the stars he is describing are important because of their implications for life on

earth—"stars charged with knowledge of fate" (*conscia fati / sidera*, *Astr.* 1.1–2)—is an unmistakable echo of the introduction to Dido's final lines in *Aeneid* 4: "on the brink of death, she called to witness the gods and the stars charged with knowledge of fate" (*testatur moritura deos et conscia sidera fati*, *Aen.* 4.519–20). 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.¹²³ The phrase's original setting, then, evokes not a triumphant destiny but an unsettling cycle of violence: both the collapse of Dido's new state and the ultimate failure of Carthage's imperial ambitions. Similarly, the poet's Phaethon-like wish to traverse the skies and gain familiarity with the constellations (*Astr.* 1.13–15) would appear to have troubling associations for an audience familiar with Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.¹²⁴

In the *Astronomica*, the image of Phaethon is repeatedly associated with inadequate (or even dangerous) claimants to the seat of power. Manilius also, however, celebrates the notion of the poet himself as a Phaethon figure, imagining his narrator as a cosmic charioteer who will succeed not only in rivaling his poetic models but in blazing new trails across the poetic cosmos. As Patrick Glauthier has persuasively argued, Manilius's departures and deviations from Aratus serve a metapoetic agenda: the poet advances a self-representation as a literary Phaethon who "deviates" from his predecessor's path and sets fire to the Aratean heavens; Glauthier further suggests that in doing so, Manilius becomes a poetic Phaethon and thus risks breaking apart the framework of the universe.¹²⁵ Moreover, there is an important conceptual parallel between Manilius's image of the poetic successor as a potential Phaethon and the political overtones of succession that shape the project as a whole. Manilius seems at pains to resolve the tensions suggested in the imagery of his proem, insisting that his project is made safe by the peaceful conditions of the current regime: "there's only an opportunity for this during peace" (*hoc sub pace vacat tantum*, *Astr.* 1.13). Gale argues that Manilius's intertextual engagement with Vergil (and Aratus) overall serves "a squarely Augustan ideology."¹²⁶ The end of Book 1, however, destabilizes the vision of peace celebrated in its opening lines, returning to the Phaethon myth and conflating it with the worst catastrophes of Roman history. In this explicitly cosmological and natural-philosophical setting, evocations of Phaethon and celestial conflagration appear as direct analogues for reckless leaders and civil strife on earth, recontextualizing the ideologically driven images and narratives advanced by earlier Augustan authors.

Manilius closes his first book with a polysemous set of explanations for the

Milky Way (*Astr.* 1.685–750).¹²⁷ The most substantial explanation attributes the galaxy's shape to Phaethon, who blazed a path of destruction as he spun out of control, "hurtling through the constellations in his father's chariot" (*patrio curru per signa volentem*, *Astr.* 1.736). Elsewhere in the poem, however, Manilius asserts the order, regularity, and immutability of the *mundus* (1.456–531), explicitly stating that the *mundus* has always been and will always be the same. As Glauthier recognizes, the explanation involving Phaethon "[flies] in the face of this doctrine, and yet Manilius both relates them and treats them as factual."¹²⁸ This deviation or ambiguity, in turn, calls attention to a major political subtext in these lines. The significance of taking over the "father's chariot," already shaped by Vergil and Ovid as a metaphor for anxiety over succession in the Roman principate, becomes even more emphatic given the way Manilius phrases it here. The adjective *patrio*, in contrast to Ovid's phrasing (*currus . . . paterni*, *Met.* 2.327), conjures the word's close relationship to the Roman notion of the *patria*.¹²⁹ Just as in Vergil's programmatic simile from *Georgics* 1, the "chariot of state" hurtles out of control.¹³⁰ 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).¹³¹

Manilius asserts that fire is the most pervasive and powerful force in the cosmos: flame "takes hold of the bodies / fuel that suit its nature" (*materiamque sui dependit flamma capacem*, *Astr.* 1.822). The poet here nods to the presumed affinity between fire and those it afflicts, recalling not only the proleptic flames of desire and ambition that afflict (respectively) Vergil's Dido and Ovid's Phaethon but the fiery characterizations of leaders to whom "incendiary" ambitions are attributed: e.g., Cicero's Catiline or Sallust's Hannibal.¹³² Manilius asserts that "heavenly blazes" (*caeli incendia*, 875), a poetic gloss for *cometae* (870), portend disasters of various sorts, including barren crops (876–79); plague, in a description deeply indebted to Lucretius (890–91);¹³³ and wars, particularly civil. Comets in Manilius become heavily invested with poetic language, suggesting a form of agency in the events they are believed to predict: comets "signify" (*significant*, 1.892, 907) death and civil war; they "threaten" (*minantur*, 1.893; *minitantia*, 1.901) widespread devastation; and like Vergil's famous declaration at *Aen.* 1.1, they "sing" (*canunt*, 1.896) of turmoil on the earthly plane.¹³⁴ Manilius describes the battle of Philippi as particularly marked out by astral conflagration: "nor at any point did the heavens suffer more outbreaks of fire" (*Astr.* 1.907–8: *nec plura alias incendia mundus / sustinuit*).

Manilius presents Philippi as a repetition of Pharsalus (*Astr.* 1.910) in imitation of Vergil, but “caps” Vergil in presenting Actium as a further doubling of Philippi (*Astr.* 1.915–16: *repetita . . . rerum / alea*, “affairs put once again at hazard”).¹³⁵ The poetic and political intertwine once again, as the motif of sons “doubling” the conflicts initiated by their fathers again points toward the centrality of doubling and succession to Manilius’s project. The description of Sextus Pompey, “imitating his father’s foes, took captive the waters made safe by his parent” (*Astr.* 1.920–21: *patrios armis imitatus filius hostes / aequora Pompeius cepit defensa parenti*), echoes the reference to Phaethon and the *patrio . . . curru* at *Astr.* 1.738. Again, an unworthy heir corrupts the element mastered by his parent. Manilius claims doubling or twinship between these historical figures and their heavenly avatars, asserting the connection between fiery cosmic phenomena, especially Phaethon, and the propagators of triumviral conflict.

At the end of the poem (as it survives, at least) the poet again returns to this theme, asserting a close parallel between cosmic order and politics at Rome:

*utque per ingentis populus describitur urbes.
principiumque patres retinent et proximum equester
ordo locum, populumque equiti populoque subire
vulgus iners videas et iam sine nomine turbam,
sic etiam magno quaedam res publica mundo est
quam natura facit, quae caelo condidit urbem.
sunt stellae procerum similes, sunt proxima primis
sidera, suntque gradus atque omnia iusta priorum:
maximus est populus summo qui culmine fertur,
cui si pro numero vires natura dedisset,
ipse suas aether flammas sufferre nequiret,
totus et accenso mundus flagraret Olympo. (Man. *Astr.* 5.734–45)*

And as in great cities the inhabitants are divided into classes, of which the senate holds the prime position and the equestrian order the next one, and one may see the equestrians followed by the common people, the common people by the idle mob, and finally the nameless throng, so too in the mighty heavens there exists a republic made by Nature, who founded a city in the sky. There are superstars of lofty rank and others which come close to the highest ones; there are all the grades and privileges of superior orders. But outnumbering all these is the populace born around heaven’s dome: had nature given it powers com-

mensurate with its numbers, the burning zone of heaven itself would be unable to bear its flames, and the whole universe would burn, with Olympus ablaze.

Lines 744–45 echo the recollection of Phaethon offered in Book 1: “the nearby stars burned with new flames; even now, they recall the appearance of that past calamity” (*vicina novis flagrarunt sidera flammis / nunc quoque praeteriti faciem referentia casus*, 1.748–49). Essentially the whole universe would promptly self-immolate 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).¹³⁶ Thus Manilius raises the specter of the catastrophic outcome that he elsewhere argues is unthinkable, envisioning the breakdown not only the “natural” order of society he outlines in this passage but his own presentation of the laws governing the cosmos.¹³⁷ Moreover, the text presents this vision of *ekpyrosis* in terms that any reader of Roman political rhetoric would immediately recognize: an image of a hierarchical world in which the disadvantaged majority realize the strength of their numbers and rise up to engulf the universe in flames.

In contrast to the more covert and paradoxical readings imminent in Vergil and Ovid, Manilius provides a compelling illustration of how overt the rhetoric surrounding fire and leadership could be. While Vergil and Ovid address the ideological issues raised by Phaethon’s incendiary demise indirectly, Manilius links Phaethon directly with the worst crises any state can face. He describes not only Sextus Pompey but also (more controversially, if less directly) Octavian himself as Phaethon-esque leaders haunted by the legacy of their distinguished fathers. These readings suggest that the semidivine power of fire that the *princeps* now wields can extend into the entirety of Rome, if he is not careful; moreover, acquiring that power by virtue of blood inheritance—rather than demonstrated ability or a competition of equals—makes it considerably more dangerous. Fires in the city clearly presented a threat to the emperor’s claims to control the city’s physical landscape; equally, however, fire could represent the emperor’s own capacity to threaten and suppress political dissent.

Book-Burning, Memory, and Metaphor in Seneca

Authors as early as Timagenes of Alexandria were burning their own works in response to imperial interdiction, and Ovid at least suggested he would be will-

ing to do the same. The fate of the late-Augustan historian Titus Labienus, however, signaled a new level of aggression on the part of the *princeps* when it came to destroying offensive material.¹³⁸ According to the elder Seneca, after seeing his works burned by imperial decree Labienus “[did not] wish to be a survivor of his own masterpiece,” choosing instead to die.¹³⁹ Rather than risk the shameful denial of a proper cremation and burial as an enemy of the state, Labienus had himself walled up alive in his family tomb, thus avoiding the final indignity of having fire, “which had subsumed his reputation, denied to his body” (Sen. *Controv.* 10.7). Under the later Julio-Claudians, authors continued to face serious consequences for their attempts to publish work deemed inimical to the regimes under which they wrote.

In 25 CE, Cremutius Cordus became the first to be formally charged with *maiestas* (that is, harm to the integrity of the state) for writing a history.¹⁴⁰ The problem, according to Tacitus, was the author’s sympathetic portrayal of Brutus and Cassius.¹⁴¹ The senate decreed that Cremutius Cordus’s books were to be burned by the aediles.¹⁴² Cremutius himself committed suicide, either as a form of protest or (as is more likely) to avoid a trial and conviction on *maiestas* charges, which would have lasting legal consequences for his surviving family.¹⁴³ With this shift, writings hostile to the principate went from being considered defamatory to seditious; such transgressions were now punishable not just with exclusion or banishment but with death.¹⁴⁴ Copies of at least some of his works survived and were republished under Caligula.¹⁴⁵ Nevertheless, writers were now aware that they and their work were subject to retaliation and suppression of the most drastic kind. Yet punishment of the emperor’s critics did not 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.¹⁴⁶ The transfer of the emperor’s implied capacity for destruction from an author’s works to his person provides a new level of applicability for the metaphors surrounding “inflammatory” language.

Seneca is thought to have written the *Consolatio ad Marciam* in the 40s CE during a period of exile, before his ascendancy as Nero’s tutor and writer.¹⁴⁷ This treatise addresses Cremutius Cordus’s daughter Marcia, and its stated aim is to console her after the loss of her son. In the *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. Moreover, the incidents of book burning discussed above may have made conflagration all the more inviting as a metaphor for a ruler's capacity to transform or destroy a society.

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 (*Ad Marc.* 1.2–3, *magna illorum pars arserat*). Cremutius Cordus's 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."¹⁴⁸ 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:

decernebatur illi statua in Pompei theatro ponenda, quod exustum Caesar reficiebat: exclamavit Cordus tunc uere theatrum perire. quid ergo? non rumperetur supra cineres Cn. Pompei constitui Seianum et in monumentis maximi imperatoris consecrari perfidum militem? (Sen. *Ad Marc.* 22.4–5)

[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?

Like Timagenes before him, Seneca's Cremutius here offers memorably ironic commentary on a postconflagration reconstruction effort.¹⁴⁹ Seneca's description of the honorary statue of Sejanus erected "over Pompey's ashes" (*supra cineres . . . Pompei*) in the restored theater suggests a further violation of the triumvir's memory, evoking the ceremonial cremation at Rome that Pompey was famously denied. In commemorating Cremutius's remark, Seneca manages to give the historian the last word in his feud with Sejanus. Seneca's anecdote, however, brings back the memory not just of Cremutius's historical writings but his living voice.

Cremutius, an emblematic target of imperial book-burning, becomes a figure retrospectively "revived" from the attempts of imperial authority to destroy him through fire. Seneca's Cremutius is phoenix-like, rising up from the ashes

to speak again in a new form, “reborn” through Marcia’s pious efforts to preserve and republish the fragments of her father’s work.¹⁵⁰ The vivid recollections of literary admirers such as Seneca himself also contribute to this process. Seneca goes on to extend and amplify his own ventriloquization of Cremutius, resurrecting him as an almost divinized figure. Thus Seneca’s Cremutius Cordus “survives” the incineration of his works, making good on the promise of serial immortality that Ovid’s Pythagoras attributes to the phoenix, and to which Ovid himself lays claim in the closing lines of the *Metamorphoses*.

From his new seat on the astral plane, Seneca’s Cremutius Cordus *redivivus* is able to speak again—and to pass judgment—in his “own” voice. Seneca’s consolation closes with the image of Cremutius speaking directly to Marcia from a celestial seat (26.1: *tanto elatiore, quanto est ipse sublimior*), describing 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. He claims that his life’s work now seems a trivial thing, in comparison to the array of countless ages now open to his view:

*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?* (Sen. *Ad Marc.* 26.4)

What need to explain that here, no rival armies rage in contest, no fleets shatter each other, no parricides are here—either imagined or contemplated—no forums ring with strife in endless days, nothing here is done in secret, but minds are open, hearts revealed, lives transparent to the public, and every age—and all that is yet to come—is visible to us?

The rise and fall of great empires and cities, no less than the collapse of individual regimes and dynasties, becomes not only manageable but expected—and even welcome—from such a “cosmic viewpoint.”¹⁵¹ Seneca’s Cremutius reminds us of the end we all will meet, suggesting that Marcia should take comfort from the anticipation of this universal destruction.

The collapse of the cosmos that Seneca’s Cremutius anticipates includes an earthquake, a plague, and a flood, before ultimately ending with a fire, which “in huge conflagration will scorch and burn all mortal things” (*ignibus vastis torrebit incendetque mortalia*, 26.6). He continues:

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. (Sen. *Ad Marc.* 26.6–7)

And when the time comes for the world to be blotted out before beginning life anew, these things will annihilate 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—we fortunate souls whose lot is also eternal life, whenever the god sees fit for it all to be made again—amid the common collapse, we also shall be added as a tiny fraction to this mighty destruction, and shall be changed again into our former elements.

Seneca's language and imagery here link the demise of free expression and ideological competition in the Roman state with fires in the urban landscape, with *ekpyrosis*, and with the commemoration of past conflicts. Yet the parallel action in nature—disasters that alter the appearance of the earth and threaten all living things equally—finally yields an outcome that signifies a moral catharsis, a renewal of time that will render such human concerns immaterial.

Seneca, working in the Stoic tradition of exemplarity, is skilled in the use of literary models and tragic heroes as illustrations both of misplaced values and of ideal behavior.¹⁵² The lesson inherent in Cremutius's fate—however much Seneca strives to recuperate and valorize it—suggests the intersecting personal and political stakes not just of open opposition to leadership but even of a perceived or implied criticism in written works. Likewise, Seneca's engagement with the theme of Phaethon suggests the political significance of the myth in the era, with explicit reference to the formulations advanced in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and *Tristia*.

In the late Augustan period, as well as during the subsequent reigns of Tiberius, Caligula, and Claudius, the transition from one dynastic leader to the next was a perennially fraught issue. Many heirs died suspiciously early, and Caligula and Claudius were both removed from power by violent means. Accordingly, Phaethon's story appears to have acquired new significance as a cautionary emblem of failed succession and overblown ambition that brings the world to the brink of oblivion. Similarly, the phoenix becomes implicated in the politics

of succession as a symbol of expiring *saecula* and a harbinger of dynastic collapse. Yet both motifs carried additional ideological significance as aspirational images. Phaethon's ambition to ascend to the heavens had appeal as a metapoetic figure, while the phoenix could symbolize the hope for Rome's survival through the successful transmission of power from one *princeps* to the next. Thus both Phaethon and the phoenix seem to have invited treatment not only as political figures for dynastic succession but also as poetic devices symbolizing metapoetic competition and literary filiation.

The tone of Ovid's Phaethon episode oscillates between celebration of the thrilling ambition and cosmic inspiration that the story encapsulates and apprehension at the (perhaps) inevitable failure of the son to control a cosmic chariot bereft of its original driver. Ovid's presentation of Phaethon as an ambitious successor determined to achieve the impossible and surpass his divine model intertwines the poetic and the political. Even as the text indirectly contemplates the potentially disastrous consequences of a mere mortal attempting to "take up the reins" of Augustus's political vehicle, the poet also reacts to—and attempts to surpass—his predecessors, especially Vergil. This discourse itself takes on poignant new contours in poems referencing the poet's disgrace and relegation, as Phaethon's tragic fall becomes a major motif in Ovid's representation of his own punishment.

Phaethon's trajectory in this chapter reflects not just the literary discourse about Phaethon explored the readings of Ovid, Manilius, and the *Consolatio ad Liviam* but also the problem that will haunt the next chapter's examination of Nero's reign and Rome's defining catastrophe: that is, the difficulty of separating the political from the poetic in Nero's case. Seneca cites the Ovidian epitaph for Phaethon approvingly in the *De vita beata* (Sen. VB 20.5: *etiam si non tenuerit, 'magnis tamen excidit ausis'*, "even if he does not attain [his goal], 'he still fell having dared great things'"), provocatively extracting a positive lesson from a tragic narrative.¹⁵³ Yet the sense of risk inherent in Phaethon's image, however it is deployed, nevertheless enhances Seneca's larger messages concerning the unpredictability of life and the necessity of persevering in the face of constant peril. This message would find deadly confirmation not only in the murders, coups, and executions that characterized much of the Julio-Claudian court life that Seneca knew so well but also in July of 64 with the Great Fire—and eventually in Seneca's own suicide on Nero's orders in April of 65.

Seneca's quotation of Ovid also neatly sums up what seems at stake for Nero, supremely ambitious as both leader and poet, in the heroic "appropria-

tions” he brought into the “text” of his life. As we will see in the next chapter, authors of the Neronian period reworked the imagery and storylines involving Phaethon, catastrophe, and conflagration that Vergil, Ovid, and the other Julio-Claudian authors examined in the first two chapters had given such ideological resonance. By virtue of their authors’ close association with Nero, texts by Lucan, Seneca, and Petronius themselves took on additional layers of meaning after the catastrophic events of Nero’s final years. Thus historical and literary memory fused, further linking Roman leaders with disastrous fires and political catastrophe.

CHAPTER 3

Sequitur Clades

The Neronian Trajectory into Catastrophe

The political impact of fire at Rome and literary depictions of conflagration came to a spectacular intersection during the reign of Nero. As the whole world “knows,” Nero fiddled while Rome burned.¹ The dubious veracity of this legend belies its import as a cultural touchstone, bringing urban disaster, leadership, and creative expression together in a single potent image. The tale’s enduring mystique has much to do with the baroquely villainous portrait of Nero construed by later sources who, working under new regimes, had a vested interest in using him as an exemplar of the “bad emperor.”² The Nero we know from these sources is a decadent and depraved ruler, who at best failed his city in its hour of need and at worst may have been to blame for the Great Fire of 64.³ Yet already during his own lifetime, 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.

Early in his reign, the young *princeps* seemed poised to revive or even surpass the legacy 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 works by Lucan, Seneca, Petronius, the epigrammatist Lucilius, the satirist Persius, and (probably) the pastoral poet Calpurnius Siculus.⁴ When it came to relationships with the authors of his day, however, the poet-actor-emperor nurtured contradictory impulses: on the one hand, to let more talented writers’

works shed indirect glory on him, and on the other, to rival their acclaim as literary creators. This volatile dynamic informs every aspect of how Nero's reign is remembered. The readings in this chapter demonstrate three main points: first, that the imagery and storylines concerning catastrophe and conflagration developed and given currency by Vergil, Ovid, and the other Julio-Claudian authors examined in chapters 1 and 2 preoccupied the Neronian literary imagination even before the events of 64 CE; second, a few texts invite interpretation as covert responses to the fire itself; and third, the collision of this literary tradition with the events of 64 created a new fusion of historical and literary memory. Rome's defining catastrophe, Nero's reckless and extravagant persona as leader, and the wide range of extant allusions and figurations connecting conflagration and ideology converged to create a turning point in the discourse of leaders and fires at Rome.

A brief selection from the conclusion of the famous *Cena Trimalchionis* episode in Petronius's *Satyricon* foregrounds many of this chapter's primary concerns. In this scene, the over-the-top dining extravaganza hosted by the wealthy freedman Trimalchio has taken a morbid turn as Trimalchio begins expounding at length on his plans for his own tomb and funeral.⁵ He imitates a corpse laid out for cremation as a band enters to play his dirge:

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. (Petron. Sat. 78)

The situation was reaching its stomach-churning climax when Trimalchio—who, by the way, was just sloppy drunk—ordered a new amusement: cornet players. Supported by numerous cushions, he stretched himself out at full length on the couch. "Make like I'm dead," he says. "Play something cute!" The cornet players obliged with a doomy racket, and one of them especially—that undertaker fellow's slave, who was the most impressive of the outfit—blasted so

hard that he alarmed the whole neighborhood. So, of course, the watchmen who looked after the district, thinking Trimalchio's house was on fire, suddenly smashed in the door and started messing about with their axes and water, like they do. Seizing this most opportune moment, we gave the word to Agamemnon, and just as if there *were* a fire, we fled at a dead run.

The *vigiles'* interruption makes for a comical conclusion to Trimalchio's banquet, allowing the narrator Encolpius and his companions to escape the tedious event. Trimalchio's funereal fantasy already blurs the lines dividing illusion from reality; as Niall Slater points out, this role-playing itself invites a further blurring of fiction and reality as actual *vigiles* burst in on the party to extinguish the imaginary fire.⁶ The host's performance slowly becomes real to the degree that it threatens to become a "fatal charade," which the guests flee as urgently as they would from an actual conflagration (*tam plane quam ex incendio fugimus*).⁷ Thus Trimalchio's enactments of myth and fantasy threaten to lead to very real consequences at its conclusion.⁸ Since Nero famously drew accusations of having burned Rome in imitation of Trojan legend, it is significant that within the passage quoted above, a series of mangled references to the classic narrative of Troy's fall are detectable.

The event reaches a sickening peak (*ad summam nauseam*); it is now prepared, like the Vergilian description of Troy, to collapse from its summit (*ruit alto a culmine Troia*, *Aen.* 2.290). Trimalchio himself, weighed down with drunkenness (*ebrietate . . . gravis*), is like Vergil's city of Troy, "buried in sleep and wine" (*somno vinoque sepultam*, *Aen.* 2.265).⁹ The *vigiles* break through the doors (*effregerunt ianuam*) with hatchets in hand (*cum . . . securibus*), much as the Greek warrior Pyrrhus smashes through Priam's palace doors with a double axe (*correpta dura bipenni / limina perrumpit*, *Aen.* 2.479–80). Paradoxically, the narrator Encolpius and his friends are simultaneously Greek, signaling to the suggestively named "Agamemnon" when the moment to break out presents itself (*occasionem opportunissimam nacti*), and Trojan, escaping like fugitives from an impending conflagration (*tam plane quam ex incendio fugimus*).¹⁰ Trimalchio, whose parallels to Nero have been widely observed in scholarship, essentially traps his increasingly alarmed guests in his own fantasy world. This overbearing self-mythologizer's solipsistic vision turns on him when neither he nor those around him can any longer distinguish fiction from reality.¹¹

Trimalchio's orchestrated fantasy skids alarmingly into an actualized catastrophe in a way that approximates (even if it does not actually allude to) Nero's

own signature moment as the Fire of 64 raged.¹² As Shadi Bartsch comments on the peculiar blend of theatricality and menace underpinning the action of the *Cena*, “What do we have here but a Trimalchio/Nero, . . . blender of the real and the theatrical in the alembic of violence?”¹³ Yet it is perhaps missing the point to insist on strict one-to-one correspondences between the two figures. For Catharine Edwards, the most telling parallel is not so much a matter of specific details as an “exploration of the relationship between an all-powerful host and his guests.”¹⁴ In the broad strokes, what we have in the *Cena*, and by implication in Nero’s Rome, is a scenario predicated to a great extent on the power wielded by its host/emperor to determine the “reality” that his guests/subjects experience.¹⁵

Given the uncertainties of assigning secure dates to this text, it is impossible to insist that Petronius’s work was written entirely or even partly after the Fire of 64. Yet the *vigiles* who burst in on the party suggest that paranoia around the risk of fire was a tempting target for satire; the period after the fire would seem the most likely period for this issue to achieve salience. Likewise, a reworking of the Trojan destruction would in all likelihood have gained a certain currency in the months following the Neronian destruction, as accusations sprang up about Nero’s alleged performance while Rome burned. Regardless of the novel’s notional date, however, this scene from the *Cena* succinctly sketches many of the prevailing preoccupations of the Roman imagination during the Neronian period. All at once, Petronius summons the era’s pervasive atmosphere of paranoia, provides a graphic demonstration of the way in which fantasy and perception “become” reality in Nero’s world, offers a morbid sendup of grandiose epic themes, and reminds us of the very real terror of fire that haunted the days and nights of ancient urbanites.

In this chapter, I begin with an overview of the Great Fire of 64 as a lens for understanding how Nero would have been viewed in its aftermath. Rather than attempting to evaluate the accuracy—or lack thereof—of the various historical accounts of the fire, however, I focus on the anecdotes that speak to its impact on the Roman imaginary. First I examine Nero’s rumored performance of an *excidium Troiae* as he watched Rome burn as the earliest surviving *creative* response to the 64 disaster.¹⁶ I treat this story as a “text,” i.e., a meaningful story that can be analyzed both for the cultural import it carried and for the ideological signals it sent to its contemporary audience.¹⁷ Whether Nero’s rumored performance during the Great Fire actually happened or was simply a popular accusation, the legend reflects a sense for what sorts of behavior could plausibly

be attributed to Nero in the aftermath of the crisis. Seen in this light, the unverifiability, even the probable falsity, of this tale is perhaps the most important thing about it. Its folkloric and mythic dimensions undermine the story's historical credibility; yet the tenacity with which it has endured in the popular imagination is a testament to the appeal of these same qualities. Second, I consider the construction of Nero's storied Golden House as another form of creative response to the fire. Augustus had found in Rome's fire-damaged fabric an ideal medium for broadcasting his message of transformation and recovery—a message powerfully expressed by the glittering new monuments that replaced the destroyed and decayed facade of “old Rome.” Likewise, Nero's Domus Aurea was a sweeping overhaul of Rome's 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 inevitably invited suspicions of prior planning.

Like the story of Nero's song, the literature examined in this chapter reveals the powerful influence of the texts discussed in chapters 1 and 2, many of which had quickly attained canonical status in the world of Latin literature. The prevalence of literary treatments linking themes such as Phaethon and *ekpyrosis* with Roman leadership become increasingly pointed, especially in the work of Lucan and the younger Seneca, who was Lucan's uncle and Nero's tutor. Rather than attempting to disentangle the complex possibilities of influence between and among the Neronian authors I will discuss, a set of related readings seeks to delineate the ways in which these texts demonstrate the continued preoccupation with imagery and storylines concerning catastrophe and conflagration in the years leading up to the Fire of 64. Like Petronius, Seneca and Lucan display a preoccupation with themes of internecine strife, spectacles of death and violence, and crises of personal identity in the face of overwhelming and capricious authority.

Finally, I examine Seneca's *Letter* 91 in detail. In this text, the ostensible topic is a fire that occurred in the provincial capital of Lugdunum (modern Lyon) shortly after Rome's own catastrophe. Yet the specific site of the conflagration quickly recedes from focus, as Seneca offers an array of targeted allusions to Rome's Augustan past and suggestive meditations on the fate of all great cities. Just as Nero's *excidium Troiae* likens a past calamity to a present one, Seneca's allusions invite us to read *Letter* 91 as a form of displaced commentary—not only on Rome's recent devastation but also on its ideological

unmaking. Thus the readings in this chapter demonstrate that 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.

The Great Fire of Rome as History and Mystery

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 aberrant behavior attributed to him is credible, how much is deliberate distortion, and how much of it, however bizarre it now seems, may actually have been perfectly reasonable under the circumstances.¹⁸ Tacitus grapples with the same problems in his own account of the fire. As discussed more extensively in this book's final chapter, the social and ideological atmosphere at Rome into which the fire erupted cannot be distinguished from Tacitus's larger program of condemnation. Tacitus situates the fire immediately after a carefully crafted set-piece detailing an especially decadent banquet on and around the illuminated Lake of Agrippa, planned by Nero's increasingly powerful adviser and all-around henchman, Tigellinus. Following this scene of imperial amusement and moral dissolution, "calamity ensues" (*sequitur clades*, Tac. *Ann.* 15.38.1). The close association of these two events—which in all likelihood occurred some months apart—creates a moralistic sense of cause and effect between Nero's debauchery and Rome's destruction. Yet even if reconstructing an unbiased account of the event is impossible, Tacitus's account (*Ann.* 15.38–41) is the earliest one to survive that covers the event in detail and the best representation we have of the features of the story that Romans of the late first century would have found most significant.

On the night between July 18 and 19 of 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 the *vigiles* mobilized, the fire most probably had raged beyond the limited potential of their most commonly used tactics.¹⁹ The first fire ever recorded to extend beyond the boundary of a single *regio*, the 64 blaze outmatched the training and organizational capabilities of a firefighting culture that seems to have evolved on a localized basis. As discussed in chapter 1, the forces of the *vigiles* were assigned by region and

would have had little opportunity to develop strategies for a fire of such magnitude. To compound the problem, the firefighting cohort thought to have been responsible for responding to the initial outbreak in the Circus was stationed across the Tiber; they probably would have faced an obstacle in bridges crowded with panicked civilians running in the opposite direction.²⁰

Dio (62.16.4–7) describes the confusion in the streets in terms that, if not actually based on firsthand 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 anything 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. Many were suffocated, many were trampled underfoot; in a word, no evil that can possibly happen to people in such a crisis failed to befall them. They could not even escape anywhere easily; and if anybody did save himself from the immediate danger, he would fall into another and perish.²¹

Dio's account certainly displays many of the hallmarks of the *urbs capta* literary topos;²² yet at the same time it is perfectly plausible as a "real-life" instantiation of these literary images. In this moment, the burning cities that littered the Greco-Roman literary tradition were themselves reanimated as Rome's current reality. Nero, compulsive performer that he was, could hardly have missed the significance of this "realization" of one of literature's most cherished topoi. Nor could he have been unaware that his actions would be closely scrutinized during and immediately after the fire. Much of his conduct, in fact, sounds generally consistent with 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 the new parts of his new home, the Domus Transitoria. Tacitus seems to present this as a basis for censure, as it

seems to have been in 27 when Tiberius missed the fire on the Caelian.²³ Fires broke out in the city constantly; many must have taken more than a day or two to extinguish. Nero, reliant only on relayed messages, may not have immediately realized this one's magnitude. Once he had returned to the city, however, he apparently waged a vigorous campaign to contain the fire. Tacitus, Suetonius, and Dio all report rumors that agents of the emperor were setting fires around the city or demolishing buildings; they further imply or assert outright that Nero's orders were behind this apparently pernicious activity. If true at all, however, the rumors may reflect misunderstood attempts at "backburning" (in firefighting terminology, the practice of burning a zone in a controlled fashion to deny an approaching blaze any additional fuel).²⁴ The demolition of buildings to create firebreaks was instrumental in the near-total suppression of the fire at the foot of the Esquiline on Day 6. Shortly thereafter, though, in a different section of the city, the fire rekindled on the property of Tigellinus, the impresario of Nero's debauched lake party.

The rekindled blaze continued unabated for another three days, this time leveling the city's monumental districts north of the Capitoline. Tacitus provides a memorable summation of the fire's impact on Rome's fourteen districts: "four . . . remained unharmed; three were leveled to the ground; and in the other seven only a few relics of houses remained, gutted and half-burnt" (Tac. *Ann.* 15.40).²⁵ 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 he had taken control after decades of neglect punctuated by bursts of open conflict. The Augustan improvements, in turn, reflected and complemented the *princeps's* gradual reformation of the city's social and administrative structure. Tacitus's and Suetonius's accounts of the Neronian fire's aftermath, by contrast, provide 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. Nero's relief efforts in the immediate aftermath were swift and thoroughgoing. A general cleanup cleared the rubble, and Nero offered rewards for quick rebuilding. Furthermore, he seems to have taken great care to reassure the shaken public: he appeased the gods, offering immediate prayers and sacrifices on a grand scale.

The tremendous sense of religious alarm that the 64 fire would have elicited is an often-overlooked aspect of its lasting effect upon Rome.²⁶ 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 as the Romans were in death ritual and commemoration.²⁷ Nero seems to have recognized some of the long-term religious impact of the event and designed propitiations accordingly. The Sibylline books so carefully “preserved” (i.e., edited and perhaps censored) by Augustus were consulted.²⁸ 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. Epigraphic evidence from the Domitianic period indicates that under Nero’s authority a set of altars to Vulcan were vowed to ward off fires in the future.²⁹ 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 were already suspected (with some reason) of objecting to Roman state religion; numerous Christians duly perished as public entertainment.³⁰

As with the rumors blaming Nero for Rome’s destruction (or at least for singing while Rome burned), certain aspects of the suspicion that fell on the city’s Christians, as well as of the punishment they received, reflect the larger trends of allusivity that characterized Nero’s reign overall. Christian eschatological literature, much of which reworked a long inherited tradition from Judaism, anticipates a fiery apocalypse that would precede a period of renewal, or even a messianic age.³¹ Such imagery may have contributed, directly or indirectly, to the suspicion that at least some Christians were responsible for the Great Fire. Accusers could have asserted that fanatical believers had attempted—much as Nero himself is accused of doing, in fact, with Trojan myth—to bring this cherished literature to life in the here and now. Whatever the pretext, Tacitus reports that Nero devised spectacular punishments for the accused that appear to function as an illustration of their alleged crime. Such a display may well have appealed to a grieving and frightened population with little sympathy for those suspected of beliefs and practices at odds with Roman values.³² Some victims were fashioned into human torches set to illuminate evening festivities that Nero sponsored on the imperial properties in the Vatican plain;³³ other executions, Edward Champlin suggests, represented mythological punishments alluding to the destroyed landmarks in the city.³⁴ Executing Rome’s Christians in a series of “fatal charades” evidently functioned as a graphic form of visual revenge on behalf of the city, reasserting Rome’s topography and identity in the aftermath of near annihilation.

Finally, Nero initiated a radical reimagining of Rome’s urban space, outlining some ambitious long-term strategies to make the rebuilt city safer from the

threat of future fires. Like other ancient historians, Suetonius and Tacitus record imperial-era building and urban maintenance projects at Rome in the first century CE as essentially a one-man show, letting the emperors they discuss take the full measure of praise and blame for the changes they enact. Both authors largely suspend the extraordinarily critical tone they otherwise take in their accounts of Nero's reign when describing the measures he instituted to reduce the risk of future fires.³⁵ Suetonius reports that Nero "thought out a new form of buildings of the city, and in front of the houses and apartments he erected porches, from the flat roofs of which fires could be fought; he had these put up at his own cost" (*Formam aedificiorum urbis novam excogitavit et ut ante insulas ac domos porticus essent, de quarum solariis incendia arcerentur; easque sumptu suo exstruxit, Ner. 16.1*). Tacitus implies, less generously, that Nero only *promised* he would institute these measures (*eas porticus Nero sua pecunia extructurum . . . pollicitus est, Ann. 15.43.2*).³⁶ The thoroughgoing and visionary scope of Nero's efforts to rebuild the city would appear entirely admirable. Indeed, they are the sort of accomplishments that Augustus might have been happy to boast of in his *Res Gestae*. Yet Nero failed to earn the kind of approval that Augustus garnered for his efforts to rebuild Rome. This may be in part because—as Tacitus's qualification of Nero's building measures as a mere "promise" suggests—he did not live long enough to carry out all of these plans; it was, in fact, later emperors who followed through on some (if not all) of Nero's urban innovations, even as they actively promoted the vituperation of his memory. Moreover, Nero's response was so quick and so comprehensive that the measures in themselves may have drawn suspicion of prior planning.

Suetonius maintains that Nero "set the city ablaze as if disgusted with the unsightliness of its antiquated buildings and the narrow and winding streets" (*quasi offensus deformitate veterum aedificiorum et angustiis flexurisque vicorum, incendit urbem, Ner. 38.1*). Suetonius here hints, however, that improving Rome's overall infrastructure was not Nero's true motivation but a mere pretext (*quasi*). His "real" objective, as imagined by hostile sources, comprises the two most salient examples of his determination to live a life out of myth. In next two sections, I discuss these alleged motivations: first, that Nero wished to destroy Rome in imitation of the Trojan legend that so fascinated his literary predecessors and contemporaries; and second, that he needed to clear space for his Golden House, a project that refashioned Rome's urban center into a fantastical expression of Nero's identity as ruler-god and master of the cosmos.

Nero's Song of Troy: An Instant Classic?

No story from Roman history is more widely circulated than the charge that Nero deliberately burned Rome—except, perhaps, for the related allegation that when the fire was still raging Nero took the opportunity to perform a song on the fall of Troy.³⁷ Even (or especially) if the story is an inspired fabrication, it is a telling reflection of popular sentiment. Indelible as the image of Nero's fire-inspired performance is, a preliminary look at the *testimonia* immediately fragments it into an assortment of inconsistent details, each with its own set of possible literary precedents and intractable source problems.³⁸

Tacitus (*Ann.* 15.39.3) offers the rumor as an explanation for why the Roman *vox populi* did not praise Nero's outstanding relief efforts in the wake of the fire. Suetonius and Cassius Dio assert this rumor as fact, but vary significantly in the details they add to support their assertions. Whereas Suetonius puts Nero at the top of a tower in the Gardens of Maecenas on the Esquiline Hill, Dio puts him on "the highest point" of the Palatine Hill.³⁹ Suetonius reports that Nero wore a dramatic costume, while Dio describes him in the beltless frock of a citharode.⁴⁰ Each of these costumes has different implications for the type of performance Nero is implied to have given.⁴¹ The versions of Dio and Suetonius do share some common points. Both place Nero at a high vantage point on one of his properties from which he could watch the catastrophe unfold below him; both comment on Nero's appreciation of the view;⁴² and both affirm, as does Tacitus's rumor, that he sang of Troy's destruction.

Still, further questions remain. Was the song in Latin or in Greek?⁴³ Did he perform an excerpt from some classic text or his own poetry? Nero is known to have composed a Troy-themed poem, which the scene below him may have prompted him to recite.⁴⁴ Yet might we also imagine Nero composing new poetry in response to this view? The discrepancies obscuring this widely disseminated story suggest the reasons that the "truth" of this event is inaccessible. Certainly the later historians who report Nero's actions are likely to have added literary flourishes designed to align him more closely with despotic or destructive figures from the Greco-Roman tradition. Yet the living Nero himself seems to have developed, in a self-aware fashion, a type of category confusion that exacerbates the difficulties of separating fact from fiction.⁴⁵

Nero's reported actions in the months leading up to July of 64 bear the hallmarks of mythically inspired stagecraft, inviting suspicion that Nero planned

the destruction of Rome as a perverse form of role-play—the greatest, perhaps, of the transgressive performances that the notoriously histrionic *princeps* offered to his public.⁴⁶ The rumor of Nero's performance in 64 certainly suggests his relish of the conceit that he, a Roman monarch who claimed kinship with figures such as Aeneas and Priam, would reenact their experience of watching their city burn.⁴⁷ Allusion likewise played a part in Nero's actions in the immediate aftermath of the 64 calamity: as discussed above, the symbolic execution of Rome's Christians formed part of Nero's larger program of allusive self-representation as the city's champion and protector in the wake of disaster. Yet throughout his life, Nero provided ample material for those wishing to view him in retrospect as a character obsessed with recreating family history, with imitating literary models, and with responding to urban disaster.⁴⁸

Disasters Foretold, Disasters Retold: Nero's Performative Precedents for the 64 Event

The blurring of real people into characters, as well as of lives into plots, had begun long before Nero's ascent to power. Nero in some ways simply amplified patterns in mythopoetic self-fashioning set by Augustus. Growing up amidst the toxic politics of imperial succession and intensively schooled in the literature and theater of the day, Nero could hardly have avoided recognizing himself and his imperial rivals in the tales of gods and mythical rulers retailed in popular texts.⁴⁹ Images and behaviors associated with Nero's earlier life may have influenced the way in which the account of his fire-inspired Troy song was constructed and promoted. However artfully later sources select and shape their material, these anecdotes suggest that Nero's life offered these sources ample scope for fashioning him as a figure destined to bring Rome back in touch with its roots in the Trojan conflagration.⁵⁰

Nero made his debut as a public figure at age ten at a reperformance of the Trojan Games sponsored by Claudius in 47 CE.⁵¹ For many onlookers, Nero's appearance evoked not just the memory of his grandfather Germanicus but also Vergil's treatment of the Trojan games in *Aeneid* 5. In this scene, Aeneas's son Iulus, founder of the Julian line, leads this game; his performance symbolizes a renewal of Trojan memory among Aeneas's band of survivors. Likewise, as Ellen O'Gorman argues, Nero's appearance in the game of Troy thus introduced him to Rome as a reenactor of Trojan-themed events and narratives.⁵² For a Roman audience, Troy's primary significance would always lie in its fall, the fiery *sine qua non* of Rome's own foundation.

Nero articulated this link even more directly at an early public oration in 53, in which he “advocated the cause of the people of Ilium.”⁵³ Basing his argument not on recent events but on the mythical tradition that “Rome was the offspring of Troy, and Aeneas the founder of the Julian line, with other old traditions akin to myths” (Tac. *Ann.* 12.58), Nero argued for Ilium’s permanent exemption from Roman taxation, suggesting Nero’s investment in the Julian family’s claimed Trojan ancestry.⁵⁴ The young Nero also intervened successfully on behalf of Bononia (Bologna) when the city required assistance after a devastating fire; he secured further concessions for Rhodes and Apamea after a major earthquake.⁵⁵ Bononia’s historic association with Nero’s ancestor Mark Antony suggests a predilection for louche living, Hellenizing tendencies, and accusations of intent to destroy Rome.⁵⁶ Nero’s assistance to all these cities suggests an early interest in urban disaster. Thus, well ahead of his ascent to power, Nero’s public actions begin to form a metaphorical frame around the catastrophic events that would come to exemplify his reign.

During his principate, Nero also oversaw a revival of Afranius’s *Incendium*, a farce in which characters escape from an urban conflagration.⁵⁷ According to Suetonius, the play became a perverse kind of game show as the set was actually torched and performers were allowed to keep the items they seized, *Supermarket Sweep*-style, as they scrambled to evade the eponymous blaze. Nero, meanwhile, watched all this from a specially built balcony on the set.⁵⁸ Although Suetonius gives no firm date for this performance, he does specify it as part of festivities sponsored by Nero “for the Eternity of Empire,” a probable reference to Nero’s *Ludi Maximi* in 59 CE.⁵⁹ As Gesine Manuwald has shown, the real fire on the set of the *Incendium* is likely to have been an imperial innovation.⁶⁰ Blurring the line between performance and reality, this event offered the public the image of Nero sitting at a high vantage point, enjoying the spectacle of a conflagration which he had commissioned as entertainment. If the *Incendium* performance really did predate the Great Fire by several years, the impression made on the public by such an image becomes a significant factor in the evident tenacity with which rumor took hold about his behavior during the 64 blaze.⁶¹

Additionally, confidence in Nero’s leadership in the years immediately prior to 64 may have been shaken by several civic disturbances, natural disasters, and other misfortunes. Public protests broke out in 62 against Nero’s repudiation of his dynastic bride, Octavia, an unusual moment of disharmony between the emperor and the Roman populace.⁶² In the same year, lightning struck Nero’s newly built public gymnasium; the resultant fire melted a likeness of Nero “into a shapeless mass of bronze.”⁶³ Also in the early 60s, a massive earthquake (or

series of quakes) leveled several towns in Campania.⁶⁴ Seismic disturbances in the region continued into the early summer of 64, when Nero's debut performance of epic poetry in Neapolis (Naples) was interrupted by tremors, as Suetonius tells us: "although the theater was actually struck suddenly by an earthquake, he did not quit singing until he finished the tune he had begun" (Suet. *Ner.* 20). According to Tacitus, the audience was able to exit the theater before the building collapsed, a stroke of luck that Nero claimed as evidence of divine favor; he later went on to compose a song about his good fortune.⁶⁵ The logical converse of this rhetorical stance, of course, is that when misfortune does strike, the ruler must somehow have failed to avert (or even actively encouraged) the disaster. Moreover, here again we have an image of Nero strikingly similar to his reported performance during the Great Fire just a few weeks later: reciting poetry with an apparent unconcern for the fate of those endangered by a proximate disaster.

Overall, then, there seems to have been a considerable amount of material available for those interested in characterizing Nero as a figure obsessed with incendiary spectacles and with replaying myth. These anecdotes could easily have served as catalyst to Rome's widespread cultural tendency to assign responsibility—on a cosmic as well as a practical level—to leaders in times of emergency. Although the historical Nero may indeed have provided grounds for suspicion, accounts of his behavior before, during, and after the 64 destruction blend so well with the larger penumbra of transgressive performance and spectacle characterizing his persona that it becomes impossible to separate fact from fantasy. Moreover, the line between Nero's alleged behavior and the literary models that in all likelihood shaped both the man himself and later authors' accounts of him is vanishingly thin.

Disasters and Creative Imitation: Nero and the Epic Tradition

The story of Nero's performance commemorating Troy's fall amidst the flames of Rome trades upon Nero's known propensity for taking the stage and singing before an audience. This behavior was already sufficiently aberrant for a Roman *princeps* as to suggest a limitless capacity for deviance.⁶⁶ Yet the rumor reflects more than Nero's disregard for traditional values or his obsession with poetry. It holds several specific types of appeal for an audience with sophisticated literary sensibilities. Troy and its fall, an evergreen topic for Roman poets, was especially in vogue at the time, making the narrative a likely refrain for anyone

composing at the moment of the fire.⁶⁷ Nero's Troy poem apparently included a passage in which Paris, a figure of dubious merit elsewhere in literature, is rewritten as the bravest of the Trojans.⁶⁸ This Paris reflects the paradoxes of Nero's own character: a combination, as Edward Champlin puts it, "of sensual living and careful training."⁶⁹ Yet Paris, according to legend, was foreseen in a dream by his mother, Hecuba, as a flaming torch, destined from birth to play the key role in his city's incendiary undoing.⁷⁰ Nero's apparent willingness to be identified with not just a "positive" Trojan exemplar on the model of his progenitors Aeneas and Iulus but also (to borrow a Vergilian slur) as a *Paris alter* may have made him a tempting target for his critics in the period following the 64 disaster.⁷¹ The tale of Nero's performance as he views his city in flames strikes several other chords suggesting a nuanced relationship with the epic tradition.

Nero's simultaneous roles as witness to and performer of a legendary destruction narrative suggests formal parallels with a famous scene from Homeric epic. At *Il.* 9.189, Achilles, setting himself apart from the carnage raging outside his 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 of a fiery destruction narrative as he witnesses Rome's conflagration produces a *mise-en-abyme* effect much like that of Achilles's song. As Lovatt argues, "viewing is always potentially a metaphor for reading," and viewing a violent or destructive situation can easily become a metaphor for epic poetry itself.⁷² Similarly, both Nero's subject matter and his elevated position for viewing the unfolding catastrophe are reminiscent of Aeneas's recollection of his experiences during the fall of Troy in *Aeneid* 2.⁷³ In climbing to a high point on his property to view his city's conflagration as he sings of Troy's fall, Nero superimposes literary and historical memory over one another. He simultaneously performs both his legendary ancestor's "lived" experience of Troy's fall and the poetic recounting of the event that Aeneas delivers in *Aeneid* 2.

Both the *imperium sine fine* advanced in Augustan-era rhetoric and Nero's own efforts promoting games "for the eternity of the empire" seem contradicted by the tragic outlook on history that he appears to adopt in performing his song.⁷⁴ The Augustan principate had established a close connection between the ruling house and Rome's roots in Troy, strategically selecting Trojan myth to reflect contemporary circumstances and signal future goals in the wake of political collapse. By contrast, destroying Rome becomes a vehicle for Nero to reverse this process, reenacting the mythic tale of Troy's fall—which Augustus had so skillfully exploited—and reprising Augustus's role as Rome's rebuilder

after the fall of the Roman republic.⁷⁵ Thus the rumor exploits literary and historical memory to create a potent commentary on Nero's warped priorities as a leader, as well as on his fatal misreading of his own heritage.

Assessing a critical moment's magnitude in parallel with mythopoetic narrative was an entirely natural—and, in fact, expected—response to any significant event in Roman culture.⁷⁶ For instance, Tacitus records the zeal with which survivors set about constructing the similarities between the 64 destruction and the Gallic sack of 390 BCE; the interval between these two conflagrations was reckoned as a mystical diminution into equal numbers of years, months, and days.⁷⁷ Likewise, when Nero built his Golden House complex over space cleared by the fire, a jingle circulated comparing the house itself to the Gallic sack.⁷⁸ Moreover, figures from Rome's storied republican past had exhibited a similar impulse.

As noted in chapter 1, Scipio was inspired by the fall of Carthage to anticipate Rome's own eventual collapse, likening a present catastrophe to a future one; yet like Nero he did so by reciting poetry about the fall of Troy.⁷⁹ In a sense, Nero is simply fulfilling Scipio's quasi-prophetic utterance, using the lessons not only of Troy but also of Carthage to comment wryly on Rome's prospects as he watches his city replicate those historic destructions.⁸⁰ In creating allusive parallels with Rome's foundational narratives as he witnesses a scene of widespread devastation, Nero takes a tendency widely observable in Roman culture to a characteristically perverse extreme. Thus Nero's legendary performance of a Troy song, whether he actually enacted such a scene or simply invited its fabrication, constitutes the first of many imaginative, even "literary" responses to the 64 disaster.⁸¹ Like Nero's alleged *excidium Troiae*, his Golden House was made possible by the fire, and this fantastical structure offers a tangible expression of Nero's defining impulse to align the urban reality of Rome more closely with the world of myth and poetry.

The Golden House as Urban *Palingenesis*

Nero's new residence 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. In the vignette directly preceding his narrative of the Great Fire, Tacitus remarks in a sneering aside that "Nero used the whole city as his house."⁸² As Miriam Griffin observes, the comment foreshadows the accusations leveled against Nero of taking over the city after the

fire.⁸³ Yet it also suggests indirectly the kind of expansion of domestic entertaining and image-making already pioneered by Augustus on the Campus Martius, as well as his expansion of the imperial residence into a multidimensional religious, governmental, and cultural complex. As discussed in chapter 1, Augustus spread monuments throughout the city representing the imperial family; he also agglomerated to his own residence a number of symbolic expressions of the city's power. This conflation of *domus* and *urbs* constructed Augustus as the *paterfamilias* of Rome's newly united urban "household." Similarly, Nero's inappropriate (in Tacitus's view) blurring of public and private entertainments suggests that he had little interest in distancing himself from the population. To the contrary, including Rome's people as witnesses to, and participants in, his spectacles and celebrations seems to have been a major component of his leadership style.

Accusations after the fire that "all Rome was becoming Nero's house" originated in Nero's lifetime, and several later sources recount his ambition to have the city renamed in his honor.⁸⁴ Yet in recent decades scholars have increasingly challenged the notion that Nero's admittedly unprecedented use of urban space really implies the kind of overreach that later sources make it out to be.⁸⁵ The complex may not have been designed as an exclusive retreat, but rather as an inclusive, flexible performance complex that quickly redeveloped a huge expanse of destroyed land by leaving much of it open, but far from empty. Its overall design principles appear to have made Nero available, in varying degrees and in various forms of representation, to significant portions of the urban population. Owing to the panoramic effect of the valley formed 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*.

Surveyable from various vantage points in the hills around the edges of the valley, the view revealed a totalizing vision of tended lands, artificial wilderness, and mountainous waterfalls, all anchored by the focal feature, the so-called *Stagnum Neronis*. This manmade lake appears to have been designed as virtual "seascape," surrounded by various cities scaled down to miniature around it; rocky waterfalls and tended ground interspersed with patches of artificial wilderness suggest mountains, rivers, and stretches of inhabited and uninhabited land. The cosmic viewpoint created by this vista is further suggested in the overall design of the complex.⁸⁶ 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 lend themselves to interpretation as an imitation of the sun’s trajectory through the sky. To the southwest, Augustus’s Apollo-themed compound on the Palatine would be clearly visible. The property’s 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.”⁸⁷ 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 under the control of the ruler-god.

Increasingly, scholars have 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 the Sol imagery as post-Neronian repurposing.⁸⁸ The complex thus became the fullest expression of Nero’s solar stylings; this clear revival of Augustus’s most defining imagery only seem to have fully taken hold in the year 64.⁸⁹ 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.⁹⁰ Likewise, 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 banner, possibly a model or precursor for the Colossus mentioned earlier, may well have represented Nero as a solar entity.⁹¹ Nero’s new *Domus* therefore elides the distinction that Augustan rhetoric had at least notionally preserved between earthly ruler and divine demiurge. Overall, the design provides precisely the sort of panoramic view of the world that only Apollo/Sol would be afforded from the solar chariot; yet for a terrestrial being to achieve such a vision is reminiscent not just of the immortal solar deities but also of Phaethon.

The linen banner portraying a colossal Nero had only just been completed when it was burnt by lightning, along with the greater part of the surrounding gardens; thus in attempting quasi-divine stature in the form of this colossal self-portrait (and in possibly assuming the role of the Sun-god), Nero is symbolically struck down by Jove’s punishment as he and the miniature “earthscapes” around him are reduced to ashes.⁹² Moreover, an elaborate mural discovered in excavations of the Golden House apparently depicted 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.⁹³ 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.⁹⁴ Thus for Champlin, endorsement of Phaethon in 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.⁹⁵ Nevertheless, references to Phaethon as an easy short-hand for the young ruler could invite other, less flattering readings.

Peter Heslin identifies, from several types of evidence, the possibility that Augustus's famed solar calendar on the Campus Martius may have wandered off course by Nero's time. If the shadow cast by its obelisk/*gnomon* was no longer hitting its appointed marks, it would have provided, as Heslin comments, "a vivid visual representation of 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."⁹⁶ Nero was perhaps more likely than most to have recognized himself and his imperial rivals in the unstable successor evoked by the doomed solar charioteers depicted in Vergil, Ovid, and Manilius. Tiberius's remarks on the Phaethon-esque future of Caligula were discussed in chapter 2; if known to Nero, these comments would have rendered the implicit message of such poetry grimly explicit. 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 semidivine being who acknowledges the risks of his own ambition, yet averts them through his superior faculties. In the work of Lucan, Nero's one-time supporter turned would-be assassin, fire symbolizes the destructive energy of his poem's doomed leaders, most notably Caesar. Moreover, the Phaethon subtext established early in the poem evokes the era's concern over reckless leadership in a way that indirectly implicates Nero.

Disastrously Ambitious: Phaethon Figurations and Incendiary Leadership in Lucan's Bellum Civile

In text of the ten books of the *Bellum Civile* that Lucan had completed before his arrest in the Pisonian conspiracy and subsequent death in 65 CE, a series of narrative episodes, similes, and digressions featuring various kinds of fire imagery

both amplifies the poem's sense of crisis and advances its symbolic disintegration of physical, social, and cosmic boundaries.⁹⁷ Lucan repeatedly evokes the hallowed imagery of his epic predecessors only to break it down, sometimes literally: the broken buildings of his proem (BC 1.24–26) suggest the collapse of Vergil's *altae moenia Romae*.⁹⁸ This reminder of once-great towns and buildings brought low, a consolatory topos, further calls to mind the famous consolations of the author's illustrious uncle Seneca. A 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. BC 7.617, *inpendisse pudet lacrimas in funere mundi*). Throughout the poem, images of fire and metaphorically "inflammatory" language play a major role, offering scope both for allusive manipulation of Lucan's epic predecessors and for creative engagement with the natural and moral philosophy prevalent in his own day. Lucan associates each of the three major leaders in his epic either with fiery destruction generally or with Phaethon specifically.

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 (BC 1.33–34, 37–38). Yet starting with its programmatic first (and longest) simile, Rome's inevitable destruction (indeed, that of the cosmos) is asserted in explicit terms as an irrecoverable Stoic *ekpyrosis*. 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, thereby equating the catastrophic destruction caused by earthly political strife with the disastrous clash of elements on a cosmic scale:

*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 Phoebe
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 plum-

met into the sea, and the earth will refuse to stretch out the shore and will shake off the ocean. Phoebe, disdaining 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.⁹⁹

Lucan invokes *ekpyrosis* to describe the destruction of the Roman republican political system in terms that involve the very unmaking of the cosmos, collapsing the laws of man and nature alike.¹⁰⁰ Thus the fire threatened by the torch-wielding crowd in Vergil's initial simile has become in Lucan a full-blown *ekpyrosis* beyond any human agency or control—one that will inevitably annihilate the universe.¹⁰¹ The early connection forged to Stoic doctrine in Lucan's *ekpyrosis* simile ties conflagration to the theme of societal decline: Rome becomes bloated with wealth and throws off the balance of the cosmos, touching off the sequence of annihilation.¹⁰² The notion of Stoic *ekpyrosis* was popular in Roman thought during the early empire; Lucan's relationship to Stoicism has attracted attention for its possible connections with Seneca's writing in particular.¹⁰³ Seneca's most notable uses of *ekpyrosis*, however, envision it as a welcome opportunity to do away with degraded life forms and begin a process of renewal.¹⁰⁴ Are we, then, to understand the proem here as anticipating a regeneration and return to order after the triumviral chaos, understanding Julio-Claudian Rome as a new Golden Age? This opening simile's intertext with its Vergilian counterpart would suggest otherwise.

As discussed in chapter 1, the statesman simile in *Aeneid* 1 offers an intimation of a past political crisis resolved; the simile at *BC* 1.72–80, by contrast, presents an expansion and escalation of a fiery disaster's scale. Instead of a storm instigated and quelled by deities representing opposing elements (Juno instigates the storm with winds/air, but Neptune, lord of the sea/water, stops it from disturbing his realm), 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, and neither is willing to yield any sphere of influence to the other. Ultimately, the very act of imagining the implications of Lucan's simile demands recourse to knowledge of events outside the text's narrative. Thus 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?

Similarly, these lines' multiple Ovidian correspondences suggest that the previous century's civil conflict offers no guarantee against another catastrophe. As Stephen Wheeler argues, "Lucan's simile comparing the fall of Rome to

the end of the world explicitly reverses the cosmogony of the *Metamorphoses*.¹⁰⁵ Rome may have been remade, but it can equally be unmade. Moreover, Lucan draws his phrase *chaos antiquum* from Tellus's warning near the end of Ovid's Phaethon narrative (*Met.* 2.300): *in chaos antiquum confundimur*, "we are plunged into ancient chaos!"¹⁰⁶ This salient anticipation of fiery destruction follows shortly after an invocation of Nero widely read as an allusion to Ovid's Phaethon.

Lucan's figuration of Nero as an overly weighty Phaethon in the proem is a well-established feature of the text.¹⁰⁷ Nero's deification is anticipated by the narrator:

*seu sceptrā tenere,
seu te flammīgeros Phoebeī consendere currus,
telluremque nihil mutato sole timentem
igne vago lustrare iuvet.* (Luc. *BC* 1.47–50)

[W]hether it pleases you to hold the scepter, or mount the fire-bringing chariot of Phoebus, and light up the earth, which has no fear even though the sun has changed, with your wandering fire.

Nero is pictured taking over the chariot of the sun in terms that inevitably bring to mind the myth of Phaethon at the beginning of his ride. Are we to imagine Nero succeeding brilliantly where Phaethon failed, or failing just as he did? Emma Gee characterizes this passage as Lucan's direct response to poetic invocations of the *princeps* introduced by Vergil and Ovid; Lucan, however, is bent on taking the language of cosmography established by these models and "pushing it over the edge."¹⁰⁸ By exemplifying the potential of claims of catasterism to slide toward the ridiculous, Lucan's proem may sidestep the necessity of drawing serious implications from the Phaethon figuration at all.¹⁰⁹ But as Stefano Rebggiani points out, Lucan is at pains to protest that the earth (*tellus*/*Tellus*) is *not* afraid of Nero's taking over the role of the Sun—yet she might do well to be afraid, it is implied, because of her recollection of the disastrous outcome of the last attempted "succession" to the role of the solar *auriga*.¹¹⁰ As Lisa Cordes has further commented, the ambivalence of using a Phaethon figuration to praise the ruler is further reflected—and perhaps only enhanced by—the rhetorical lengths to which the poet goes to present it in flattering terms.¹¹¹ Thus the passage evokes anxieties at the same time that it suppresses them: the mem-

ory of Phaethon implies the possibility of a disastrous outcome, and the narrator's protestations do more to call attention to these dire implications than they do to dismiss them.

As the Phaethon theme develops throughout the epic, what might be read as a gently ironic treatment in the proem becomes increasingly threatening.¹¹² When Lucan's Nigidius Figulus lists the various possibilities for cosmic destruction at the end of the first book, he mentions the ancient flood (*Deucalioneos . . . imbres*, BC 1.653) and then the upper air (heaven's fiery region) catching fire from the sun's chariot (*succensusque tuis flagrasset curribus aether*, BC 1.657) in what seems yet another likely reference to the Phaethon myth. Thus the affinity Lucan suggests between Nero's anticipated catasterism and Phaethon's story adumbrates the form that Rome's own collapse follows: overweening ambition and a meteoric rise are followed inevitably by catastrophic demise.

Lucan further indicates the importance of Phaethon to his project in Book 2, when he presents a long literary "map" with a sixteen-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
populea fluvium ripas umbrasse corona,
cumque diem pronum transverso limite ducens
succendit Phaethon flagrantibus aethera loris,
gurgitibus raptis penitus tellure perusta,
hunc habuisse pares Phoebeis ignibus undas.* (Luc. BC 2.408–15)

and there the Po, a river mightier than which the earth does not unleash, sweeps shattered forests down to the sea and drains Italy of its waters. The story goes that this was the river that a ring of poplars first shaded at its banks; and when Phaethon, driving the day down headlong, athwart its appointed course, set the sky aflame with burning reins as rushing streams vanished and the earth burned to its core, this river had currents equal to Phoebus's fire.

As Elaine Fantham comments, the story of Phaethon's reckless endangerment of the cosmic order forms an allusive facet of Lucan's larger portrayal of civil war as a kind of cosmic dissolution.¹¹³ Furthermore, a fragment of Lucan's lost *Iliacon* compares a lost referent to the fire of Phaethon's ride:¹¹⁴

*Haud aliter raptum transverso limite caeli
 flammati Phaethonta poli videre deique
 cum vice mutata totis in montibus ardens
 terra dedit caelo lucem, naturaque versa.* (Luc. *Iliacon*, fr. 6 Courtney)

Not otherwise did the poles and gods see Phaethon snatched away, athwart his appointed path of blazing sky, when positions changed, and the earth, burning on whole mountains, gave light to the sky, and nature was overturned.

This simile offers the same phrase for Phaethon's veering trajectory (*transverso limite*, cf. *BC* 2.412) in more direct connection with *ekpyrosis*. Lucan leaves out the role of Jupiter in checking Phaethon's progress, by default assigning the Italian river Eridanus/Po a vigorously active role in extinguishing this incendiary threat.¹¹⁵ This change in agency assigns a greater importance, perhaps, to the region of Italy (and the people who inhabit it) in warding off catastrophe. Equally, however, Lucan may suppress the role of Jupiter's lightning because Caesar, the poem's prime agent of chaos and destruction, is the character most associated with lightning and other forms of destructive fire.

Lucan's Caesar is persistently characterized with incendiary imagery, and this imagery is itself further associated with warfare and unchecked aggression. In the simile that initiates the fire-tinged characterization of Caesar evident throughout the poem, he is figured as a thunderbolt, perfectly designed to topple the established Roman order represented by Pompey (who in the unusual twin simile to this one is an aged oak, weighed down by its own history and poised to fall).¹¹⁶ Caesar's fiery properties are perhaps even the key to his success: Judith Rosner-Siegel remarks on how the eyes of the people, dazzled with "slanting flame" of celestial fire (i.e., comets or meteors) in the simile at *BC* 1.153–55 (*populosque paventes / terruit obliqua . . . flamma*) recall the slanted damming action of Caesar's cavalry (1.220, *in obliquum amnem*), as they enable his troops to cross the flood-swollen Rubicon (1.204, *tumidum . . . per amnem*).¹¹⁷ The Rubicon's implied opposition in this passage is overcome by the military force of Caesar, the incendiary dynast. In Lucan's retelling of the Phaethon myth at *BC* 2.410–15, another river in northern Italy is celebrated for stopping the destructive progress of Phaethon, another incendiary figure.¹¹⁸ By implication, the boundary of a river (the storm-swollen Rubicon, cf. the Po/Eridanus) was enough to stop Phaethon but is evidently no match for Caesar.

The eclipse that opens Book 7 (*BC* 7.1–6) anticipates the battle at Pharsalus, when Caesar's destructive rampage will reach its peak; textually, however, it recalls the obscured or darkened sun imagery that Vergil (*G.* 1.466–68) and Ovid (*Met.* 15.785–86) used to link the historical aftermath of Caesar's death with the sun's eclipse after Phaethon's death.¹¹⁹ For Lucan, the common theme connecting the eclipses of Pharsalus, Phaethon, and Caesar appears to be the failure of mortal attempts to achieve divine status—the very future, as Pramit Chaudhuri points out, that Lucan envisages for Nero in the proem via an allusion to Phaethon.¹²⁰ Thus Caesar is characterized as a force of incendiary destruction not unlike Phaethon, while the geography associated with Phaethon and his ride is thus given signal importance at an early stage in the epic.

Pompey and Cato, the epic's two other key leader figures, are both associated with Phaethon in more subtle ways. As Jennifer Thomas has shown, nineteen of the sites listed in Phaethon's accidental rampage in *Metamorphoses* 2 (214–71) appear in the catalogue of Pompey's troops in *Bellum Civile* 3.169–297, and all but three do so in identical or mirrored line positions.¹²¹ Thus, by implication, Pompey and his followers reenact Phaethon's global destruction as they march toward Pharsalus. Similarly, the dire conditions of Cato's ordeal in Book 9 were created, in mythological terms, by Phaethon.¹²² Lucan's geography overall symbolizes contested power, as Erica Bexley has argued.¹²³ The Libyan zone, an austere environment seemingly designed to test the limits of human endurance, is constructed in a way that reflects on, contends with, and ultimately defeats the leadership of Cato.¹²⁴ Lucan dwells at length on the Libyan region's aridity and inhospitality, features “known” though Ovid's Phaethon narrative to have been the result of the reckless demigod's ill-fated ride.¹²⁵

In the post-Phaethonic wasteland of Libya, the *ekpyrosis* threatened in Lucan's proem seems already to have happened. In this searing allegorical environment, the Stoic idealist Cato's great failure is actually a product of his peculiar strength.¹²⁶ Cato's march across the desert appears to hold little strategic value, and is instead constructed as an elaborate test of Roman *virtus* (9.302, *audax virtus*) that only a figure like Cato possesses the resolve to withstand. Cato, rendered uniquely impervious to heat, thirst, and snakebite 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.¹²⁷ The rest of Cato's men can claim the privilege of dying free men (as he reminds them at 9.379), but this is a dubious consolation at best.¹²⁸ For all his individual fortitude, Cato is not capable of

overcoming the destructive forces of civil war any more than he can rescue his men from the depredations of their desert setting.

Cato is the one figure in Lucan's epic who seems authorized to activate the positive aspect of incendiary metaphor; yet this appears only to emphasize the futility of his efforts. 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 panicked spirits with courage and love of their struggles," *BC* 9.406–7). This line echoes the end of *Aeneid* 6, in which Aeneas's spirit is inflamed by his father's presentation of Rome's future glory.¹²⁹ Cato's harangue, however, is directed at an exhausted band of survivors, who continue with him down a "desert path" from which, unlike Aeneas's underworld journey, there is "no return" (*inreducem viam deserto limite carpit*, 9.408). The phrase *deserto limite* echoes the *transverso limite* of Lucan's Phaethon at *BC* 2.412, as well as the fragment of his lost *Iliacon*. Reminding readers of Phaethon's celestial ambitions here, however unfulfilled they may have been, serves in some sense to valorize Cato's struggle, even as it exposes the ultimate futility of his quest.

Thus, in a fractured and oblique fashion, both Pompey and Cato replicate aspects of Phaethon's self-destructive trajectory: Pompey by enlisting a wide swathe of the Mediterranean world in a destructive lost cause; Cato by persevering in the wasteland of Libya despite the dire consequences. Caesar, on the other hand, is so thoroughly imbued with the destructive power that fire represents in Lucan's epic that he becomes in effect a human *ekpyrosis*, a one-man disaster visited upon the entire known world.¹³⁰ It is certainly tempting to speculate about what a poet of Lucan's proclivities would have done in response to the Fire of 64, an urban catastrophe of truly legendary proportions—especially since he wrote such a work. Lucan's lost *De incendio urbis* is easily imagined as the ultimate literary expression of the fraught relationship between leaders and fires at Rome. A passage from Statius that commemorates this work will be examined in the next chapter. For this chapter's final reading, however, let us turn to a text that in the absence of Lucan's lost work may be understood as the earliest surviving text written in response to the fire. In *Ep. ad Luc.* 91, Seneca describes the devastation of the Gallic provincial capital Lugdunum in a fire thought to have occurred shortly after the Roman conflagration, in late summer or early autumn of 64 CE. As we will see, he does so in a way that invites reading as a direct (if covert) response to Rome's fire of the same year.¹³¹

Seneca and the Fire(s) of 64: Epistulae Morales 91

Two years prior to the events of 64, Seneca had largely withdrawn from public life; he hoped, perhaps, to avoid becoming the target of a denunciation or otherwise giving offense to a ruler who had recently ordered the killing of his own mother and first wife, among other intimates.¹³² The effort was at least temporarily successful, and it was during this period that Seneca produced the series of letters known as the *Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium*.¹³³ In the 124 letters that survive, Seneca's general avoidance of current events, at Rome and elsewhere, means that many of them are effectively impossible to date.¹³⁴ Such obscurity was probably both deliberate and necessary in the political climate in which he wrote; the volatile personal and political dynamic of his relationship with Nero, to whom he had once served as tutor and chief adviser, would no doubt have made his work subject to especially close scrutiny. *Ep.* 91, however, is exceptionally precise in its relevance.

Seneca takes as his starting point the news of Lugdunum's devastation by fire, an event that most scholars agree occurred (at most) only a few months after the Great Fire of Rome.¹³⁵ Previous scholarship has already suggested that *Ep.* 91 exaggerates the impact of the Lugdunum fire to a scale that more accurately describes Rome's.¹³⁶ Yet far-reaching implications of this insight have not been traced throughout the text. As we have already seen, Roman audiences still reeling from the destruction of their own capital reflexively reached out for parallels from myth, history, and literature. Similarly, for Seneca's readers an analogy between the fire described in *Ep.* 91 and Rome's current disaster would seem readily apparent. Nero is accused of burning Rome in imitation of Troy; Lugdunum's "imitation" of Rome's great fire, in turn, provides Seneca with the opportunity to hold up another kind of mirror.¹³⁷ By synchronicity, the devastation of Rome, center of the empire, is twinned with that of the provincial capital of Lugdunum. Seneca exploits this convenient parallel to create a displaced or "shadow" commentary on the destruction of Neronian Rome. Thus Lugdunum becomes a vehicle not just for dramatizing Seneca's response to Rome's recent misfortune but also for commenting indirectly on the instability that has led to his own departure from the city.

Urbs Maxima and Urbs Nulla: Lugdunum as a Proxy for Rome

Seneca begins *Ep.* 91 by creating a suggestively elastic civic terminology: referring to Lugdunum as a *colonia* and then to comparable cities as *civitates* and

oppida. Thereafter, Seneca largely abandons specific connections to Lugdunum, meditating instead on the public disaster of an unnamed *urbs*:

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, Lugdunum, 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. (Sen. Ep. 91.1–2)

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. The effect of the event has been that he must seek out his own inner strength—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 precedent. 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, Lugdunum, 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 no city at all. In short, it's taking me longer to tell you about the destruction than the destruction actually took.

Despite the letter's early assertion that Lugdunum's many lost buildings were "most beautiful" (*Ep.* 91.2, *tot pulcherrima opera*), Seneca does not name or describe a single monument that would tie his commentary specifically to the provincial capital.¹³⁸ 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." Seneca insists on the massive civic magnitude of the event, commenting that no "great state" (*res magna*, suggesting a stature exceeding that of Lugdunum proper) had ever before been denied some warning period before its ruin. Yet "in this [city]" (*in hac*) one night has made the difference between *urbem maximam*, "a city at its greatest" (or perhaps, in another nod to Rome's status, "the greatest city"), and [*urbem*] *nullam*, "no city at all." Later, at *Ep.* 91.10, Seneca makes the letter's only reference to Lugdunum's topography, remarking that it was magnificent "but then again, occupied only one hill, and not such a large one" (*uni tamen inposita et huic non latissimo monti*). This point appears to have little relevance other than to evoke Rome's famous seven hills.¹³⁹ Together, these elements strengthen the impression that Seneca is using the Lugdunum fire as a proxy for Rome's recent disaster.

Yet Seneca's claim that the event at Lugdunum was without a precedent (91.1, *sine exemplo*) is not rendered false by our own glaring awareness of Rome's own recent conflagration. Rather, as Seneca offers a series of examples of destroyed cities all over the empire, the remark casts an ironic glance at those who would insist on the exceptionalism of their own city's calamity.¹⁴⁰ As Ker argues, *Ep.* 91 "presents [Seneca's] Roman audience with much-needed perspective about *their* seemingly singular event."¹⁴¹ This strategy contributes to the universal outlook that Seneca advises, allowing us to apply the letter's lessons to disasters far and wide—including Rome's, but not limited to it.

As general as Seneca's observations may be, they nevertheless convey some pointedly Rome-centric historical commentary. He counsels at *Ep.* 91.16: "It's not by burial mounds, or those monuments of varying sizes which line the road

that you should measure things; ash puts everyone on the same level (*aequat omnis cinis*). We're born unequal, but as equals we die (*in pares nascimur, pares morimur*). I say the same thing about cities that I say about their inhabitants: Ardea was captured as well as Rome." This reference recalls Rome's legendary sack at the hands of the invading Gauls, after which Rome rose to even greater glory. Seneca reminds us that Ardea, too, had suffered and recovered from a sack, but eventually faded into obscurity and by the Augustan period was a byword for ruined grandeur; he implies that Ardea's model of decline is just as possible as a reemergence.¹⁴²

Mentioning Ardea in company with Rome's Gallic catastrophe here may serve yet another agenda for Seneca. After sacking Rome, the Gauls headed for Ardea but were repelled by the Roman general Camillus, who had retired there after his exile. Seneca elsewhere in his letters uses allusions to Rome's exiled luminaries to situate himself in a lineage of "great exiles."¹⁴³ Although Seneca's retreat from his role as Nero's adviser has displaced him from his onetime position of power and influence, he cannot rescue Rome as Camillus once did. Nevertheless, as Nero's departed adviser and Rome's would-be consoler in this moment of crisis, he uses another form of displacement to communicate his views, transferring his reaction to Rome's conflagration onto the destruction of the provincial capital at Lugdunum.

Similarly, *Ep.* 91 creates a sense of temporal displacement with a series of telling allusions to Augustan Rome. In the *De clementia*, a work dedicated to Nero in the early days of his reign, Seneca commends Augustus to Nero as a model for his future leadership.¹⁴⁴ In *Ep.* 91, however, his appeals to the Augustan legacy evoke failure, loss, and reversal. Seneca repeatedly emphasizes the current peaceful conditions (*ubique armis quiescentibus, cum toto orbe terrarum diffusa securitas sit*) in language that evokes the Augustan era of stability and prosperity that Nero claimed to replicate.¹⁴⁵ He continues to build the connection to the dynasty's foundational era, commenting at 91.6.1: *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 repetition of *multis* . . . *multa* echoes the *Aeneid*'s iconic proem, further advancing Vergil's vision of Rome (and by association Augustus's) as a major subtext here.¹⁴⁶ Both these passages respond to the rhetoric of state formation, empire building, and Roman identity as expressed in *Aeneid* 1. The explicit reference to the gods' favor (*deum indulgentia*) seems particularly indebted to the claims of divine

support for Rome advanced in Latin epic, as does the emphasis on *labor*, a term heavy with Vergilian connotations.¹⁴⁷ Seneca goes on at 91.6.3 to develop the theme of reversal: *esset aliquod inbecillitatis nostrae solacium rerumque nostrarum, si tam tarde perirent cuncta quam fiunt; nunc incrementa lente exeunt, festinatur in damnum* (“It would be some kind of comfort for our helplessness and our state of affairs, if everything died out as gradually as it comes into existence; now progress advances slowly, the rush is into destruction”). The gnomic final *sententia* unmistakably echoes of the oxymoron Augustus is alleged to have lived by: σπεῦδε βραδέως, i.e., *festina lente*.¹⁴⁸ Here, however, Seneca flips the formula: at present (*nunc*), the gains (*incrementa*) accomplished by the erstwhile *labores* of Roman leaders and the gods’ *indulgentia* are racing into a final, Trojan-esque ruin. Augustus’s “slow hustle,” a model for city-building as much as for stable government, is decoupled and inverted. The human effort and divine support celebrated in the *Aeneid*’s proem are evoked only to be undone, and the city itself is unmade by reversing Augustus’s own motto.

The Day of Doom: Stoic *Ekpyrosis* and Expiring *Saecula*

Seneca writes near the letter’s end at 91.14: *nam huic coloniae ab origine sua centensimus annus est, aetas ne homini quidem extrema* (“For it’s only the hundredth year since this colony was founded, not even the outer limit of the human lifespan”). The founding of Lugdunum as a Roman colony only a century earlier ostensibly returns us to our context of the provincial capital, but it also invites comparison with the far greater antiquity of many of the structures destroyed in the Roman conflagration.¹⁴⁹ Moreover, the reference to the colony’s founding in 43 BCE evokes the century (give or take) that had passed between the collapse of the republic in the 40s BCE and the present day under Nero.¹⁵⁰ The phrase *aetas . . . homini . . . extrema* alludes to the *saeculum*, supposedly the longest possible length of human life. *Saecula* were believed to last between 100 and 120 years, and Roman authors frequently debated the number of *saecula* that Rome had been allotted.¹⁵¹ Chapter 1 discussed the cosmological anxieties of the mid-first century BCE, when fears of an end to Rome’s cosmic cycle and of impending apocalypse proliferated amidst the political chaos of the era; the resolution of these concerns, in turn, became central to Augustan rhetoric of cosmic renewal. Thus the historical reference reminds us that the Augustan “re-setting” of the cosmic clock is due to expire in the Neronian present.

Further developing the letter's theme of time's acceleration and collapse in moments of crisis is Seneca's emphasis on the shock of total destruction on "a single day" (*id unus dies*, 91.6.2), a dissonant echo of his own remark at the letter's outset that "one night leveled" Lugdunum (*una nox stravit*, 91.2). The motif of destruction wrought in a single day had been used from Greek tragedy onward to suggest the caprice of Fortune. Roman epic in particular displays an obsession with anticipating the specific day of the world's doom.¹⁵² In Seneca's work, however, the "single day" evokes the Stoic doctrine of *ekpyrosis*.¹⁵³ Seneca also nods to earlier figurations of urban fire as analogues to civil war and foreign invasion, remarking at 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."¹⁵⁴ As Lucan more famously states in the opening lines of the *Bellum Civile*, "great things collapse into themselves" (*in se magna ruunt*, *BC* 1.81). These remarks do not condemn individual leaders; rather they suggest the potential for systemic failure innate to vast power structures, calling attention to the collapsing distinction between internal and external threats. Thus Seneca pulls the poetics of catastrophe out of the mythic and cosmic realms, asserting their relevance to the here and now. As the Stoic practice of *praemeditatio malorum* dictates, we must realize that disaster never lies far outside our horizon of experience but can occur at any time.¹⁵⁵

Reigniting History: Liberalis, Timagenes, Book-Burning, and the *De beneficiis*

Liberalis, whose distress at his destroyed capital (and implied responsibility for rebuilding it) are the purported inspiration for *Ep.* 91, is presumed to be Aebutius Liberalis, addressee of the *De beneficiis*.¹⁵⁶ In both texts, Liberalis is characterized as a prominent young civic benefactor and an object of Seneca's didactic efforts, making him an attractive analogue for Nero.¹⁵⁷ Seneca's history with Nero thus provides a major subtext to the advice he plans to offer here to his young friend: *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 a sort of unbelievable love of his homeland, which perhaps has burned only so it might be spurred on for the better," *Sen. Ep.* 91.13.1). Here we have the letter's one really good fire pun: Liberalis is described as "aflame" (*flagranti*) with patriotic passion. The qualification "sort

of unbelievable" (*incredibili quodam*) implies Seneca's awareness of the pun he is perpetrating.¹⁵⁸ Yet the phrase may also subtly acknowledge the resentment and skepticism with which leaders' recovery efforts are often met in the aftermath of catastrophe.¹⁵⁹ The hostility and suspicion that Nero faced after Rome's conflagration may also inform Seneca's parting advice at the letter's conclusion. Asserting that no one can report accurately about what happens after we die, he exclaims:

quanta dementia est vereri ne infameris ab infamibus? quemadmodum famam extimuitis sine causa, sic et illa quae numquam timeres nisi fama iussisset. num quid detrimenti faceret vir bonus iniquis rumoribus sparsus? (Sen. Ep. 91.20)

How great a madness is it to dread being defamed by the infamous? Just as you feared rumor without cause, you also fear things you never would, had rumor not dictated it. Surely no good man suffers harm when splattered by unfair rumors?

Here Seneca is addressing his alleged correspondent Lucilius, rather than Liberalis directly. Indirectly, however, this conclusion could very well be addressed to Nero, acknowledging the impact of rumor and speculation swirling around the emperor at the time, and suggesting at least an awareness, if not an endorsement, of the accusations faced by his former pupil.¹⁶⁰

Seneca also seems to suggest that disaster can ultimately have positive consequences for a city (*ut in melius excitaretur*), a theme he expands on at 91.13.2: *saepe maiori fortunae locum fecit iniuria. multa ceciderunt, ut altius surgerent* ("Many's the time that damage made room for greater fortune. Many structures have fallen only to rise higher"). Seneca intimates that disasters are moments to shine for a polity's leadership, urging them and their societies on to better things (*melius, maiori, altius*) and echoing rhetoric of rebuilding under Augustus that Seneca describes in the *De beneficiis*: *saevitum est in opera publica ignibus, surrexerunt meliora consumptis* ("when fire ravaged public buildings, there arose better ones than those destroyed").¹⁶¹ The notion of Rome's triumphant reemergence from destruction again evokes Roman rhetoric vis-à-vis Troy and the Gallic sack and is traceable to the very earliest stages of Latin literature. Yet Seneca immediately undercuts these encouragements with a remark he attributes to Timagenes of Alexandria, the rhetor and historian discussed in chapter 1, who was remembered as one of Augustan Rome's most prominent dissident voices.

Seneca, now writing in a state of ambiguous self-exile roughly analogous to, and yet more precarious than that of, Timagenes, offers a wistful echo of the relative safety with which Timagenes aired his critical views:¹⁶²

Timagenes, felicitati urbis inimicus, aiebat Romae sibi incendia ob hoc unum dolori esse, quod sciret meliora surrectura quam arsissent. (Ep. 91.13.3)

Timagenes, who had a grudge against the city's prosperity, used to say that conflagrations at Rome upset him only because he knew that better buildings would arise than those which had burned.

Here, in recalling Timagenes's hostility to "the city's prosperity" (*felicitati urbis inimicus*), Seneca refers unambiguously to Rome, reinforcing the impression that the letter's other references to a destroyed *urbs* also apply to Rome. Timagenes, as quoted in *Ep.* 91, ironizes the Augustan narrative of progress in the wake of misfortune (*Ben.* 6.32.3, *surrexerunt meliora*; cf. *Ep.* 91.13.3, *meliora surrectura*). The disfavor with which Seneca's Timagenes views Roman "progress" should give us pause: new structures will rise, but Seneca *qua* Timagenes seems to doubt whether they should.

Overall, in *Ep.* 91, the destruction of the Gallic capital at Lugdunum provides Seneca with the scope to explore civic disasters in terms that are (paradoxically) both pointed and obscure. His ostensible focus on Lugdunum allows him to transcend the immediacy of any one disaster, even as he alludes unmistakably to Rome's recent conflagration. Seneca sharpens the sense that Rome and its leadership are his major subtexts with a series of appeals to Augustan Rome and its cultural legacy. He calls into question the supposed permanence of this legacy, pointing to achievements of the Augustan era only to highlight the present state of urban devastation. Moreover, the disruption, displacement, and loss created by urban conflagration and civic crisis become a mirror for his own current state of political "exile" from Rome. Thus Seneca uses the two fires of 64 to reflect on the collapse of Roman leadership, as well as to suggest the city's (perhaps) inevitable failure to live up to the predictions of eternal greatness and *imperium sine fine* set out in the Augustan era.

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. The evidence simply does not allow a final judg-

ment on whether Nero planned the Great Fire or on what song of Troy (if any) he performed in concert with the unfolding catastrophe. What is certain is that the Great Fire and Nero's death irrevocably altered the majestic, forward-looking narrative of Rome's rise from Troy's ashes that Augustan poets had endeavored to construct.¹⁶³ Given his well-documented obsession with conflating myth and reality, during the fateful days in July of 64 and in their aftermath Nero may well have realized at least some of the singular role he would come to play in Rome's tradition of literary conflagration. The original poetry to which Nero dedicated his efforts is now lost, yet through the legend of his performance in 64 he has nevertheless inscribed himself into the shared imaginary of the Greco-Roman tradition.¹⁶⁴

Nero is accused of using Rome's destruction as inspiration to recall the fall of Troy, "likening present misfortunes to past ones," but this tendency was far from unique to him. The events of 64 must be read in light of Rome's pervasive cultural tendency to draw comparisons between current events and those of myth and literature. The Nero of legend acts on these same tendencies, reaching for his lyre (or cithara)—if not for the torch—in order to align Rome more closely with Troy, her mythic predecessor. Yet by the same token, we can imagine Romans as essentially "programmed" to make these same associations in constructing and promoting the story of Nero's performance during the fire, as well as of his alleged arson. Seneca likewise appeals both to literary and to historical memory to understand a recent catastrophe in *Ep.* 91, gradually expanding his outlook to reflect on the inevitable doom of all great states. He suggests that the values underpinning Rome's revival under Augustus have dissolved, presenting his own ethical models of Stoic detachment and universal perspective as the superior answer to the current crisis. Thus the Neronian destruction created an irresistible opportunity to fuse literary allusion and cultural memory. We see this impulse at work not only in Nero's legendary performance of an *excidium Troiae* and in Seneca's *Ep.* 91 but also in all probability (as I have argued above) in Petronius's scenes of Trojan travesty and paranoid *vigiles*.

This chapter's readings delineate a consistent thematic concern with the triad of leaders, fires, and urban disaster among Neronian authors. The sense of living dangerously that pervades the work of the authors discussed here found grim confirmation in the demise each met: all were forced to commit suicide at Nero's command. In a fitting final imitation, within a few years Nero himself would be forced to enact the same fate he had so often decreed for his contemporaries. The best revenge that Lucan, Seneca, and Petronius could have hoped

for may ultimately be the way in which their works effectively “frame” Nero for the Fire of 64. Much of this material in all likelihood predates the catastrophe of 64 CE.¹⁶⁵ We need not see specific references to the Neronian conflagration in these texts 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. Yet 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.

The events of 64 may simply have made Nero, already apparently an enthusiastic exploiter of poetic images in his daily existence, into an ideal repository for the rich supply of previous texts linking leaders and fire. 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 rereadings and ideological implications when considered in hindsight after the actual conflagration of 64. Thus Neronian literature yields a definitive turning point in the discourse of leaders and fires at Rome. Subsequently, authors and emperors alike recognized this effect; as the chapters to follow demonstrate, they exploited it with remarkable energy. Nero’s posthumous critics used the legend of his performance while Rome burned, as well as the memory of his extravagant Golden House, to portray him as a tyrant of mythic and cosmic dimension. The next chapter showcases a range 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 4

From the Ashes

Post-Neronian Rome and Literary Memory

Overall, authors working in the late first century CE continued to develop the traditions linking leaders and fiery destruction that had so preoccupied their predecessors over the previous century. Fires, already highly politicized in the late republic, possessed demonstrable ideological value in the rhetoric and literature of the Augustan period, as well as in the later Julio-Claudian era. As I argued in chapter 3, the Great Fire of 64 and Nero's storied response to it represented predictable outcomes of the material, ideological, and literary climate in which they occurred. The readings in previous chapters demonstrated the depth and persistence of Rome's anxiety about its eventual downfall—and the intensity with which it remembered prior destructions of cultural significance. Previously these tropes had evoked the memory of the civil wars of the first century BCE; in this period, however, they were newly charged with the power to conjure the memory of Nero, the 64 fire, and the collapse of the Julio-Claudian dynasty. 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. In the years following Nero's death, authors and leaders alike were intent on presenting a set of images and narratives designed to further tarnish Nero's memory, even as they laid claim to the purported ideals of Augustus, the founder of his dynasty.

Images associated with the Flavian rebuilding of the city and manipulation of Nero's portraiture, as well as the hostile historiographic tradition cultivated under Flavian rule, 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.¹ Evidence from multiple forms of representation suggests the totalizing nature of this project.² Under the Flavians, a new vision of Rome's urban fabric arose around its inhabitants; this new city was, in essence, a monument to the catastrophes of the past, since this *Nova Roma* was in all likelihood built according to the regulations Nero had laid out after 64.³ In this chapter, I explore the intermediality inherent in Flavian-era commemorations of Nero's most salient failure in leadership (at least as hostile Flavian rhetoric would have it): the Great Fire of 64 CE. Nero and the 64 fire were inheritors to a discourse on fire and leadership that both predated the 64 catastrophe and 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. The Great Fire seems to have generated a field of contested aetiologies in Flavian literature, as the long pedigree of pre-Neronian literary conflagrations found new company in the freshly minted historical narratives from Nero's incendiary reign. Some of these texts specifically link Nero to the 64 catastrophe, while others associate him with conflagration on a broader level.

Pliny the Elder suggests the commonplace acceptance of Nero's guilt in a discussion of certain hugely expensive nettle trees that had been cultivated at Rome before the fire, remarking that "they lasted . . . down to the Emperor Nero's conflagration, green and fresh due to careful maintenance—had not the *princeps* hastened the death even of trees."⁴ Statius and the author of the *Octavia*, as we will see below, also blame Nero for starting the blaze but vary in the motivations they assign him for doing so. Other texts, such as Martial's *Epigrams* and the inscriptions associated with Domitian's altars to Vulcan (the so-called *Arae Incendii Neroniani*), address the ongoing problem of fire more indirectly, in what read as attempts to differentiate Domitian's efforts to rebuild after a major fire from those of Nero. Thus these texts reveal the risk that subsequent rulers ran of becoming associated with Nero—i.e., with arson and with overly ambitious rebuilding—should another such catastrophe occur. Flavian propaganda blamed Nero for the 64 fire and for his dynasty's collapse. Yet this strategy's very success meant that subsequent rulers who experienced disasters—or who exhibited threatening behaviors—now risked accusations of

becoming another Nero. Thus efforts to manipulate the discourse surrounding the Neronian past ran the risk of “blowback,” as the memory of Nero and “his” fire continued to evolve.

An emblematic example of the Flavian impulse to blame Nero for the fire—as well as to associate this alleged crime with the despotism with which he was now charged—comes from Statius’s *Silvae* 2.7. Writing a generation after the fall of Nero, Statius throughout his career signals his intention to link his work with the political power of his day, presenting himself as the most acclaimed poet of Domitianic Rome and promoting his popularity among the senatorial elite. Statius’s *Silvae* share their title with—and are presumed to be modeled on—a lost composition by Lucan. Thus the *Silvae* are from the outset an inherently commemorative project, inviting recollection of and comparison with Lucan’s work.⁵ Yet even within this context, *Silvae* Book 2 displays an especially intense focus on the themes of loss and commemoration; *Silvae* 2.7, the book’s final poem, is presented as a posthumous birthday gift for Lucan, addressed to his widow. The poem commemorates not only the salient features of Lucan’s career and character but also those of Nero: his persecution of his political opponents, his suppression of literary rivals, and his alleged responsibility for the Great Fire.

In the poem’s opening lines, the muse Calliope arrives in Córdoba to greet Lucan at his birth. Cradling the infant, she catalogues the works that will win him acclaim in her appointed sphere (eloquence and epic poetry) before his untimely death. The 64 fire inspired one of Lucan’s final works, the now-lost *De incendio urbis*, to which Calliope alludes at lines 60–61:

*dices culminibus Remi vagantes
infandos domini nocentis ignes*

you will speak of the abominable flames ranging over Rome’s rooftops: her guilty master’s [doing] . . .

The lines above show that either Lucan or Statius (or both) clearly thought of Nero as responsible for the conflagration. As Frederick Ahl has argued, it is likely that Statius is here echoing the content of the *De incendio urbis* itself.⁶ Not only does he attribute the fire of Rome to Nero but he also plays on the allusion to Phaethon in Lucan’s proem discussed in chapter 3 (*vagantes* . . . *ignes* ~ *igne vago*, Luc. BC 1.50).⁷ Thus Statius, through a superimposition of literary and

historical memory, suggests that Lucan's prophecy of Nero as a new Phaethon has been "fulfilled," as it were, through Nero's presumed involvement in the fire.

Silvae Book 2 was probably released in 95 CE, some thirty years after the catastrophic years of 64–65, which included the Great Fire in July 64; the presumed composition of the *De incendio urbis*; and the Pisonian conspiracy and its discovery, which ultimately led to the deaths of Lucan and his fellow conspirators, as well as of Seneca in April of 65. At least some of this poem's readership could be expected to have direct recollection of these events; the poem's presentation to Lucan's widow, Polla Argentaria, indicates that at least a small contingent of survivors still maintained a presence in Rome.⁸ Tacitus and Suetonius, writing a generation after Statius, both dismiss the conflict between Lucan and Nero as a literary feud. Statius's poem shows, however, that in the transitional era between living memory and recorded history, the retrospective representation of Lucan's opposition to Nero had great ideological power.⁹ Lucan's poetry acquired new significance after his death as a reflection of the anti-Neronian sentiments that had ultimately cost him his life; arguably, praising Nero's victims in and of itself was a form of posthumous reproach. Thus Lucan's lost work on the Great Fire appears to have become (whatever its actual content) a potent device for those wishing to condemn Nero's memory.

Like these lines from *Silvae* 2.7, the texts examined in this chapter perform a mediating role in the construction of cultural memory in post-Neronian Rome. They connect Nero both with the events of 64 and with fire in general, forging a set of variable links and causalities between and among these elements. This chapter showcases the range of different formats and perspectives in which the 64 fire worked its way into the ideological, aesthetic, and commemorative cultures of Rome in the dynastic period following the collapse of the Julio-Claudians. In the fabric of the city, Domitian dedicated the so-called Arae Incendii Neroniani, a presumed set of monumental altars dedicated to Vulcan in fulfillment of a vow dating back to the Neronian Fire. While offering a conspicuous reminder of evils suffered under Nero, these altars may also represent an attempt at diverting blame for the fire of 80 CE.¹⁰ Likewise, Martial's *Epigram* 5.7, which presents Rome as a phoenix rising from the ashes, is easily read as a reference to Domitian's restoration of the cityscape after the 80 CE fire. The poem, addressed to Vulcan, appears to present Domitian's response to the fire of 80 as an improvement on Nero's response to the 64 disaster.¹¹ Martial's pervasive Ovidian citations, however, evoke the emperor's overwhelming power to destroy lives; like fire itself, this was a threat that could never be elim-

inated. Thus both Martial's poem and Domitian's altars provide a reflection of Rome's transformation under the Flavians, in which Julio-Claudian notions of identity, eternity, and the leader's privileged relationship with the gods are all acknowledged and adjusted.

The Nero known to us from scandalous report is a semimythic figure, notorious for his alleged arson of the city, as well as for his rumored performance of a song about Troy as he watched Rome burn. These features of Nero's legend are evoked both directly (the supposed arson) and indirectly (the song) in the historical drama *Octavia*. The play recalls many of the same themes that appeared so pervasively in the Julio-Claudian material examined in chapters 1–3, including Phaethon figurations and the *urbs capta*/Rome as Troy motif. In the *Octavia*, however, this range of incendiary metaphors illustrates Nero's collapsing dynasty, fusing recent history together with the proleptic anticipation of his signature catastrophe. Among our ancient sources, this play alone asserts that the emperor's decision to burn Rome was actually made in 62 CE; at the play's conclusion (*Octavia* 831–57), Nero devises this plan as revenge against the people for their short-lived resistance to his plans to divorce his dynastic bride Octavia and marry Poppaea. Importantly, such a motivation is less easily consigned to the past than the mythopoeticizing ambitions of a dead megalomaniac (the most frequent interpretation of Nero's alleged arson). Instead the *Octavia* suggests that the 64 fire was the result of a confrontation between the emperor and his people, an ongoing source of risk and unease for ruler and ruled alike in imperial Rome. Thus the newly minted historical narratives concerning Nero's incendiary reign worked in concert with the physical realities of urban life, yielding a volatile blend of politics and poetics.

Ruins, Reminders, and Survivors: Post-Neronian Rome, the Arae Incendii Neroniani, and the Memory of Nero

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 had established. Scattered citywide, the physical reminders of Nero, his fire, and his fall gave potency to this shift.¹² While the fire of 64 seems to have occupied a dominant position in 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. As new monuments

rose celebrating Flavian renewal, plots of land destroyed in 64 apparently continued to lie in wasted states until well into Vespasian's reign.¹³ Equally, the Flavians represented their seizure of the city as a return to order after Nero's death and the succession of emperors engaged in the ugly struggle for control in 68–69 CE. Vespasian and his successors claimed to offer redemption from the damage of 64–69 and protection from future threats; yet lasting reminders of past disaster constituted a major component of this project. In redeeming the damage that (as hostile post-Neronian rhetoric would have it) Nero's depravity had wrought upon Rome, the Flavians perhaps also hoped to elide the destruction of 69, in which Vespasian, his sons, and their supporters were deeply implicated

When Vespasian's forces ultimately prevailed in 69, the new ruler made every effort to represent the establishment of his dynasty as a break with the chaos and impiety of the previous era. He lost no time in restoring the sacred areas on the Capitoline Hill, which had burned in 69 during a clash between his own supporters and those of his predecessor Vitellius.¹⁴ Vespasian also dedicated the massive temple of Claudius on the Caelian Hill, a project that had originated in the Neronian period but had fallen into neglect after the fire when the land was incorporated into the Golden House.¹⁵ Other conspicuous projects also refashioned the Golden House property: most notably the Flavian Amphitheater but also the Baths of Titus at the base of the Esquiline Hill and the Ludus Magnus adjacent to the amphitheater. These new landmarks called attention to Nero's former use (or abuse, as his posthumous critics would have it) of urban space and reminded the public of the disaster Rome had suffered under his auspices. Significantly, however, they also prevented this high-profile area of Rome from returning to its pre-64 status as a densely settled commercial and residential zone.¹⁶ Yet ultimately Rome was never entirely able to leave its dread of social upheaval and urban collapse in the past.

The eruption of Vesuvius in 79 CE again reminded Rome—and urban populations around the empire—of their vulnerability to disaster.¹⁷ Moreover, the fire of 80 consumed much of the Campus Martius and the glorious new Flavian Capitol, only recently restored after the destruction of 69.¹⁸ The damage was a stark reversal of the message of progress and recovery that Flavian leadership had no doubt hoped to project. The emperor Titus, upon hearing the news of the fire ravaging the city, is said to have announced, "I am ruined" (Suet. *Tit.* 3.4). This eloquently succinct personalization of the disaster perhaps was meant to stand in pointed contrast to Nero's rumored poetic outpouring during the

height of the 64 destruction. Yet it also suggests 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. In any case, Titus's comment proved prophetic. A devastating plague soon broke out, and Titus died shortly thereafter in September of 81.

Domitian thus faced the unenviable task of again restoring Rome and reassuring the people of his dynasty's stability.¹⁹ 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. Domitian augmented Rome's finances with aggressive taxation measures, and his ambitious building program is still apparent today in the city's landscape.²⁰ Yet he also needed to prove his capacity to provide security from divine threats. He lavishly rebuilt numerous temples lost in 80, including the Capitoline Temple to Jupiter Optimus Maximus;²¹ he radically expanded and redefined the imperial cult, even as he reinstated a number of archaic religious customs;²² and he cultivated a notable personal devotion to Minerva, to whom he dedicated a temple in the Forum Transitorium (which again had previous associations with Nero's building program).²³ Yet in the end he succumbed to the opposition of disaffected members of his own inner circle. Like Nero, Domitian is remembered today as the reviled final exponent of a dynasty founded out of intense civil conflict. Unlike Nero, he left behind him a highly monumentalized city, a reasonably healthy treasury, and a functional—if complex—urban bureaucracy to support his successors.

Sometime after 83, Domitian dedicated a set of altars to Vulcan in fulfillment of what their dedicatory inscription claims is a "long-neglected vow" that dated from "when the city burned for nine days in the time of Nero." There appear to have been multiple altars, although at present only two sites can be identified with any confidence. The lone surviving architectural example suggests that they were of massive dimensions, and their associated precincts occupied a number of conspicuous urban frontages, inviting the attention of viewers at various points around the city. Certain features of these precincts, such as large and spectacular fires set in a focal feature, railed or spiked enclosures, and strict delimitation of space marked by *cippi*, are highly reminiscent of the imperial *ustrina* discussed in chapter 2. The extreme set of precautions and controls necessary to manage incendiary events like cremations or large sacrificial fires safely in the urban environment were in and of themselves an assertion of the emperor's control over life and worship in the city.

Ara(e) Incendii Neroniani is the modern Latinism invented to refer to this presumed set of monumental altars to Vulcan (CIL VI.826 = 30837b, lines 4–13):

ara quae / est inferius dedicata est ab / Imp Caesare / Domitiano Aug / Germanico ex voto suscepto / quod diu erat neglectum / nec redditum incendiorum / arcendorum causa / quando urbs per novem dies / arsit Neronianis temporibus

the altar which is below has been dedicated by the Emperor Caesar Domitian Augustus Germanicus, from a vow undertaken for the sake of repelling fires, when the city burned for nine days in the time of Nero—[a vow] which had been long neglected and not fulfilled.

The descriptive nature of the introductory lines is likely to reflect the original language of the vow, which proposed a dedication in specific terms to be fulfilled when the supplicant's wish was granted.²⁴ The apparent consistency of the design across multiple locations suggests that these altars were intended to send a clear message. Offered as a religious solution to a specific problem, these monuments testify to the supernatural dimension of the Roman perception of urban fires.

The inscription specifies that the monuments were vowed not by Domitian, their dedicator, but rather were promised at the time of the Neronian fire. A *votum* was a solemn commitment made in favor of a divinity: the promissor (and after his death, his heir) was obligated to the divinity at the hazard of further divine punishment.²⁵ The most logical originator in “Neronian times” of a sacred obligation that could be passed on to Domitian is presumably his forerunner in the role of Pontifex Maximus: Nero himself. Yet the text seems to avoid crediting Nero directly for the origination of the vow, instead couching his notorious name in an adjectival form that encompasses the entire period in question (*Neronianis temporibus*). The inclusion of Nero's name (in any form) on a new monument would have been arresting in an urban landscape in which other reminders of his reign had been erased or conspicuously altered.²⁶ The phrasing seems less concerned with the exact date of the fire than with connecting Nero to the event in general terms. This may be in part because the date was such common knowledge, but perhaps it also bespeaks an elevated interest in comparing Nero with Domitian as a leader: Domitian's titlature is featured prominently and with embellishments (*Imp. Caesar Domitianus Aug. Germanicus Pont. Max.*), while Nero's *cognomen* is relegated to an adjectival modifier.²⁷

The inscription notably lacks any suggestion of Nero's guilt in the fire, a popular accusation amongst Nero's contemporary and posthumous detractors. Nevertheless, the altars were dedicated in an environment that promoted these accusations so actively that it was perhaps unnecessary to make any direct reference to them.²⁸

The text of the inscription seems to claim that the plan to build these altar complexes originated with a vow by Nero. If this is accurate, then Domitian's decision to fulfill this vow some twenty or more years later is a significant choice—all the more so given the lapse between vow and its fulfillment. Dedicating such large, conspicuously placed altars to the god of fires and forges seems to have presented Domitian with an opportunity to stake two rhetorical claims at once. First, Domitian attempts to portray himself as a responsible emperor who fulfills sacred obligations, even those of a reviled predecessor. Second, he aims to consign the catastrophes of Nero's reign (as well as, perhaps, some more recent ones) definitively into the city's past—a past under the rule of a “bad” emperor. Noted for his scrupulous attention to religious matters, Domitian may well have seen in the unfulfilled vow of the Arae an opportunity to advance his own standing in the field of religious leadership: ingeniously, this monument exploits Nero's own prodigious efforts in the wake of 64 to recast him as a religious failure.

Lines 16–25 of the inscription specify the rites to be performed annually on the Volcanalia (*Volcanalibus [ante diem] X K Septembres*). The annual rituals celebrated at the Arae, in concert with the ancient citywide veneration of Vulcan, would now perpetually renew the memory of Nero's disgrace and dynastic failure.²⁹ The issue of the “long neglected” vow may have achieved an additional salience in the years leading up to Domitian's principate. The brief reign of Titus had dealt some significant blows to the Roman urban population's sense of security. If Nero's unfinished altars, and by implication the vow they represented, had been lying in neglect for all to see, then Domitian's appeal to the memory of Nero and the 64 disaster may have aimed at diverting attention from more recent misfortunes.

In reformulating both the altars vowed by Nero and the ritual of the Volcanalia, Domitian 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. Domitian's altars seem to have aimed at similar redemption: symbolically, the *princeps* acts to free Rome from its past: Nero, “his” fire, and the wrath of the god. Yet he also ensures the perpetuation of the memory of “Nero-

nian times” and the Neronian fire by inscribing them into the sacred landscape and ritual calendar, casting himself as the city’s redeemer from the continual threat of destruction and oblivion. Chapter 3 outlines the extraordinary divine propitiations that Nero undertook in the aftermath of the destruction. Nevertheless, these measures may not have been adequate to address long-term religious anxiety surrounding the inability to identify or even to remove remains, the failure to perform the requisite rituals, and the absence of a physical site to deposit (and later, to visit) the dead.

Significantly, the supernatural explanation that Domitian offers for Rome’s past failure to control fires is not our only example of such rhetoric in the period. Martial’s *Epigram* 5.7, which ends with a prayer to Vulcan entreating the god to spare Rome from future fires, has long been identified as a reference to the city’s restoration after the fire of 80. If we bear in mind Domitian’s narrative of Nero’s unfulfilled vow, the poem indirectly advances the anti-Neronian agenda so central to Flavian rhetoric, but it also complicates it. Martial moves beyond commemorating the recovery from the fire to hint at the real damage that Domitian himself could do, suggesting that the *princeps*’s power, like that of Vulcan, may be as dangerous as it is beneficial.

Renewing Fires: Martial’s Epigrams and the Power of Rome’s Pater

Martial’s celebrations of urban space suggest, here and there, that certain reminders of Nero evidently offered too much rhetorical or practical value to destroy altogether. The most famous example is the “starry Colossus” that is afforded a “closer look” at the heavens in the *Liber spectaculorum* (2.1: *Hic ubi sidereus propius videt astra colossus*).³⁰ In effect, Martial demotes Nero’s largest representation to subsidiary status in comparison with the massive Flavian Amphitheater that has replaced “the hateful halls of that bestial king,” a “single house” that once “occupied the entire city” (*invidiosa feri radiabant atria regis / unaque iam tota stabat in urbe domus*, Mart. *Spect.* 2.3–4). The cosmocratic vocabulary (*sidereus*, *astra*, *radiabant*, *regis*) of these lines mockingly recalls Nero’s own self-representation as a bearer of light and a restorer of Rome. *Doc-tus Nero*’s penchant for poetry is recalled in *Epigram* 8.70, suggesting that his verses were still read, if not admired.³¹ Likewise, Martial slyly alludes to Nero’s “hot” reputation in assessing the temperature of the late emperor’s bath com-

plex, which was evidently still popular (*Ep.* 10.48): *inmodico sexta Nerone calet*, “the sixth hour heats up with Nero’s excess.”³²

Less directly implicating Nero is *Epigram* 3.52, in which Martial suggests that a property owner has destroyed his own home in anticipation of collecting wealth in the aftermath:

*empta domus fuerat tibi, Tongiliane, ducentis:
abstulit hanc nimium casus in urbe frequens.
conlatum est deciens. rogo, non potes ipse videri
incendisse tuam, Tongiliane, domum?* (Mart. *Ep.* 3.52)

Tongilianus, you got your house for two hundred; a misfortune all too common in this city destroyed it. The payout was ten times as much. I’ve got to ask: could you not appear to have set fire to your house yourself, Tongilianus?

In the brief span of this poem’s four lines, Tongilianus’s house fire goes from being an “accidental” misfortune that costs him a bundle to a crime that profits him tenfold.³³ These lines also, however, echo the accusations of arson that sprang up around Nero in the wake of the 64 conflagration. In Martial’s satirical version of Rome, the city is apparently crawling with neo-*Nerones*, all too often (*nimum . . . frequens*) replicating the most notorious of Nero’s alleged crimes on a smaller scale; yet these comments also expose the charge against Nero as a rhetorical commonplace amplified to epic proportions. In short, Nero’s presence is still strongly felt in Martial’s poetry, even if he is now mocked for the same qualities for which he once sought acclaim.

Similarly, Martial’s *Epigram* 5.7 does not mention Nero directly. Nevertheless, the poem’s themes of recovery after fire, renewed accord with the gods, and the divine pairing of Mars and Venus are highly evocative of Nero and the Julio-Claudian era more broadly, suggesting that Domitian’s rebuilding of Rome after the fire of 80 was haunted by the situation’s obvious parallels with Nero and 64. The poem presents Rome as a phoenix rising from the ashes. Like the *Arae*, this text can be read as a reflection of Rome’s 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:

*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,
 parce: sumus Martis turba, sed et Veneris;
 parce, pater: sic Lemniacis lasciva catenis
 ignoscat coniunx et patienter amet. (Mart. Ep. 5.7)*

Just as fires renew Assyrian nests, every time one bird has lived ten ages, so the new Rome has shed her previous old age, and she has taken on the face of her ruler. Now, I pray, Vulcan, forget your familiar grievances, and show mercy: we are the throng of Mars, but also of Venus. Show mercy, Father: thus may your uninhibited spouse forgive your Lemnian shackles, and enduringly love you.

Martial echoes the Julian claims of descent from Venus (5–6), appropriating this heritage as the entire city's (*sumus . . . turba*). Thus Martial may be suggesting that the punishments that Vulcan had leveled on the city in the Julio-Claudian past must now cease. The poem's 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.

The arrangement of *una . . . avis* at *Epigram* 5.7.4 appears to echo the illustrative way that *una . . . domus* spans "the whole city" in line 4 of *Liber spectaculorum* 2. In *Epigram* 5.7, just as in *Liber spectaculorum* 2, Martial characterizes Flavians' refashioning of the city as a form of renewal, a "return of Rome to herself" (*reddita Roma sibi, Spect. 2.11*). Thus the poem distinguishes the city's new rulers from Nero, whose efforts to rebuild after the 64 fire are characterized in *Spect. 2* and elsewhere (unfairly, as many scholars now agree) as a tyrannical land grab.³⁴ Yet at *Epigram* 5.7, Domitian exerts an influence on the landscape not unlike Nero's: "new Rome" has shed her old form and adopted the appearance of her current ruler (*Ep. 5.7.3–4*). Moreover, a clear series of Ovidian citations creates a tension between Domitian's lavish renewal of Rome's cityscape after the devastating fire of 80 and the emperor's own overwhelming power to destroy lives.³⁵

The image of Rome as phoenix (1–2) that Martial offers celebrate Domitian's rebuilding is specifically Ovid's phoenix from *Metamorphoses* 15.391–96. Ovid is the only other source that suggests that the bird is of Assyrian origin; it is more commonly associated with Egypt or Arabia. In chapter 2, I detail how Ovid's Pythagoras presents the phoenix (*Met. 15.391–417*) as a symbol of regime

change with potentially dire connotations. Thus the appearance of the Ovidian phoenix in *Epigram* 5.7 conveys more than just a sense of eternity or rebirth; it harnesses the bird's greater symbolism in the *Metamorphoses*, prefiguring not just the successive rise but also the inevitable fall of great nations. Furthermore, the reference to the "Lemnian chains" that Venus is to "forgive" in recompense for Rome's safety recollects the tale of Vulcan's past attempts to punish her notorious adultery.

As the bard Demodocus recounts in Book 8 of the *Odyssey*, Hephaestus, the lord of Lemnos, constructed a booby-trap of golden chains to catch Aphrodite *in flagrante* with Ares; he then kept them bound together, and the spectacle of their predicament was a source of amusement for the other gods. This conclusion, a typically Martialian bait-and-switch, introduces a bit of divine burlesque into what had seemed a serious topic, but this episode of divine adultery is a recurring theme in the poetry that Ovid later suggests led to his disgrace and relegation.³⁶ Martial, no less than modern readers, in all likelihood had little sense of what Ovid's offenses actually entailed; what matters here is the impression Ovid's own account gives, however tendentiously, that it was his poetry's lascivious content—as well as his mockery of the very gods his *princeps* celebrated as divine progenitors and protectors—that attracted the ruler's wrath.

Additionally, Martial's entreaty for Vulcan to spare Rome from future fires (*parce . . . parce, pater*, 6–7) echoes explicitly the refrain from Ovid's *Tristia* 2, a paradigmatic set of distichs in which the banished poet begs for reprieve:³⁷

*parce, precor, fulmenque tuum, fera tela, reconde,
heu nimium misero cognita tela mihi!*
*parce, pater patriae, nec nominis inmemor huius
olim placandi spem mihi tolle tui.* (Ov. Tr. 2.179–82)

Show mercy, I pray, and sheathe the thunderbolt, your savage weapons—weapons, alas, all too familiar to wretched me! Show mercy, father of the nation—do not disregard this title and take away all hope of ever appeasing you.

Binding Augustus's official image and nomenclature with his obligations toward his city, Ovid here imagines addressing the conquering *princeps*, who is dressed in triumphal regalia as Jupiter. He begs the *pater patriae* for mercy (*parce, precor*) and to withdraw his lightning, a weapon "alas all too familiar" to

the poet, in what again seems an evocation of Jupiter's intervention that ended Phaethon's incendiary ride. Thus for Martial's informed readers the phrase *parce, pater* evokes the voice of victims of overwhelming authority: not just Vulcan but also the emperor himself.

Epigram 5.7 inscribes Martial, Domitian, and the gods themselves into a discourse about Rome's past. The text links Rome's recent destruction both to the mythic punishment of Mars and Venus and to Ovid's historical punishment under Augustus. Just as Domitian is both a new Augustus and an anti-Nero, Martial himself has stepped into the role of a potential Ovid; as such, he inherits not just Ovid's racier subject matter but also the risks inherent to such themes. Likewise, Augustus's power—to exile, to execute, and even to eradicate literature itself—now lives on in Domitian.³⁸ The ad hoc historical narrative of Martial's allusions thus equates Vulcan's destructive force with the terrible punitive power of the emperor.³⁹ Both of these *patres* can make or unmake Rome (and its poets) at will. Ultimately, however, this subtext is not "hidden criticism," nor does it portray Domitian as a dangerous or destructive presence.⁴⁰

Martial often invokes historical figures in ways designed to highlight their inferiority to the current emperor and era; in this model of exemplarity, Lisa Cordes argues, "[t]he image of earlier emperors may be used either as a negative foil against which the current *princeps* is shown to be different, . . . or it may serve as a model of the good *princeps* who is now not only equaled but even surpassed—here reference to Augustus is of most importance."⁴¹ Similarly, Gianpiero Rosati has examined the evocations of the Augustan "Golden Age" and the attribution of divine power to the *princeps* in Martial, noting the poet's assimilation of Domitian to a variety of gods.⁴² Rosati concludes that with these mythopoetic gestures, Martial "shows that he is capable of creating continuity between the myth of the past, fixed in collective memory, and the mythical dimension of the new world, the dimension created by the sovereign."⁴³

There is a threatening undercurrent to the presentation of imperial power here, but rather than portraying Domitian as the dangerous figure Martial's allusive program instead suggests that even the revered Augustus has a record that can—at least in certain respects—be improved upon. The Domitian of *Ep.* 5.7 has the opportunity to handle "lascivious" poetic material with a more sophisticated—and less reactionary—touch than Augustus apparently did in Ovid's case.⁴⁴ The poem invites us to view Domitian's response to the fire of 80 as superior to Nero's response to that of 64; yet the allusive program implicates Domitian in a far more ambitious scheme than merely outdoing Nero.

Martial instead suggests that Augustus himself, Rome's exemplary first *princeps*, could be surpassed by the current ruler, both as a godlike rebuilder of the cityscape and as a sophisticated reader (and supporter) of Rome's literary creators. In the post-Neronian drama *Octavia*, the range of incendiary metaphors used to illustrate Nero's dynastic conflict also highlights the destructive power of the *princeps*.⁴⁵

Octavia: Dress Rehearsal for Destruction

As discussed in chapter 3, the overt theatricality apparent in many of Nero's political gestures, as well as his proclivity for stage performances and public charioteering, suggest the emperor's acute awareness of—and active participation in—the process of shaping him as a mythic and tragic figure. Such behavior, in turn, may have framed Nero as particularly compelling material for the unknown author of the historical drama *Octavia* to adapt for the stage.⁴⁶ 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. 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 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.⁴⁷

The play's subtle elaborations of the Phaethon myth, in concert with multiple appeals to the *urbs capta* motif and thematization of Troy more generally, play Rome's recent history off against the canonical texts of the Julio-Claudian era, from Vergil and Ovid to Seneca and Lucan. The play's network of allusions to Augustan poetry often use this legacy to draw contrasts between the ideals of the dynasty's founding era and the degeneration of the principate under Nero. The text's backhanded approach to Augustan poetic models is further apparent in the play's apparent disregard for the divine mechanisms that govern traditional epic and tragedy, a nihilistic ideological stance that aligns the text with Lucan's *Bellum Civile*.⁴⁸ As in Lucan's epic, the *Octavia's* most compelling character is the bloodthirsty, amoral ruler who recklessly pursues his personal goals

at the expense of those around him—and whose actions amount to an attack on Rome itself.

The anonymously authored play presents a number of notorious interpretive difficulties. As the lone example of Roman historical drama, a performance tradition that 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? Vespasian? Domitian?⁴⁹ Was it ever performed, and if so, publicly or privately?⁵⁰ All these questions continue to provoke contention, but the more limited objective here is to consider the play's web of connections between the personal flaws of Nero, the range of incendiary metaphors it uses to illustrate his collapsing dynasty, and the emphatic foreshadowing of the fire of 64.⁵¹ The text of the *Octavia* suggests how thoroughly conflated (or conflatable) Nero's entire reign was with the central event of the fire.

The play's generic status as a performance piece (regardless of whether it was ever actually performed) allows for a particularly evocative strategy of image elaboration. In the action of the play, a description or metaphor implanted in a character's speech at one point can reemerge as a "realized" action or event at a later point.⁵² This theatrical device, which renders tangible the threat implicit in the earlier speech, echoes the effects seen in Petronius's *Cena Trimalchionis* discussed in the previous chapter.⁵³ The power of this technique 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 those dramatized on stage, as well as the likely representation (in staged performances) of sites, statues, and other monuments familiar to their eyes.⁵⁴ In the case of the *Octavia*'s Neronian court, the still-fresh memory of Rome's recently "performed" past, a period within living memory for at least some of the presumed audience, would loom especially large.

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.⁵⁵ In particular, the character of Seneca in the *Octavia* appeals not just to the audience's memory of the historical Seneca's literary and philosophical work but also to their knowledge of the events of his life and his grisly death, accounts of which were widely read in the years following Nero's fall.⁵⁶ Similarly, the pervasive metaphorical use of fire imagery exploits the audience's presumed awareness, and perhaps even direct recollec-

tion, of the catastrophic fire that would occur two years after the play's dramatic date. This array of fire-related metaphors and images at first appears easy to dismiss as a series of stock-imagery clichés, which largely read as sub-Vergilian (by way of Seneca).⁵⁷ At the play's climax, however, these images dovetail spectacularly into a confrontation between the leader and the torch-wielding Roman mob. This scene presents a nearly realized conflagration onstage. As I suggest, this conflict signifies an unrealized past in which Nero's excesses would have been curtailed before the catastrophic events of his final years. Yet in a cruel irony, the popular resistance played out on the *Octavia's* stage instead becomes the provocation for Nero to plan his city's incendiary destruction.

The Blasted Universe and the Shattered Dynasty: Phaethon and *Ekpyrosis* in the *Octavia's* Rome

As detailed in this book's previous chapters, Phaethon's unsuccessful attempt to take over his father's cosmic responsibilities had already become heavily freighted with the history of potential heirs eliminated under suspicious circumstances in the Julio-Claudian era. The reading offered in chapter 1 of Vergil's charioteer in *Georgics* 1 as a subtextual Phaethon figuration and in chapter 2 of Ovid's Phaethon (and later, that of Manilius) as a failed successor now carries the additional freight of Lucan's figuration of Nero as Phaethon in the proem of the *Bellum Civile*, as discussed in chapter 3. These associations found a resounding historical manifestation in the catastrophic downfall of Nero, a proud charioteer and solar-imagery enthusiast who notoriously oversaw (and may have caused) his city's fiery destruction.

Phaethon's popularity in Flavian poetry, therefore, may owe a debt not only to Ovid's Phaethon but to Lucan's evocation of Nero's anticipated future as driver of the solar chariot and to Nero's own invitations to view him as solar charioteer. Thus Rebeggiani argues that the multiple allusions to Phaethon in Statius's *Thebaid* help to shape Polynices as a Nero figure.⁵⁸ Similarly, the boy poet Q. Sulpicius Maximus won Domitian's favor in 94 CE for an impromptu composition in Greek hexameters that treats the aftermath of Phaethon's ride. Peter Heslin speculates that the poem appealed to the Domitianic audience with an allusive elaboration of an allegory promoted by the emperor: Phaethon for Nero, Helios for Augustus, and Jupiter for Domitian.⁵⁹ Though the *Octavia* never explicitly mentions Phaethon's name, the doomed demigod haunts the play in an indirect fashion reminiscent of Lucan's proem. These references,

along with allusions to the fall of Troy and broader appeals to the *urbs capta* motif, accumulate around Nero as the play progresses; thus the 64 fire gradually emerges as another allusive presence in the text.

In the play's programmatic opening scene, Octavia 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. Octavia, alone in her chamber, observes the glow of dawn, which "drives wandering stars from the sky" (*vaga caelo sidera fulgens Aurora fugat*, *Octavia* 1); a Titan with "beaming rays of hair" rises up (*surgit Titan radiante coma*, *Octavia* 2).⁶⁰ The "wandering stars" (*vaga . . . sidera*) of line 1 are suggestively close to the *igne vago* of Lucan's proem (often posited as representing an allusion to Phaethon) as well as to the "wandering flames" (*vagantes . . . ignes*) that Statius describes as the topic of Lucan's lost composition on the Neronian fire.⁶¹ Similarly, the image of the sun's "shining hair" (*radiante coma*) evokes the portrait of Nero with radiate crown on coins, as well as perhaps his portrayal on the Colossus designed by Zenodorus; as discussed in chapter 3, both these visual developments date from 64 or later.⁶² Unsurprisingly, then, arrival of the sun has negative associations in the *Octavia's* world (*Octavia* 18): *o lux semper funesta mihi!* ("Oh light, always a sign of death to me!").⁶³ Octavia's recollection of the disgrace and execution of another empress, her mother Messalina (*Octavia* 10–16), combined with the title character's opening nod to the imminent arrival of the sun, initiates the play's underlying preoccupation with dynastic succession and the risks it poses to Rome's stability.⁶⁴

Octavia recalls her mother's death at her father's orders, and her ensuing dynastic marriage to Nero. She likens her stepmother/mother-in-law, Agrippina, to a Fury presiding at the wedding: *illa, illa meis tristis Erinys / thalamis Stygios praetulit ignes* ("that one, that grim Erinys, held up a Stygian torch at my wedding," *Octavia* 23–34). This image initiates an ongoing interplay between fire/marriage and death/unstable leadership.⁶⁵ In a direct address to her dead father, Octavia asserts that Agrippina "snuffed out" (*extinxit*, 25) Claudius to make way for Nero. Octavia seems here to echo the dismay that Vergil expresses at the worldwide chaos following Caesar's demise in *Georgics* 1 (*extincto . . . Caesare*, 1.466), an impression reinforced by the subsequent reiteration of the term in reference to the violent deaths of several other members of the imperial family.⁶⁶ Moreover, Octavia is only the first to appear in a series of characters doomed to a ghastly end after the play's conclusion; then come Seneca, Nero himself, Poppaea, and (by implication) the populace of Rome, upon whom

Nero vows incendiary retribution for their opposition to his repudiation of Octavia. Thus the *Octavia's* opening lines swiftly link the concepts of Nero, fire, and dynastic succession to intimations of large-scale disaster. Octavia's reinterpretation of sunlight and marriage torches as threatening images also serves to anticipate the multiple reversals in the *ekpyrosis* imagery that she invokes later in a dialogue with her nurse.

Octavia rejects her nurse's suggestion that Nero might yet tire of Poppaea and learn to love her in an *adynaton* with numerous poetic flourishes: "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" (*iungentur ante saeva sideribus freta / et ignis undae, Tartaro tristi polus . . . quam cum scelesti coniugis mente impia mens nostra*, 221–26). The classic image of opposites conjoined by desire, as in the Homeric union of Mars/Ares and Venus/Aphrodite, is reversed in these lines. Octavia's speech instead anticipates the moment in which opposing forces will cause the universe to implode. Reminiscent of the rejections found in Senecan tragedy, the speech also hints at intimations of the world's end as outlined in chapter 3, which explored this theme in Seneca's natural philosophy and in the proem of Lucan's epic.⁶⁷ Thus Octavia's *adynaton* reminds us of the Neronian era's literary fascination with *ekpyrosis*. Moreover, it signals the start of 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.

Octavia goes on to pray that Nero meet a grim end, a prophetic utterance that blends with her own 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 monstis; 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.* (*Octavia* 227–37)

If only the guide of heaven would take action to overwhelm the dreadful head of this unspeakable *princeps* with flames! Often does he [Jupiter] shake the earth with his threatening thunder, terrifying our minds with sacred fires and strange prodigies. We saw the glow, a comet blazing in the sky, revealing its ill-boding torch where slow Boötes, 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 a faithless leader.

A number of parallels to Senecan drama are clear in these lines; they also appear to suggest that Nero's impure character is corrupting not just the city but the very cosmos (*polluitur aether*).⁶⁸ Here, however, Octavia's words also evoke actual events from Nero's reign that could now be reevaluated as portents suggesting his affinity for fiery destruction, as well as his eventual demise. In 60 CE a comet had appeared in the sky, visible for some six months according to the historical Seneca.⁶⁹ Given the traditional association of comets with Phaethon, as well as with transitions in leadership, this particular comet became cemented in later accounts as an early sign of Nero's impending doom.⁷⁰ In invoking the language of a historical witness (*vidimus*) in this precise form and context, Octavia suggests a parity between the Romans of the Neronian period and those who had once seen portents surrounding the death of a previous Caesar.⁷¹ Equally, Octavia's comment on the frequent portent of lightning (*saepe terras fulmine infesto quatit*, 229), alongside the wish that Jupiter might "overwhelm" the head of Nero with his fire (*dirum caput / obruere flammis*, 227–28), seems to presage an apparently well-known minor calamity from the period. As discussed in chapter 3, 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 portrait of Nero.⁷² In retrospect this image clearly had the potential to intimate not just the end of Nero's reign (as well as that of his dynasty) but also the far more destructive fire that awaited Rome in 64.

Amidst these generally monstrous portents and characterizations, the speech unmistakably identifies Nero as another Phaethon, incorporating tropes familiar from Ovid: death at the business end of Jupiter's thunderbolt, a comet streaking through the heavens, and a near-collision with the slow-moving Boötes.⁷³ The desire for the Phaethon-esque portent of the comet to "fulfill itself" via a thunderbolt from Jupiter—i.e., another realization of the Phaethon theme—fuses literary and historical memory, inviting us to remember not only

the literary Phaethon as evoked by Vergil, Ovid, Manilius, and Lucan (discussed in chapters 1, 2, and 3, respectively) but also the historical crises in which each of these references were embedded. Similarly, the character of Seneca is able not just to exploit the biography on the historical Seneca but to allude to “his” own work as he anticipates the outcome of his fraught relationship with Nero.

In his introductory speech at the start of the play’s second act, the *Octavia*’s Seneca quotes “himself” (that is, the historical Seneca’s written work) in an Ovidian-inflected soliloquy on the imminent doom he sees approaching. Seneca laments that he has been beguiled by Fortune (*Octavia* 377–80)—a figure the historical Seneca frequently counsels his readers to resist—into returning to the imperial court.⁷⁴ He ruefully comments that it used to delight him to look upon the sun, the greatest of Nature’s creations (*Octavia* 385–90).⁷⁵ To Seneca, as to Octavia, sunlight (and perhaps Nero’s solar imagery) now seems a threatening force. Cosmology and *ekpyrosis* as presented in Vergilian evocations of urban crisis, Ovid’s extended mythic cycle of disaster and recovery, and Manilius’s prediction of dual civic and cosmic catastrophe are all implicated in the lines that follow:

*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.* (*Octavia* 391–96)

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.⁷⁶

Seneca’s speech seems to recuperate the pre-Lucan conception of *ekpyrosis* as an opportunity for regrowth and renewal; it alludes both to the historical Seneca’s commitment to Stoic doctrine and to the post-Neronian political renewal perhaps envisioned by the playwright.⁷⁷ Yet the passage is also heavily inflected with language recalling classic moments of crisis from Augustan poetry. The

reference to the collapse of the heavens (*caeli ruina*) echoes the *Aeneid*'s language at 1.129, where the phrase describes the storm about to overwhelm the Trojan fleet. This catastrophe, as we saw in chapter 1, is likened in simile to an urban riot, in which the mob threatens a leader with stones and torches.⁷⁸

Additionally, the speech's final reference to the reign of Saturn (*Octavia* 396) introduces a lengthy passage on the degenerating ages of man (*Octavia* 397–434) heavily indebted to Ovid's myth of ages (*Met.* 1.89–150). As discussed in chapter 1, Ovid's account itself precedes and anticipates the catastrophic cycle of flood and fire (*Met.* 1.253–2.400). Overall, Seneca's apocalyptic rhetoric here is reminiscent of the "Age of Apollo" predicted by Nigidius Figulus; as discussed in chapter 1, Augustan poets transformed this notion from an apocalyptic endpoint into an age of peace and renewal. Invoking the notion of *ekpyrosis* here suggests, in turn, that the clock has finally run out on Augustus's *aureum saeculum* and the final day is now at hand.⁷⁹ Seneca's recap of *Metamorphoses* 1 breaks off, significantly, at Nero's entrance (*Octavia* 435–36). By implication, therefore, Nero's arrival stands in for Ovid's apocalyptic Phaethon sequence, which forms the bridge between *Metamorphoses* 1 and 2.

The ensuing exchange between Nero and Seneca puts Augustan models of statesmanship, as well as previous models of epic, into competition with each other. In the debate that follows, Seneca's language (*Octavia* 479–451) recalls the opening of Vergil's *Aeneid*, while Nero's words recall the first lines of Lucan's *Bellum Civile*.⁸⁰ Nero says that during the triumviral conflicts, "the world was blasted by the might of leaders" (*concussus orbis viribus magnis ducum*, *Octavia* 518), a clear echo of Lucan's opening lines of the *Bellum Civile* (*certatum totis concussi viribus orbis*, *BC* 1.5).⁸¹ Metapoetically, for the *Octavia*'s Nero to "steal" a line from the historic Nero's poetic rival and would-be assassin to make a point about ruthless competition also seems perversely apropos. Furthermore, 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 to align the recurrence of civil war with an endless cycle of destruction and rebirth. For an audience well versed in Lucan's opening lines, such a direct citation of Lucan's fifth line might also prompt them to recall the lines that follow in the proem of the epic.⁸² Chapter 3 explored 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 conflagration (*BC* 1.72–80); this imagery would seem prescient in post-Neronian retrospect.

This exchange reveals an emergent historical tension in its revival of Augustan references. Augustus's rhetoric of a new *aureum saeculum* was now irrevocably tinged with the awareness of his dynasty's inglorious end. In metapoetic terms, the *Octavia's* Seneca tries to offer a Vergilian model of recovery and stabilization after crisis, while its Nero insistently focuses on Lucan's theme of cyclical conflict. The notion of global wars settled by the establishment of a new and permanent peace under Julio-Claudian rule now found new meaning after Nero's fall as poignant reminders of unfulfilled hope. 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; the *Octavia* shows that this tendency could also extend to Rome's very recent history. The Great Fire, along with Nero's suicide and the collapse of Rome's first imperial dynasty, had imbued much of the *Octavia's* possible source material with tremendous potential for unintended prescience and for high dramatic irony.

The idea that civil wars were generally identifiable with universal conflagration and the world's implosion is heavily promoted in early imperial literature.⁸³ After the events of 64 and 68–69, however, conflagration and civil strife became intertwined in a new way that implicated not only Nero but the Flavians themselves. As noted in chapter 2, examples from Neronian literature with highly suggestive fire imagery cannot be definitively identified as post-64; by contrast, the *Octavia* provides definite evidence of the ways in which the images promoted by earlier authors, particularly Seneca and Lucan, could be reread in the wake of the fire and Nero's fall. The themes of conflagration and civil strife, along with the allusive presence of Phaethon, reemerge at the play's climax.

Troy, the *Urbs Capta*, and the Anticipation of 64 in the *Octavia*

The *Octavia* is a dramatic reworking of recent imperial history as revenge tragedy. In a uniquely inventive twist, it recasts the fire as Nero's vengeance upon the population of Rome for their resistance to his repudiation of his dynastic bride.⁸⁴ Nero, as unable to control the Roman populace as he is to master his own passions, plans to "lay siege" to his own city in retaliation for the civil uprising they mount against him. At lines 773–77, a chorus of Nero's sycophantic courtiers celebrates 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.* (Octavia 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. 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 are all well-known features of the *Aeneid*.⁸⁵ 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.⁸⁶ This tendency perhaps reflects the courtiers' preoccupation with literary models, a nod to the poetic obsessions prevalent in Nero's reign. The Nero-as-Paris theme advanced in these lines may allude to the historical Nero's own *Troica*, which is reported to have presented Paris in a positive, even heroic light.⁸⁷ As discussed in chapter 3, Nero's version of events celebrated Paris as the victor over Hector in the games sponsored by the Trojan royal family during which the young, previously dispossessed prince's true identity is revealed; this characterization reflects Nero's own competitive and poetic tendencies.⁸⁸ Most significantly, as Patrick Kragelund has already suggested, these lines would also remind the audience of Nero's rumored performance of his composition on the fall of Troy as Rome burned in 64.⁸⁹

Soon, however, the court learns that the populace, angry over Nero's rejection of Octavia, has surrounded the palace and is preparing to put it to the torch (*saepire flammis principis sedem parant*, 801). The chorus counters with a passage laced with learned allusions; their multiple engagements with the tale of Troy's fall reflect the play's strategy of presenting moments from Rome's legendary and historical past that resonate with its imperial present:

*quid fera frustra bella movetis?
 invicta gerit tela Cupido:*

*flammis vestros obruet ignes
 quis extinxit fulmina saepe
 captumque Iouem caelo traxit.
 Laeso 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. (Octavia 806–19)*

Why this wild, pointless hostility? Cupid wields invincible weapons; he'll overwhelm your fires with his flames, with which he has often snuffed out lightning, and dragged Jupiter captive from the sky. To the one you've offended, 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 will bring.

These lines return us to Aeneas's horror at recollecting the fall of Troy (*animus quid ferat horret* ~ *animus meminisse horret*, Verg. *Aen.* 2.12).⁹⁰ The ode, however, places these events in Rome's future, inverting Vergil's teleological progression from Troy's collapse to its rebirth in Italy, and suggesting instead that the collapse is yet to come. Moreover, formal parallels and verbal correspondences throughout the passage suggest the incendiary nature of the coming civic catastrophe.

Just as Nero himself is reported to have done as he witnessed the 64 fire, the courtiers employ the Trojan theme to respond to a present danger; their references to Iliadic figures (Achilles, Priam, Agamemnon) blend with a famous Catullan recollection of Troy's fate (*Octavia* 816–17: *claras / diruit urbes*; cf. Catull. 51.15–16: *beatas / perdidit urbes*).⁹¹ Here the term *extinguere*, extensively thematized throughout the play, now echoes not just Vergil's *extincto* . . . *Cae-*

sare from *Georgics* 1 but also the play's own multiple references to various characters in the imperial family as *extincti*.⁹² As Ferri observes, the phrase *flammis . . . extinxit fulmina* appears to nod at Ovid's *Met.* 2.313, *saevos compescuit ignis ignes*, where Phaethon's flaming solar chariot is paradoxically "quenched" by the thunderbolt of Jove.⁹³ The chorus also reframes Octavia's initial wish for Jupiter to overwhelm Nero with flames (*obruere flammis*, 228) as a nearly realized event (*flammis . . . obruet*, 808), pairing it with allusions to the fall of Troy. Jupiter's lightning here, as in Octavia's original wish, represents the righteous punishment of Nero, now given imminent potentiality at the hands of the torch-wielding populace. Here, however, the courtiers "cap" this Ovidian reference with yet another allusion, offering Cupid's "flames" (*ignes*) as the referent for Nero's passion for Poppaea. Love will spur Nero to action against the crowd and overwhelm their efforts with superior force, just as Cupid's flame defeats Jupiter's thunderbolt. Responding to an actual threat of incineration with a flurry of poetic parallels again hints at the Neronian proclivity for conflating poetry and reality. Much as their master is said to have done in 64, Nero's learned courtiers address the present danger by citing poetic parallels. In the passages quoted above and at several other key points in the text, a clear set of allusions repeatedly compares Rome to a besieged city under attack from Nero, on the verge of realizing the literary topos of the *urbs capta*.⁹⁴

It is the crowd that has Nero surrounded in this scene; the messenger who alerts the court to the danger has already explicitly described the palace as besieged, and has addressed Nero as the military commander (*dux*) charged with defending the occupants.⁹⁵ In response, Nero paradoxically recasts himself as the besieging party.⁹⁶ Soon, Nero tells us, Rome's dwellings will fall to his flames (*mox tecta flammis concidant urbis meis*, *Octavia* 831).⁹⁷ As discussed in chapter 3, the Nero of legend displays a compulsive tendency to read Rome's exemplary past in reverse, shaping his present to echo historical and literary models—particularly Augustan ones. Here, in an arresting situational reversal of Vergil's statesman simile (*Aen.* 1.145–56) discussed in chapter 1, the leader 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 on his own people.⁹⁸ At this point, the character of the prefect suggests that Nero's anger itself should "regulate" or "cool off" the people (*tua temperet nos ira*, *Octavia* 858).⁹⁹ Nero, however, proposes to subdue Rome's populace with fire and famine.¹⁰⁰ This scene derives its power from the obscure nature of Nero's plans; the implications are obvious to the post-Neronian audience, but incomprehensible to Nero's interlocutor in the play's pre-64 setting.

Flames, mass destruction, foul deprivation, hunger, and grief, Nero says, will crush a “criminal populace” (*ignes, ruinae noxium populum premant / turpisque egestas, saeva cum luctu fames*, *Octavia* 832–33). Nero continues his speech, predicting that the people will learn to obey their *princeps* when they are shattered by punishments (*fracta per poenas metu / parere discet principis nutu sui*, *Octavia* 842–43). Asked by his prefect what punishment should be dealt 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 that “no age will blot out from memory” (*aetas nulla quam famae eximat*, *Octavia* 857). This line offers explicit metapoetic engagement with Vergil’s famous epitaph for the fallen Trojan warriors Nisus and Euryalus (*Aen.* 9.447: *nulla dies umquam memori vos eximet aevo*).¹⁰¹ The line thus speaks to poetry’s power to preserve historical memory, constituting a further nod to the rumor of Nero’s wish to burn Rome in imitation of Trojan-themed poetry, and thereby to go down in history for aligning his city with Troy’s epic tradition.¹⁰²

With these lines, however, the audience’s memory of the fire falls subject to radical revision, a significant point that has been undervalued in the scholarship on this text. The destruction of 64 is no longer the product of Nero’s 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 civic resistance to bad leadership.¹⁰³ Thus the new “cause” for the fire posited in the *Octavia* signifies more than Nero’s degenerate character; pairing fire and civil conflict as axiomatic counterparts, the text reanimates the 64 destruction not as the artifact of a single emperor’s fantastical ambitions but as the product of the complex, contentious, and mutually threatening relationship between Rome’s people and their ruler(s). Unlike the Trojan lineage that inspires Nero’s arson (or at least his response to the fire) in other accounts, the risk of popular revolt did not die with Nero. The causality of the fire in the *Octavia* implicates not just Nero but the entire structure of a principate based on a volatile mix of political upheaval and dynastic succession.

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 a period otherwise characterized by noteworthy accord between Nero and his people. Nero enjoyed unusually robust public support throughout his reign (and even after his death, as evidenced by the public’s embrace of several “false” Neros in subsequent years).¹⁰⁴ As Harriet Flower suggests, the playwright centers the drama around one of the very few moments in which Nero and the people stood in

conflict (one that no other source records as particularly prolonged or intense).¹⁰⁵ The play, as Flower argues, recasts the Roman populace as figures of opposition, suggesting that Nero had truly deserved their resistance all along. Flower comments that “[i]t is interesting that the fire of 64 does not play a larger role in the drama, and that the playwright thought that the situation in 62 . . . would be most compelling and damaging for Nero.”¹⁰⁶ While Flower is correct that the fire is not mentioned directly, the evidence discussed above shows that the drama implicates Nero in the disaster to come at every turn.

The *Octavia*’s blend of literary 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 disasters of 64–69 after the conclusion of the events portrayed in the text. Uniquely in the historical and literary tradition, this confrontation is identified as the aetiological origin of Nero’s alleged arson of the city. Fusing recent history with literary allusion, the *Octavia* both commemorates Nero’s own apparent penchant for self-mythologization and constructs the emperor and his inner circle as proleptic avatars of fiery destruction. In effect, these characters act as living repositories for the Julio-Claudian literary traditions involving incendiary motifs, including Phaethon and *ekpyrosis* as well as Troy and the *urbs capta*. This lineage of texts, in turn, appears in the play as Nero’s inheritance—a century’s worth of images and ideas positioned to become uncannily prophetic as they “came to life” during his reign. In doing so, the *Octavia* constructs Nero as an overdetermined agent of destruction, a character driven by larger cosmic and historical forces to bring Rome to the brink of oblivion. The mob’s threat to torch Nero’s palace, and Nero’s retaliatory threat to punish them with fire and famine, become powerful anticipatory referents for the fire of 64, an event still in the future of the play’s dramatic date.

The short-lived opposition of the populace is poignantly reimagined as a lost opportunity to rid the city of Nero and his minions before they could do their worst in 64. This scene in the *Octavia* presents (although it does not develop) a glimpse of a counterfactual history; specifically, it offers a kind of “sideshadowing,” which Michael Bernstein defines as a method of drawing attention to “unfulfilled or unrealized possibilities of the past” aimed at “disrupting the affirmations of a triumphalist, unidirectional view of history.”¹⁰⁷ Yet in a cruel irony, this very gesture is itself the provocation that precipitates Nero’s deliberate arson. In contrast to Tacitus’s 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 *Octavia* implies that this single moment of futile resistance cost the people of Rome everything.¹⁰⁸

As we have seen in this chapter, Statius asserts Nero’s responsibility for the Great Fire of 64 through an allusion to Lucan’s *De incendio urbis* at *Silvae* 2.7, written during the later years of Domitian’s reign. Martial’s poems, by contrast, make indirect reference to the 64 fire. *Epigram* 5.7, in particular, throws Domitian’s successful rebuilding efforts into relief against the implied backdrop of Nero’s failure. At the same time, the poem’s insistent recollection of Ovid’s poetic ambition and subsequent banishment subtly equates imperial power itself with Vulcan’s destructive force. Domitian, in dedicating the so-called Arae Incendii Neroniani (which would be better called Altars of Vulcan), is likewise engaging with Rome’s commemorative culture, apparently attempting to “rewrite” recent memory. Both *Epigram* 5.7 and the inscription of the Arae constitute responses to the fire of 80; they further suggest that Domitian was under a certain pressure to present himself not just as competent but as superior to Nero in facing the aftermath of yet another urban crisis with cosmic dimensions.

Reframing 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 the fire of 80—which, while not reaching Nero-esque proportions, nevertheless did huge amounts of damage—onto this very portrayal. In a highly oblique and nuanced fashion, then, Domitian seems in the Arae inscriptions not to attack Nero outright as Rome’s arsonist but rather to position himself in favorable comparison with Nero as a leader in response to the threat of fire. 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. While claiming the power to prevent another disastrous fire, the altars also stood as reminders 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.

Much as the Arae seem to redefine Nero’s entire reign in terms of the fire, the *Octavia* reframes it as a period of ongoing conflict and anticipated destruc-

tion. Using a profusion of metaphorical language suggesting fire throughout, the play ultimately advances an alternate aetiology of Nero's plan to burn the city, in which the fire comes as retribution for popular resistance. The text creates a complex set of images analogizing conflagration and political destruction; these images both suit its immediate topic and gain added resonance from the ultimate derivation of these images in the works of Vergil, Lucan, and Seneca. Through these appeals to literary and historical memory, Julio-Claudian Rome is characterized as a corrupted environment doomed to an incendiary fate. As a historical actor, the *Octavia*'s Nero responds 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 text creates a complex 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 as the action unfolds.

The *Octavia* also makes the Neronian past newly "present" in the post-Neronian world, dramatizing the eventual conflagration of 64 as the outcome of conflict between ruler and populace—a problem that Nero's death did nothing to solve. The risks inherent to the sociopolitical structure of the principate transcended any one emperor or dynasty, as Nero's first three successors soon learned. Presenting the fire of 64 as a delayed punishment for the uprising of 62 is perhaps preposterous; nonetheless, it demonstrates how pervasive the associations between Nero and the fire had become. It also suggests indirectly that the motivations more commonly ascribed to Nero's alleged arson were open to question. In fact, the inscrutability of the "truth" about this catastrophe provides the play's author with the scope to assign a new cause—one that will charge the event with new relevance and provoke the audience to ponder the possibility of a "repeat performance" in their own world. Although the drama arguably looks forward to a new imperial future, its poetics of cyclical destruction seem to preclude true recuperation and lasting renewal; nor does it present any entirely positive exemplum for imperial rule.¹⁰⁹ 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 similar goals.¹¹⁰ The *Octavia* anticipates much of the rhetorical strategy to be examined in the next chapter's discussion of Tacitus, in that it takes an era of documented peace and relative stability and restages it on the model of a civil war.¹¹¹

Tacitus, in a sense, makes good on the threat of renewed catastrophe evoked by the *Octavia*, creating a cyclical pattern of destruction that eventually impli-

cates not just Nero and the Julio-Claudian dynasty but the entire structure of the Roman principate. Though this does not necessarily demonstrate the direct influence of the play upon the historian, it does suggest the transgeneric appeal that this mode of expression held for authors chronicling the Neronian era. Tacitus too 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. In its essence, the *Annals*—like the *Octavia* and the *Aeneid* before it—was a project with cautionary as well as commemorative functions. Mixing recognizable Vergilian reminiscences with the memory of ancient monuments of Roman history, which are being obliterated “before our eyes,” Tacitus’s 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.

CHAPTER 5

A Rome Restored?

Myth, Memory, and Cycles of Destruction in Trajanic and Hadrianic Rome

As a necessary component of their own survival, Rome's early "adoptive" emperors presented themselves as an improvement on the now-disgraced Domitian, as well as on the form of dynastic succession that had brought him to power. At the same time, however, Rome's new emperors advertised their achievements as city-builders much as Domitian once had. They prioritized Rome's civic stability and continued monumentalization as a way of connecting with an urban population over whom they had little prior claim. Nevertheless, Rome continued to struggle with the risk of large-scale fires in these decades, and again large-scale destructions seem to have provided the impetus for major building projects. Additionally, Trajan and Hadrian appear to have found inventive ways to harness the power of incendiary imagery that further elaborated the significance of fire in the Roman cityscape. Perpetuating the ritual of imperial cremation demonstrated their commitments to the city, evoking the phoenix-like qualities of immortality and renewal familiar from textual and ceremonial expressions of imperial ideology of the Julio-Claudian and Flavian eras explored in previous chapters. Fire, when used deliberately either to symbolize the consecration of a member of the ruling family or to destroy a record of past instability, offered these leaders an opportunity for high political theater.

Writing in response to a literary tradition linking leaders proleptically and metonymically with the destruction of their cities, Pliny, Juvenal, and Tacitus all revisit the conflagrations of Rome's literary and material past. The Younger

Pliny adapts prior developments in the literary and cultural tradition surrounding urban conflagration and popular unrest in imperial Rome to the specific rhetorical goals of his *Panegyricus*. Juvenal, at several key points in *Satires* 1 and 10, also engages with the discourse of realized or externalized fire metaphors, echoing themes prominent in Pliny's *Panegyricus*.¹ Finally, this chapter's extended reading of Tacitus will show the full impact of the textual and cultural history explored in this book as a whole.

In reworking the incendiary images and proleptic strategies explored in the previous chapters of this study, Tacitus repeatedly links popular unrest and political violence with fires both literal and metaphorical. In particular, the Neronian *Annals* provide a resounding confirmation of the ideological centrality of fire at Rome, both as a metaphor for political conflict and as a catalyst for political change. Tacitus's text constructs proleptic and metonymic relationships between Nero and the 64 destruction that extend far beyond the narrative of the fire itself. The account of the fire becomes an emblematic manifestation of the threats that had haunted the principate since its inception—and which certainly did not die out with Nero. The Neronian *Annals* can therefore be read as a pointed commentary not just on the Julio-Claudian and Flavian past but also on the Trajanic and Hadrianic present inhabited by Tacitus, his readers, and their emperors. A brief excerpt from Juvenal's *Satires* brings out several of the concerns most central to this chapter's readings.

In *Satires* 3, Rome is presented at its most chaotic, full of dangers around every corner—at least according to the poem's speaker, who enumerates “the fires, constantly collapsing houses, the thousand threats of the savage city” (*incendia, lapsus / tectorum adsiduos ac mille pericula saevae / Urbis*, Juv. 3.7–9) as part of what his friend Umbricius is leaving behind as he departs from Rome for good.² Umbricius advises his interlocutor that it is better to live in the country, where there are “no fires, no terrors in the night” (*nulla incendia, nulli / nocte metus*, Juv. 3.197–98), much as Horace sums up Rome in three words: “smoke, wealth, and noise” (*fumum et opes strepitumque*, *Carm.* 3.29.12). Yet in the mythic past explored in Vergil's *Aeneid*, Rome's new identity was forged in the smoke, flames, and noise that signaled the destruction of Troy. Juvenal expands on these Augustan poetic precedents in a scene that brings Horace's impressionistic sketch of Rome's perennial risks into contact with the Vergilian account of Troy's last night.

Juvenal's description of an *insula* catching fire is presented as a realistic set piece with all the features typifying such an event, including the shouting for

water (the equivalent of shouting “Fire!” in modern parlance) and the increased risks posed to dwellers in high buildings, especially on the upper levels.³ Yet in an echo of Nero’s alleged song as he watched the 64 conflagration rage, Rome also seems to burn here with literary flames that are distinctly Trojan:

*iam poscit aquam, iam frivola transfert
Ucalegon, tabulata tibi iam tertia fumant:
tu nescis; nam si gradibus trepidatur ab imis,
ultimus ardebit quem tegula sola tuetur
a pluvia.* (Juv. 3.198–202)

First Ucalegon’s hollering for water, then he’s relocating his worthless trinkets. The third floor, where you are, is already smoking: you don’t even know it; but if the scare starts at the bottom of the stairwell, the last to burn will be the one whom only the roof tiles protect from rain.

As has long been recognized, these lines recall Vergil’s account of Aeneas awaking to find Troy’s destruction well underway and his neighbor Ucalegon’s house already aflame (*iam proximus ardet Ucalegon*, *Aen.* 2.312).⁴ Despite racket made by “your” neighbor Ucalegon (Juv. 3.199), when the fire starts in your apartment on the third floor, you are unaware (*nescis*) of the danger, much like the famous *inscius* . . . *pastor* simile describing Aeneas’s reaction to his first view of the flames engulfing Troy (*Aen.* 2.308). This Ucalegon, at least, seems to have learned a lesson from his epic predecessor; he makes a swift exit before “you” (and/or Aeneas) are clued in that your own dwelling is already going up in smoke. In effect, the Rome that Vergil’s Aeneas was instrumental in founding has become another Troy, constantly restaging the disaster of its last night.⁵

The return to the Augustan literary past in *Satires* 3 casts a dire shadow over the Rome of Juvenal’s present, suggesting a society and literary culture not just in decline but on the brink of oblivion.⁶ One might well suspect, Juvenal’s speaker adds, that a certain Persicus set fire to his own home (*merito iam suspectus tamquam ipse suas incenderit aedes*, 222) in order to acquire more and better possessions (*meliora ac plura*, 220). As discussed in chapter 4, Martial’s Tongilianus received similar dividends on his house fire in *Ep.* 3.52. Similarly, chapter 3 discusses Seneca’s claim that Lugdunum’s destruction may spur it on to greater heights (*Ep.* 91.13.1), as well as the rumors that Nero himself was suspected of destroying the city to accommodate his dream palace.⁷ Likewise,

Juvenal's text juxtaposes the mundane risks of living in Rome with more threatening notions: that the perennial rhetoric of rebuilding masks deliberate destruction, and that time and text are moving backward toward disaster.⁸ The fire scene in *Satires* 3 inverts the message of progress imminent in its Vergilian model; likewise, it implicitly dismantles imperial claims to control over Rome's urban chaos. Such claims had formed a central component of the city-(re)building rhetoric of Augustus—forming a template that was inherently unsafe (if not impossible) for his successors to replicate.⁹

As I argue in this chapter's extended reading of Tacitus's *Annals*, a series of targeted allusions to *Aeneid* 2 in the Great Fire sequence (*Ann.* 15.38–41) similarly inverts the message of progress advanced in Vergilian poetics and Augustan statecraft. As we saw in chapter 1, in the Augustan remaking of Rome, Trojan legend took on a second-order significance: Troy's fall became an analogue for the final collapse of the republic, even as the story of Aeneas inscribed the Julian lineage of Augustus into Rome's oldest history. In using the foundational text of Roman imperial literature in their accounts of Rome's destruction, Juvenal and Tacitus both create the impression that a specific ideological legacy is likewise being unmade before our eyes. These accounts of urban conflagration and "fiery" leaders are significant creative adaptations of their literary models and predecessors; yet they also respond to the urban environment and political climate that these authors inhabited.

Rebuilding Rome under the Adoptive Emperors

The large-scale fires that Rome suffered in the late first and early second century CE provided Trajan and Hadrian with the chance to refashion a number of the city's major monumental zones in grand style. At some point before Trajan's accession in 100 CE, fire ravaged a significant portion of the Circus Maximus; though the repair work was probably initiated by Domitian, Trajan finished it, scoring a rhetorical coup by refraining from crediting himself on the dedicatory inscription.¹⁰ In 104, fire affected the remaining edifice of Nero's Golden House, and Trajan used its foundations to erect a massive and opulent bath complex on the Oppian spur of the Esquiline Hill.¹¹ Thus the last of "Nero's" fires afforded Trajan the scope to make his mark in the complex of public amenities that the Flavians had developed in and around the Colosseum valley.¹² Additionally, Trajan's legislation suggests the difficulty of keeping Rome's phys-

ical environment safe. Nero is credited with instituting a number of fire prevention measures at Rome.¹³ Yet Trajan, concerned by the continued tendency of builders to create unstable living structures, found it necessary to impose on all new houses in the city a height limit of sixty Roman feet.¹⁴

Finally, in 110 CE lightning caused a fire that destroyed Agrippa's Pantheon, a building that Domitian had recently restored after the fire of 80 (although the nature and scope of these renovations are debated).¹⁵ This fire is also thought to have damaged several neighboring buildings, including the Saepta Iulia, the Basilica Neptuni, and the baths of Agrippa.¹⁶ Whatever the true extent of the fire, the damaged Pantheon seems to have provided Hadrian with the impetus for a comprehensive reorganization of the entire Campus Martius.¹⁷ Hadrian appears to have deliberately set himself within the Pantheon's cosmic image as a "quasi-cosmocrator," much as Nero's innovative design scheme is argued to have remade central Rome as a vision of the cosmos in miniature.¹⁸

In recent years scholars have contended that the revolutionary new version of Agrippa's Pantheon began as a Trajanic project.¹⁹ Hadrian is nevertheless believed to have completed the marble porch of the Pantheon we see today, adding the final touch of the enormous inscription that credits Agrippa as the original builder rather than himself (or Trajan) as rebuilders.²⁰ Hadrian may indeed have found it useful to celebrate the long-dead Agrippa (and the Augustan principate more generally) as a model for civic-minded monuments and urban reorganization—especially since it deflected attention away from more obvious parallels to the comparatively recent rebuilding efforts of Nero and Domitian, rulers whose characters were still undergoing posthumous assassination at the hands of the era's authors and orators.

The striking and inventive monuments that housed the respective cinerary remains of Trajan and Hadrian further advertised the new dynasty's aspiration to permanence and dynastic perpetuation, and they did so on a scale not seen since the Augustan funerary complex on the northern Campus Martius.²¹ Trajan's column and Hadrian's mausoleum marked Rome's skyline as perpetual reminders of the incendiary process that consecrated them as gods.²² The ritual of cremation also confirmed the divine status of other important family members, further cementing the new dynasty's prominence in Rome's landscape. Thus the spectacle of imperial cremation—as well as the monuments commemorating these newly deified figures in perpetuity—worked to reassure the public by displaying continuity between past and present. The alternation of the eagle and the pyre on the "consecration" coinage commemorating these events

illustrates the ongoing importance of such cremations in the visual rhetoric of Rome's leadership; it also suggests that the image of a bird rising from the flames—the phoenix—still had value as a symbol of imperial divinity and immortality.²³

Hadrian, the Phoenix, and Symbolic Bonfires

According to Dio, Hadrian had a mystical premonition of his accession: “[he] dreamed before the day [of Trajan’s death] that a fire descended out of heaven, the day being perfectly clear and bright, and fell first upon the left side of his throat, passing then to the right side, though it neither frightened nor injured him.”²⁴ The image of a supernatural fire marking out a successor aligns Hadrian with a tradition of leaders surviving a fire unscathed.²⁵ In conjunction with the death of a parent, however, such a flame also suggests the rebirth of the phoenix. A gold coin issued in the year of Hadrian’s succession (117–118 CE) celebrates the regenerative force of the phoenix as a direct metaphor for Trajan’s deification and Hadrian’s accession: the obverse features Trajan’s laureate bust, while the reverse shows a radiate phoenix.²⁶

The phoenix suggests itself as the antipode to the Phaethon motif explored in earlier chapters of this book; instead of an inadequate heir who brings about a destructive fire, we see a successor who preserves and venerates his lineage, even after a conflagration. Just as the phoenix is imagined to emerge reborn from his “parent’s” ashes, a king of birds, sacred to the sun, and a symbol of resurrection, so each adopted *princeps* could instantly become a full-fledged embodiment of the authority of the emperor—“son and Caesar in the same instant” (*simul filius simul Caesar*), as the Younger Pliny describes Trajan (*Pan.* 8.6).²⁷ For Hadrian, the phoenix myth’s potential as a metaphor for imperial succession became quite specific: just as some accounts offer the young phoenix as a model of filial piety in carrying its predecessor’s ashes over great distances to deposit them in Heliopolis, Hadrian had Trajan’s ashes carefully transported from Cilicia to Rome for deposition in his capital city.²⁸ Hadrian’s iconography and actions appear to focus not on the “real” bird but on its symbolic power to evoke the regeneration of the ruler.²⁹ Yet if Hadrian celebrated the phoenix as an imperial emblem, such rhetoric appears to have drawn suspicion among certain segments of the literary class.

The Elder Pliny, writing in the mid-first century CE, concludes his description of the phoenix (*HN* 10.2.5) with a skeptical notice of the display of a phoe-

nix during the reign of Claudius during the celebration of the city's eight-hundredth year: "no one doubted it was a fake" (*quem falsum esse nemo dubitaret*).³⁰ Similarly Tacitus, writing within a decade of Hadrian's accession, mentions an appearance of the phoenix in 36 CE, immediately after the notice of a false Sibylline prophecy. He cites general agreement in Greek scholarship that it is a creature sacred to the sun, differing from all other birds in its beak and in the tints of its plumage (*sacrum Soli id animal, et ore ac distinctu pinna-rum a ceteris avibus diversum*, *Ann.* 6.28); he addresses the discrepancies in the traditions surrounding the bird's lifespan, with reference to sightings in Heliopolis during the successive reigns of several Egyptian dynasties. He then discusses the complications this chronology creates:

sed antiquitas quidem obscura: inter Ptolemaeum ac Tiberium minus ducenti quinquaginta anni fuerunt. unde nonnulli falsum hunc phoenicem neque Arabum e terris credere, nihilque usurpavisse ex his, quae vetus memoria firmavit. confecto quippe annorum numero, ubi mors propinquet, suis in terris struere nidum eique vim genitalem adfundere, ex qua fetum oriri: et primam adulto curam sepe-liendi patris, neque id temere, sed sublato murrae pondere temptatoque per longum iter, ubi par oneri, par meatui sit, subire patrium corpus inque Solis aram perferre atque adolere. haec incerta et fabulosis aucta: ceterum aspici aliquando in Aegypto eam volucrem non ambigitur. (Tac. *Ann.* 6.28)

But antiquity is indeed inscrutable: between Ptolemy and Tiberius, there had passed fewer than two hundred and fifty years. Consequently, some believed this one was a fake—not from Arabian lands, and displaying none of the inherited traits that ancient memory confirms. For when its span of years is completed and death is near, the phoenix, it is said, builds a nest in its own land and infuses into it the vital force from which offspring arises; also, its first concern, when of age, is to bury its father. This thing is not done carelessly; after taking up a quantity of myrrh and testing in a long flight whether it is up to the burden and the journey, it shoulders its father's body, bears it to the altar of the Sun, and consecrates it by fire. All this is unverified and embellished with legend. Still, there is no question that the bird is occasionally seen in Egypt.

Ronald Syme suggests that the phoenix may actually have "appeared" again in 117, both inspiring the Hadrianic accession coin and adding salience to this reference in Tacitus.³¹ This hypothesis is not generally endorsed today, but the

digression nevertheless remains notable for the doubt it casts on the validity of such symbolism. As Elizabeth Keitel argues, Tacitus himself appears to have manipulated the chronology of the false phoenix, presenting this allegorical fable of “perfect” succession as an ironic counterpoint both to the unrelenting tyranny and slaughter that characterized the end of Tiberius’s principate, and to the failure of his successor Caligula.³² Tacitus’s jaundiced perspective on the nonappearance of the phoenix seems consistent with the skepticism apparent in the Elder Pliny’s account written a generation earlier; even apparently earnest celebrations of the phoenix could have become tarnished in retrospect after the collapse of Rome’s first two dynasties.³³ Yet the (non)appearance of the phoenix is not the text’s only reference to the survival of memory through incendiary destruction.

Tacitus’s famous presentation of Cremutius Cordus (*Ann.* 4.35) echoes—and may have been inspired by—Seneca’s focus on Cremutius and his writings in the *Consolatio ad Marciam* (*Marc.* 1.2–4), discussed in chapter 2.³⁴ The voice of the “incinerated” Cremutius is brought back to life by his literary successors, much as the phoenix magically regenerates from its father’s “life force.” At *Annals* 4.35.6, Cremutius Cordus, accused of treason for writing history, defends his account of the civil conflicts of the first century BCE with a bitter rhetorical question: “I’m not inflaming people by inciting civil war at public meetings, now am I?” (*num . . . belli civilis causa populum per contiones incendio?*).³⁵ Since Cremutius’s writings were to be consigned to the flames of censorship, his choice of words is notable, but additional ironies underpin this remark. First, the question contributes to the text’s overall impression that Tiberius is unable to discern between real and imagined threats.³⁶ The rhetorical *num*, indicating an expected answer in the negative, suggests that the idea of challenging an emperor through the old political mechanisms of the republic is inherently absurd. Finally, the burning of Cremutius’s books provokes Tacitus to editorialize with another fire metaphor (*Ann.* 4.35): *quo magis socordiam eorum inridere libet qui praesenti potentia credunt extinguī 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.”)³⁷ In writing about Cremutius, both Tacitus and Seneca claim to preserve the memory of works lost in the fires of imperial censorship; yet this very commemoration addresses the risks of their own writing.³⁸

This chapter’s main reading focuses on the ways in which Tacitus shapes the Neronian conflagration as a literary and political “unmaking” that exploits the

trope of conflagration on a number of levels. Although the practice of burning literary books under senatorial or imperial authority appears to have ended with Domitian, Hadrian evidently devoted unusual energy to another kind of book-burning seen intermittently from the time of Augustus. In or around 118 CE, Hadrian remitted more than 900 million sesterces of arrears that had accumulated in the preceding years, burning the documents that recorded these debts in the Forum and commemorating the occasion on contemporary coinage.³⁹ The burning of records also appears on two sets of relief panels from Rome, although attempts have been made to identify these panels with a proposed (and otherwise unrecorded) Trajanic debt relief in 106 CE.⁴⁰ Regardless of the specific event these images depict, they still place the emperor in a prominent place in Rome, personally overseeing the incendiary destruction of written records. They thus contribute to the impression that the public incineration of such material remained a significant political statement. In contrast to these precisely controlled uses of symbolic fire on the part of the principate, the period's authors depict the interaction of fire and memory in far less stable ways.

iam strident ignes: *The Reciprocity of Incendiary Punishments in Pliny's Panegyricus and Juvenal's Satires*

Pliny the Younger provides an arresting illustration of fire's symbolic potential as an attack on past evils in his *Panegyricus*, delivered at the outset of Trajan's principate in 100 CE.⁴¹ In the *Panegyricus* Pliny celebrates the new emperor, Trajan, for freeing men from the fear that Domitian had instilled of reprisal for their speech (66.4–5); this guarantee implies, at least in theory, that the praise heaped on Trajan in this oration must be genuine.⁴² Though a more resounding overall affirmation of Trajan's promise as a ruler is hard to imagine, the *Panegyricus* nevertheless suggests the consequences should the *optimus princeps* ever take a turn for the suboptimal.⁴³ In a colorful passage that owes a debt to literary descriptions of mutilated and burned corpses from epic and tragedy, the author recalls the violent celebrations that followed Domitian's assassination:⁴⁴

Nemo tam temperans gaudii seraeque laetitiae, quin instar ultionis videretur cernere laceros artus truncata membra, postremo truces horrendasque imagines obiectas excocatasque flammis, ut ex illo terrore et minis in usum hominum ac voluptates ignibus mutarentur. (Plin. *Pan.* 52.4–6)

No one exercised restraint in their joy and long-awaited happiness; it seemed like a form of vengeance to look on the mutilated limbs and hacked pieces [of Domitian's statues]; and above all, to see his vicious and hideous likenesses hurled into the flames and melted down, so that out of that old source of terror and menace, they could be transformed by the fire into things that men find useful and delightful.

In Pliny's description, Domitian's statues serve as a proxy for the dead emperor, in what Eric Varner characterizes as "a cathartic communal destruction of Domitian himself in effigy."⁴⁵ Melting Domitian's statues approximates a gratifying attack on a hated figure, but it also offers opportunities for the kind of physical transformation that fire can catalyze.⁴⁶

Memory sanctions often took the form of mutilation or damage to portraits and inscriptions, which then remained as a lasting and conspicuous form of condemnation.⁴⁷ This type of erasure did not truly eliminate the memory of the figures in question; rather it reinvented the targeted figure as a negative exemplum or scapegoat for the evils of the past, of which the remaining object would now serve as a perpetual reminder.⁴⁸ Fire, however, precludes such indirect commemoration.⁴⁹ Instead, out of the incendiary obliteration of Domitian's entire form arises a totally new and more appealing set of possibilities. Just as the statues of a now-vilified emperor can become items that benefit Rome's citizens, so Roman leadership itself can emerge, phoenix-like, from a chaotic upheaval as a new and improved principate. Pliny's language here effects still another kind of transformation, refashioning an earlier memory of Domitian from the *Panegyric* itself.

Pliny rejoices at *Pan.* 33.3 that no one at Trajan's games has suffered what he alleges was routine under Domitian. According to Pliny, Domitian would spot someone in the crowd who appeared insufficiently cheerful; this unfortunate soul, "transformed from spectator to spectacle" (*e spectatore spectaculum factus*), would be dragged off to "expiate" this offense by being tortured with "hook and fire" for the ruler's "grim satisfaction" (*miseras voluptates unco et ignibus expiavit*).⁵⁰ Thus for Pliny, Domitian's cruelty when he was in power becomes a proleptic anticipation of—and a literal provocation to—his eventual fate. The wicked pleasure that Domitian had taken in transforming audience members at games into spectacles of incendiary torture is transmuted into the justified pleasure the crowd later takes in seeing his image consigned to the fire and put to new use. These anecdotes serve not only as an index of Trajan's superiority to

past rulers but also as reminders of destructive patterns of behavior that the new ruler must avoid. Pliny elsewhere includes several hints that imperial succession (even via adoption) was a precarious business well before Domitian's death.⁵¹ He even suggests that Nerva himself would have faced the "torch of uprising," had he not settled on Trajan as his successor.⁵² Thus the recollection of Domitian's melting statues perhaps serves as a timely reminder of the passionate hatred that any ruler who becomes overbearing might provoke.⁵³ Fire can be a powerful tool for terror, but often those who use it end up consumed in the same flame.

In Juvenal's *Satire* 10, this trope recurs, although with a different target. Here the speaker recalls the public celebrations after the death of Sejanus, the urban prefect who had acquired tremendous influence under Tiberius only to lose favor and be executed along with his family. The text presents the destruction of a massive statue of the former prefect, with ample attention to sensational detail and crackling sound effects:⁵⁴

*iam strident ignes, iam foliibus atque caminis
ardet adoratum populo caput et crepat ingens
Seianus, deinde ex facie toto orbe secunda
fiunt urceoli, pelves, sartago, matellae.
pone domi laurus, duc in Capitolia magnum
cretatumque bouem: Seianus ducitur unco
spectandus, gaudent omnes.* (Juv. 10.61–67).

Now the flames are hissing, now in bellows and in furnaces the head, to the people's delight, burns; the massive Sejanus sizzles and squeaks. Then, out of that face—once second in command over the entire world—water pitchers, basins, crockery, piss-pots emerge. Deck the house with laurel, lead a great chalk-whitened bull up to the Capitol; Sejanus is dragged with a hook for all to see, and all rejoice.

As the statue crackles in the fire, a general holiday is declared, and a sacrifice is made. Sejanus's actual corpse (it seems) is dragged with a hook by the executioner, exposed to public view (*spectandus*), and is presumably to be thrown in the Tiber.⁵⁵ In its celebration of the fall of the mighty and the deconstruction of monumental pretensions to eternal grandeur, this passage, as Paul Miller observes, feeds "the sadistic pleasure associated with satire's lacerating attacks."⁵⁶

It is tempting to imagine the sizzling statue of Sejanus as the same one that Cremutius Cordus, according to Seneca, found so outrageous when it was erected “over Pompey’s ashes” (*supra cineres Cn. Pompei*) in a restoration of Pompey’s theater after a fire in the Tiberian period.⁵⁷

Ultimately, however, this punishment does not come at the discretion of the people Sejanus once oppressed (or whose books he was once instrumental in having burned).⁵⁸ Rather, Sejanus and his grim fate serve as testimony to what Tom Geue calls “the violent consequences of encroaching too closely on the emperor’s personal space.”⁵⁹ The text offers rapid-fire commentary of the “man-on-the-street” dialogues exchanged by members of the mob gathered to enjoy the spectacle of Sejanus’s death and *damnatio* (Juv. 10.81–82): “*perituros audio multos*” / “*nil dubium, magna est fornacula*” (“I hear many will die.” / “No doubt, that’s a big furnace.”)⁶⁰ The emperor’s punishment, like a fire, is not a discriminating weapon; it can extend to the population at large, as well as to prominent figures in the regime; ultimately, even when put to “good” use, the destruction that fire represents is liable to take on a life of its own. There may also be yet another form of rough justice operating in these lines, as Sejanus becomes the victim of the “hook and fire” that in the first *Satire* threaten a satirist at the behest of another tyrannical pseudo-*princeps* figure.

At the end of Juvenal’s first *Satire*, the speaker and an imaginary interlocutor discuss the dangers of speaking too freely. Here the text presents the execution of an outspoken satirist on the orders of Tigellinus, Nero’s praetorian prefect who in many ways reprised the role that Sejanus had played for Tiberius:⁶¹

*pone Tigillinum, taeda lucebis in illa
qua stantes ardent qui fixo gutture fumant [. . .]
et latum media sulcum deducis harena.* (Juv. 1.155–57)

Bring up Tigellinus and you’ll glow on that pine-torch where they stand and burn: those men who smoke, throats pierced [. . .] and cuts a wide furrow through the middle of the arena.⁶²

As in Pliny’s *Panegyricus*, the “transfixed throat” refers to the curved hook that was put through the chin in this form of punishment, while the torch is a probable reference to the *tunica molesta* (the “irksome shirt” or “robe of pain”).⁶³ As Kirk Freudenburg notes, the idea of fashioning victims as “human torches” presumably alludes to Tigellinus’s role in burning Christians in revenge for the

Great Fire of 64.⁶⁴ Similarly, the punishment here reads as a literalizing play on the unfortunate victim's earlier claims to righteous indignation as part of his poetic stance.⁶⁵ The passage is immediately followed by an exchange in which the dangers of speaking are further spelled out (158–61). But whenever “burning Lucilius roars, as if with sword drawn” (*ense velut stricto quotiens Lucilius ardens / infremuit*, 1.165–66), “the listener chilled from crime goes red, his heart sweats with silenced guilt” (166–67). The speaker refers to the satirist's “flaming passion” (*animo flagrante*) at Juv. 1.152, echoing Juv. 1.45, where the speaker/satirist asks rhetorically why he should mention “how much wrath with which [his] dry liver burns” (*quanta siccum iecur ardeat ira*).⁶⁶ As Geue notes, however, “the satiric combat of a ‘burning’ Lucilius could result in real self-incineration.”⁶⁷ In the anticipated execution at the end of *Satires* 1, the satirist's characteristic fire is used against him: the plumes of smoke shooting from his pierced throat, as well as the marks left in the sand of the arena (the last of this author's “writing”), illustrate the dangers inherent in speaking or writing too freely.⁶⁸

In their texts, Pliny and Juvenal provide images of leaders visiting fiery punishments upon members of the public that are later echoed when leaders themselves are overthrown and their statues are similarly punished. In a more extended and complex way, the text of Tacitus's *Annals* also creates a running commentary of proleptically “fiery” characterizations of Nero and his textual forerunners. This series of characterizations exploits the audience's presumed awareness of Nero's association with Rome's defining catastrophe, insinuating that not just Nero but the principate itself is ultimately responsible for the city's destruction.

The Tacitean Political Landscape as Destruction Zone

Within the extended narrative of events depicted in the *Annals*, Tacitus offers plentiful metaphorical imagery associating the behavior of historical actors with fire, flames, or burning.⁶⁹ Tacitean scholars, particularly in recent decades, have done much to clarify the author's pervasive and complex intertextuality.⁷⁰ This work has emphasized the major influence of literary values and poetic models upon Tacitus's work.⁷¹ Moreover, recent scholarship has brought new attention to the subtle patterning of language and metaphor in the Tacitean corpus.⁷² As Holly Haynes points out, “Tacitean historiography shapes experi-

ence through language. Separating the literary from the historical element of the texts therefore misses the point of his exercise.”⁷³

In the readings that follow, I examine a range of examples demonstrating the ways in which fire-related metaphor is used to characterize unstable leaders, as well as collective activity that is detrimental to Rome’s political environment. I also establish that various urban and military disasters narrated by Tacitus in *Annals* 1–14 function as anticipations (signals to “watch this space,” in effect) of the Great Fire of 64; these disasters tend to contain especially dense clusters of poetic overtones. Such events create opportunities for parallels to foundational imperial texts to be drawn allusively—and thereby for flaws in the ideology of the principate to be exposed indirectly.⁷⁴ I relate this phenomenon to previous scholarship demonstrating that Tacitus characterizes the principate as a form of civil war waged on Rome’s own citizens from its inception; this motif animates the old rhetorical trope that physical and political attacks on the city go hand in hand.⁷⁵ Finally, I offer a reading of the Great Fire as 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.

Nero appears to “inherit” certain incendiary traits from the series of leaders characterized with similar language, from Augustus to Agrippina; yet these terms and images also align these characters with proleptically incendiary figures like Vergil’s Dido and Ovid’s Phaethon, whose metaphorical “inflammation” anticipates the fiery destruction of a great nation or even the entire cosmos.⁷⁶ These vivid characterizations are juxtaposed, in turn, with a carefully plotted series of vignettes featuring actual outbreaks of fire and other minor disasters in the years leading up to 64. Just as Nero’s memory looms in the text of the previously composed *Histories*, even before he appears on the scene in the *Annals* his shadow stalks the earlier books as the understood telos of the dynastic narrative.⁷⁷ Both the instances of metaphorical inflammation and the series of minor disasters studded throughout the *Annals* function as proleptic iterations leading up to the set-piece of Rome’s destruction in 64.

Flagrantior inde vis, flagrantior in dies: Metaphorical Fires in the Annals

Near the end of the Neronian *Annals*, the captured conspirator Subrius Flavus declares defiantly under torture that Nero is a *parricida matris et uxoris, auriga*

et histrio et incendiarius ("murderer of mother and wife, a charioteer and stage actor and arsonist," *Ann.* 15.67.2). Subrius Flavus accuses Nero of starting the 64 fire as just one of his many offenses. For readers of the *Annals*, however, the term *incendiarius* reflects not just the suspected arson that Tacitus alludes to in his own account of the fire; it also recalls all the behavior Tacitus has marked out with variations on *incendere*, *flagrare*, and terms with related associations. If we understand the extent to which the Tacitean Nero and "his" fire both function as the logical outcome of a diseased system, this becomes more than a literal accusation of arson, suggesting a broader condemnation of the activities associated with the concept of *incendium*.⁷⁸ As discussed in chapter 1, Vergil advances Dido's metaphorically "fiery" characterization in proleptic tension with the reader's presumed awareness of the fiery fate that awaited Carthage; likewise, chapter 2 examined Ovid's development of Phaethon as a "fiery" figure well before he takes the reins of the solar chariot; finally, the Nero of the *Octavia* discussed in chapter 4 cultivates a proleptic association with fire that plays against the audience's presumed awareness of his rumored responsibility for the 64 disaster. Tacitus plays out this form of anticipation not only in narrating the rise and fall of a single mythic or tragic figure but also in presenting an extended sequence of leaders and events, so that the image gains weight and nuance through the variety of contexts in which it appears.⁷⁹

Fire is, as noted in previous chapters, a major component of stock descriptions associated with tyrants, whose grandiose ambitions and susceptibility to their passions (and, relatedly, to the influence of rumors and dubious counsel) have a corrosive effect on their abilities as leaders.⁸⁰ Tacitus adjusts and refines this vocabulary to reflect the larger contexts and personas involved.⁸¹ Yet quite apart from the ways in which these terms characterize any individual figure, we must consider them as part of Tacitus's larger exemplary model in the *Annals*.⁸² According to Christina Kraus, "as history concentrates its (and our) gaze on a series of exemplary figures, we are encouraged to see them both as unique, historically determined individuals and as imitable, repeatable, paradigms."⁸³ Just as the Tacitean Nero in some sense only reiterates and amplifies the qualities displayed by his forerunners on the imperial stage, these characters also anticipate Nero, the telos of the Julio-Claudian narrative. Likewise, destructive behavior characterized in incendiary terms becomes a metaphorical provocation to Rome's literal conflagration in 64. These descriptions function not just as anticipations or echoes of the 64 fire but more broadly as symbols of the destructive nature of the principate.

The verb *flagrare*, one of the most extravagantly metaphorical words in the Tacitean vocabulary, makes its first appearance in the *Annals* amidst connotations of imperial overreach.⁸⁴ Tacitus describes how Augustus went about grooming his grandsons Gaius and Lucius for the principate when they were still young and unproven: “when they had not yet even given up the toga of boyhood, [Augustus] had been entirely aflame with desire for them to be called leaders of the youth and awarded consulships” (*necdum posita puerili praetexta principes iuventutis appellari destinari consules specie recusantis flagrantissime cupiverat*, *Ann.* 1.3.2).⁸⁵ Augustus’s impulse to promote these presumptive heirs is implied to be hasty and short-sighted, given the well-known fate that both boys met. Furthermore, this superlative form of “flagrant desire” (*flagrantissime cupiverat*) suggests irrationality and excess, calling attention to a central flaw of the Julio-Claudian principate as Tacitus presents it: personal bloodlines and unproven potential heirs eclipse senatorial distinction and competition among accomplished men as the structuring force of the state.

Similarly, Agrippina’s promotion of Nero as a means to gain power is portrayed with a decidedly fire-friendly vocabulary. At *Ann.* 13.2.2, Tacitus characterizes her hostility toward Nero’s retainers Seneca and Burrus as a form of animalistic aggression (*ferocia*), adding that she was “aflame with all the desires of wicked autocracy” (*cunctis malae dominationis cupidinibus flagrans*). Ultimately targeting Nero as not just a feminized leader but an incendiary one, Rome’s leadership and metaphorical conflagration are repeatedly thrown together in the context of sexual transgression.⁸⁶ When passion for Poppaea renders Nero ever more “aflame” (*flagrantior in dies amore Poppaeae*, *Ann.* 14.1.1), Agrippina, moved by a “burning desire to retain her power” (*ardore retinendae potentiae*, *Ann.* 14.2), is thus motivated to make incestuous propositions to Nero.⁸⁷ Although Vergil and Seneca both offered images of leaders metaphorically “aflame” with patriotic zeal in a manner that was arguably positive, Tacitus uses the same vocabulary in the *Annals* to highlight the worst aspects of Rome’s leadership.⁸⁸

When the vocabulary of fire is applied to the Roman population at large, it is generally suggestive of public discourse cheapened and made volatile; those susceptible to this form of *incendium* are the mob, easily led into sedition and faction. A pithy sentence describes the outbreak of violence among the troops stationed on the border at Pannonia, metonymically linking the concepts of fire and political unrest: “thereafter violence’s fire intensified, and the uprising’s leaders multiplied” (*flagrantior inde vis, plures seditioni duces*, *Ann.* 1.22.1). Just

a few lines after this arresting phrase, the rabble-rousing Vibulenus enlivens a speech inciting Roman troops to mutiny with an emotional display: “these words he set aflame with tears, beating his face and chest with his hands” (*incendebat haec fletu et pectus atque os manibus verberans*, *Ann.* 1.23.1).⁸⁹ In the satire-inflected letter that Tacitus attributes to Tiberius at *Annals* 3.53–54, the most grimly self-aware of Tacitus’s emperors appears to mock not only the decline of Roman society but also the terms in which it is often described.⁹⁰ Tiberius assumes the moralizing tone of a doctor considering various remedies for societal corruption: “corrupted and corruptive alike, sick and inflamed, the mind is not to be cooled down by treatments lighter than the lusts with which it burns” (*corruptus simul et corruptor, aeger et flagrans animus haud leuioribus remediis restinguendus est quam libidinibus ardescit*, *Ann.* 3.54.1).⁹¹ Essentially, Tacitus’s Tiberius here conveys the idea that reforming Rome’s moral and political landscape would involve measures so extreme that they would be tantamount to destroying it. Underlying this statement is the recognition that destruction is a necessary part of Julio-Claudian legitimacy as formulated by Augustus, Rome’s self-styled rescuer from the chaos of the previous century.

When the Great Fire strikes in *Annals* 15, *flagrare*, *incendium*, *incendere*, and related terms are firmly associated with unstable mobs, societal corruption, and ruinous political figures who allow emotions, ambition, rumor, paranoia, and jealousy to dominate their decisions. Consistently conveying nefarious import, the metaphorical “inflammation” of various parties thus prepares readers to see Rome’s literal conflagration as a physical manifestation of the ideological harm visited upon the state throughout the *Annals*. Tacitus presents earlier disasters and previous leaders in terms that seem to anticipate the tour de force of the fire narrative in Book 15, making the city’s destruction feel—if not planned—profoundly inevitable.

The Cyclicity of Disaster and the Persistence of Trojan Myth in the *Annals*

The Nero of legend is inspired by Trojan myth and Roman history to burn the city and build a new one.⁹² Tacitus tells us that Nero in the eyes of his accusers “appeared to seek the glory of founding a new city and of having it called by his own name” (*videbaturque Nero condendae urbis novae et cognomento suo appellandae gloriam quaerere*, *Ann.* 15.40.2). Tacitus clearly distances himself from this idea by reporting it as an impression Nero created (*videbatur*) rather than

as fact.⁹³ The gradual accumulation within the *Annals* of disaster narratives, fiery and otherwise, builds to a crescendo that shapes the final, actual destruction of Rome as a repetition and amplification of all those that have preceded. Many of these events, as previous scholarship has shown, work to figure Rome as a captured city—and its emperors as the attackers—while others display a tendency to present the catastrophic as a form of theatrical spectacle.⁹⁴

This pattern begins with the pair of mutinies in Book 1 and the “flashback” to past carnage provided by the description of the scene of the *clades Variana* (*Ann.* 1.61–62).⁹⁵ It continues with incidents such as the storm in the North Sea that all but wipes out Germanicus’s fleet (2.23–24) and the cluster of disasters in Book 4 (the earthquake and amphitheater collapse at Fidenae, the Caelian Fire, and an outbreak of disease—all in the same year).⁹⁶ It finds further expression in the catastrophic failure of the dam on Lake Fucinus under Claudius (*Ann.* 12.56–57).⁹⁷ During Nero’s reign, the years and months preceding the 64 destruction seem to create an amplification and intensification of risk in Rome, as well as in other urban settlements around the empire.⁹⁸ Here we see incidents such as the bizarre outbreak of fire from the earth at Agrippina’s namesake colony in Germany (*Ann.* 13.57.5);⁹⁹ the incendiary Boudiccan revolt in Britain (14.29–38), in which Fury-like women bear down on Roman troops, encircling the divisions and enveloping them with fire (*igni suo involvunt*, 14.30.3);¹⁰⁰ two serious outbreaks of fire in Rome the same year (at 15.18.8, fire consumes a number of grain barges docked on the Tiber; at 15.22.2, another destroys Nero’s newly built gymnasium); an earthquake in Campania in 62 or 63 (15.22);¹⁰¹ and yet another earthquake in Naples (15.33–34, threatening the audience of a theater where Nero is performing) only shortly before the fire.¹⁰² On a macrocosmic level, this progression of violent incidents and natural disasters allows each one to echo and reframe the previous instances; it also creates a sense of collapsing time and space, as each of these textual and historical forerunners compounds our anticipation of the conflagration in which Rome—and much of its history—will be consumed.

Within this larger trajectory, subtle manipulation of language can also create micropatterns. For example, only three forms of *flagrare* in the *Annals* describe actual fires, and these literal instances are surrounded by a specific set of value-laden vocabulary. All appear in passages that seem to emphasize the relationship between an emperor’s public image—and the potential of disaster to harm it—in highly marked ways. First we see the Caelian fire of 27 CE, which reportedly spared only the image of Tiberius at 4.64.3 (*cunctis circum flagranti-*

bus . . . sola Tiberii effigies . . . mansisset).¹⁰³ Cynical as the manipulation of the image-discourse surrounding the fire of 27 may appear, in retrospect it nevertheless implies a condemnation of Nero when the same constellation of terms recurs at *Annals* 15.22.2. In an apparent inversion of Tiberius's Caelian "miracle," lightning destroys Nero's new gymnasium; the statue of Nero inside melts into a "shapeless mass of bronze" (*gymnasium ictu fulminis conflagravit effigiesque in eo Neronis ad informe aes liquefacta*). This is a negative portent in itself, but in comparison with the earlier notice it implies that Nero will fail where Tiberius was able to succeed in managing his public image after a disaster. Moreover, both the lightning bolt (*ictu fulminis*), a probable sign of divine disfavor, and the extreme formulation *ad informe aes* suggest a certain relish at the idea of seeing Nero's image so violently destroyed, perhaps anticipating the satisfaction Nero's enemies took in attacking his image after his death.¹⁰⁴ Melting down the statues of reviled former emperors may have erased the images in question, but as this chapter's earlier readings of Pliny's *Panegyricus* and Juvenal's *Satires* 10 remind us, textual commemorations can nevertheless convey the lasting significance of these gestures in the ideological climate of the early second century.¹⁰⁵

The key term *effigies*, as it appears in the Caelian and gymnasium fire episodes, represents imperial statuary; it can also, however, imply the masks worn during performances in theatrical and funereal contexts, and thus it prepares us for the final literal use of *flagrare*.¹⁰⁶ At *Annals* 15.29.3, the text reports: "The rumor had spread: at the very time the city was in flames (*ipso tempore flagrantis urbis*), [Nero] made his entrance on a private stage and sang the Trojan destruction." The previous interplay between the literal and metaphorical instances of fire-related terms in the *Annals* targets both the inherent theatricality and the sinister potential of imperial rhetoric at Rome. Long before 64, the Tacitean Nero seems to be rehearsing, almost literally, the role he is assigned to play in Roman history as a *scaenicus imperator* (Plin. *Pan.* 46.4) and *princeps incendiarius*, a Troy-obsessed performer who "fiddled while Rome burned." The association between forms of *flagrare* and the imperial image (*effigies*) at 4.64 and 15.22 suggests that fire and the emperor's image or "performance" have been linked conceptually, well before Nero literalizes them so clearly.

The specific literary disaster of Troy is called to the fore in connection with Nero throughout this section of *Annals*. A series of images and anecdotes attaching Nero to the story of Troy suggest that even as the text prepares him to become the final exponent of the Trojan-pedigreed Julio-Claudians, Nero him-

self orchestrates the destruction in 64 as a replay of Troy's fall. Chapter 3 considered a number of examples of Nero's alleged obsession with Troy, as well as with destruction narratives, as part of the larger complex of myths and allegations surrounding Nero's reign. His dominant role in the game of Troy, no less than his public orations concerning Troy and the disasters at Bononia and Rhodes, positions him at the center of a web of historical signification.¹⁰⁷ Altogether, these appearances and speeches (perhaps too) neatly foreshadow the role Nero is to play in *Annals* 15: linking Rome's fate to that of Troy and rebuilding the city in the aftermath of disaster.¹⁰⁸ Thus Tacitus, like the author of the *Octavia*, is adept at exploiting his audience's awareness not only of the ultimate outcome of the events he is narrating but also of Nero's well-known proclivity for Trojan-themed poetry.¹⁰⁹ In the *Annals*, the elaboration of the concept of a "performance" or a "replaying" of Troy is soon to be radically revised: no longer will it signify a celebratory spectacle or an oratorical display that looks back to the mythic past; instead, it becomes a current calamity for Rome and its people.

gravior atque atrocior: The Politics and Poetics of the Tacitean Fire of Nero

As the 64 fire burns its way through Rome's streets (and its citizens) in *Annals* 15, a series of highly recognizable Vergilian citations emerges alongside the text's vivid personification of both the fire and the city. Together these factors suggest that the tyrannical behavior and civil unrest characterized with incendiary language in the previous books of the *Annals* have now manifested themselves in the literal destruction of the city. Although Tacitus ultimately insists on the inaccessibility of the truth regarding Nero's guilt or innocence, his narrative shapes the Great Fire as the realization of all the proleptic anticipations and metaphorical insinuations concerning fire and disaster throughout the *Annals*. Tacitus's larger project of foreshadowing the 64 fire in the earlier books (as well as the early sections of Book 15) suggests that the imperial traits that Nero embodies to an extreme degree—his transgressive personal character and the vast reach of his capricious authority—have contributed to Rome's ongoing collapse under the principate.

In presenting the debauched lake party sponsored by Tigellinus (*Ann.* 15.37) that precedes the fire narrative, Tacitus comments that he offers this description only as a typical example of Nero's scandalous entertainments, rather than as an exceptionally outrageous incident.¹¹⁰ Yet this torchlight-illuminated, song-

filled (*consonare cantu et luminibus clarescere*, *Ann.* 15.37.3) display of nocturnal depravity becomes an anticipatory device for the fire narrative, in which Nero will again (according to rumor) indulge in song and enjoy the spectacle of the city alight. In the banquet's aftermath—which appears more as a continuation or climax of the preceding intemperance than a separate event—Nero's marriage ceremony to a freedman (*Ann.* 15.37.4) offers the spectacle of a “flame-colored veil” placed on the emperor (*inditum imperatori flammeum*), along with other traditional symbols of wedlock, including wedding torches (*faces nuptiales*). As Francesca Santoro L'Hoir points out, such imagery “provides both a verbal and visual harbinger” for the flames that will consume the city in the next chapter.¹¹¹ Moreover, Tacitus describes the lake party as part of Nero's habit of “treating the entire city as his home” (*totaque urbe quasi domo uti*, *Ann.* 15.37.1). By the end of Book 15, Nero becomes literal master of the city, which is now subsumed into his Golden House. As Isabelle Cogitore has demonstrated, every location mentioned as part of the city's destruction is linked with Nero, whom Tacitus has already characterized as a “consumer” of urban space.¹¹² The fire functions both as an exponent of Nero's appetite for increasingly outrageous forms of entertainment and as a reflection of his ambition to “occupy” all of Rome.

Textually, Nero's depravity is positioned as both parallel and provocation to Rome's subsequent destruction, which follows in an immediate and abrupt transition:¹¹³

Sequitur clades, forte an dolo principis incertum (nam utrumque auctores prodidere), sed omnibus, quae huic urbi per violentiam ignium acciderunt, gravior atque atrocior. (Ann. 15.38.1)

Calamity ensues, whether by chance or the *princeps's* plotting is not certain (for sources put forth both versions), but it was graver and more aggressive than anything that previously befell this city through fire's violence.

The phrase *forte an dolo principis incertum* offers perhaps the best-known example of Tacitus's technique of the “loaded alternative,” part of what Inez Ryberg describes as his “art of innuendo.”¹¹⁴ Tacitus refuses to assert Nero's guilt outright; the text indirectly confirms impossibility of Nero's personal involvement in the outbreak, specifying that he was at Antium at the time.¹¹⁵ Yet if it is clear that many held the emperor responsible on questionable grounds, the text

nevertheless does little to dispel the impression that they were correct.¹¹⁶ Thus, while still claiming the mantle of responsible scholarship, Tacitus invites the reader to understand as true the rumor that Nero started the fire.¹¹⁷ Still the refusal here to endorse this apparently widely believed accusation is a significant rhetorical gesture on the part of the author.

Nero's alleged arson is the most damning accusation that could be made of any leader in the history narrated in the *Annals*, and it is asserted as a known fact in both earlier and later sources.¹¹⁸ Tacitus uses this presumed awareness, however, to demonstrate the principle that the popularity of an accusation has nothing to do with its truthfulness. In a sense, the insistence here on the unverifiability of the rumor serves only to strengthen the texts's credibility regarding numerous other outrages that it unequivocally presents as fact. Thus, although exposing a weakness in his sources, Tacitus in fact makes a major claim for the reliability of his account and the integrity of his approach. He blames the impossibility of discerning the truth in this instance on his source material (*nam utrumque auctores prodidere*). In calling attention to *auctores* ("sources" or "authors"), Tacitus also highlights another major theme of the passage—that of authorship.

The textual conflagration of *Annals* 15 gains additional resonance from several important models. At *Ann.* 15.38.7, unnamed witnesses allege that Nero was claimed as the authority (*auctor*) of the firebrand-wielding figures seen spreading the fire. Such language, as Ellen O'Gorman points out, conflates authorship and authorization, "extending the matter of Nero's poem from the words he sings to the city he destroys."¹¹⁹ As Kraus demonstrates, Tacitus's description of Rome before and after the fire reworks Livy's account of the rebuilding of Rome after the Gallic invasion of 390 BCE.¹²⁰ Tacitus reports the rumor that Nero "sang the destruction of Troy, making present misfortunes like ancient disasters" (*cecinisse Troianum excidium, praesentia mala vetustis cladibus adsimulantem*, *Ann.* 15.39.3). In A. J. Woodman's view, this may form "a metaliterary comment" suggesting that "just as Nero sang of the destruction of Troy, so Tacitus's narrative alludes to the firing of Troy as described in some earlier text."¹²¹ Woodman speculates that Tacitus may have been reworking not only Vergil's poetic destruction of Troy but also two other sources now lost to us: Lucan's *De incendio urbis* (discussed in chapter 4) and the very poem on Troy's fall that (as Tacitus's *rumor* has it) Nero recited as an allegory of the fire.¹²² Tacitus also relies, however, on the internal micronarrative of fire and disaster created in the previous books of the *Annals*.

Nero's identity in the *Annals* as a figure obsessed with recreating past events,

family history, and established texts is already highly apparent before we arrive at his most famous allusion to Troy in *Annals* 15. Likewise, Rome frequently plays the victim in Tacitus's portrayal of Rome's emperors as virtual besiegers of the city, in what amounts to a systematic attempt to unmake Rome's republican traditions—and to remake her in the form of her new autocratic rulers.¹²³ Thus the conglomeration of poetic details and literary allusions in the fire narrative conspires to signal that Rome's destruction is, in effect, Nero's greatest creative enterprise.

The descriptions in *Annals* 1–14 of Nero and other key figures as metaphorically “fiery” has created a sense that their threatening behavior and destructive tendencies make them the functional equivalent of a conflagration. Now the situation is reversed: the fire itself is portrayed as a living being, suggesting that it, too, acts as an agent of imperial will:

initium in ea parte circi ortum quae Palatino Caelioque montibus contigua est, ubi per tabernas, quibus id mercimonium inerat quo flamma alitur, simul coeptus ignis et statim validus ac vento citus longitudinem circi corripuit. neque enim domus munimentis saeptae vel templa muris cincta aut quid aliud morae interiacebat. impetu pervagatum incendium plana primum, deinde in edita adsurgens et rursus inferiora populando, antiit remedia velocitate mali et obnoxia urbe artis itineribus hucque et illuc flexis atque enormibus vicis, qualis vetus Roma fuit. (Tac. Ann. 15.38.2–3)

[The fire] first sprang up in the part of the Circus adjacent to the Palatine and Caelian hills where—amidst shops stocked with the kind of merchandise by which flame is nourished—as soon as the fire started, it immediately grew strong, and hastened by the wind it raced down the entire length of the track. For there were no large houses shielded by fortified walls, nor temples skirted by enclosures, nor any other obstacles standing in its way. In its initial attack, the fire wandered through all the flat ground; then, sweeping upward to the heights and back down to plunder the low-lying areas, it outpaced all potential remedy with its speedy damage, especially since the city was an easy target with its narrow thoroughfares and formless lanes twisting this way and that—as old Rome was.

The terms used to delineate the fire's progress mimic the birth of a living thing: it “springs” to life, is “fed,” and grows “strong” and “fast” (*ortum . . . alitur . . . validus . . . citus*). Given the setting in the Circus, horse racing imagery (or pos-

sibly, of Phaethon's chariot?) seems to inform the verbs characterizing its initial motion as it "consumes" the track, "wanders," and "surges forth" (*corripuit . . . pervagatum . . . adsurgens*).¹²⁴ Finally, when the fire reaches overwhelming proportions, a number of terms personify it as an attacking army with an alarmingly tactical mind: its movement is a "charge," it engages in "plunder," and it "heads off opposition" (*impetu . . . populando . . . antiit remedia*).¹²⁵ Moreover, the last character shown "roving about" the city's streets, directing his entourage to seize merchandise and attack bystanders, was Nero himself: "in the disguise of a slave, Nero wandered the city's streets (*itineris urbis . . . pererrabat*), brothels, and taverns with companions, who would steal things for sale and cause injury to those in their path" (*Ann.* 13.25.1).¹²⁶ The personification of the fire as an attacker in terms that seem to recall Nero's own youthful depredations of the city also raises questions about where Rome should look for its true enemy.

Rome had not literally been sacked in over four centuries; the reference to the higgledy-piggledy (non-)design of *vetus Roma* recalls the assertion retailed in Livy that Rome's previous destruction at the hands of the Gauls had destroyed the city's original, more organized layout.¹²⁷ Here we see the literal destruction of "old Rome's" physical structures presented as the complement to the unmaking of its ideological fabric. Like fire, the immorality, infighting, and disregard for the city's well-being that has long characterized the Julio-Claudian principate (as described in the *Annals*) is a force that destroys from within. Moving from the physical destruction to the human cost, Tacitus's narration of the reaction to the fire is also colored with the perception that the population has been ambushed by an invading force.

Quintilian (*Inst.* 8.3.67–70) tells us that a writer who wishes to achieve emotional impact should not only narrate the bare bones of a city-sacking but also elaborate on its human cost in sensational detail. Accordingly, as Mathew Owen and Ingo Gildenhard observe, Tacitus "uses the fire to give outlet for the sort of narrative excitement usually reserved for war."¹²⁸ In creating literary responses to an event like the Great Fire, Nero and Tacitus alike stand in a tradition that stretches back to Vergil and Homer:¹²⁹

ad hoc lamenta paventium feminarum, fessa aetate aut rudis pueritiae, quique sibi quique aliis consulebant, dum trahunt invalidos aut opperiantur, pars mora, pars festinans, cuncta impediabant. et saepe dum in tergum respectant lateribus aut fronte circumveniebantur, vel si in proxima evaserant, illis quoque igni cor-

reptis, etiam quae longinqua crediderant in eodem casu reperiebant. (Tac. Ann. 15.38.4–5)

To this, add the lamentations of frightened women, [those] of feeble age, [those] of tender childhood, those concerned for themselves or for others, as they dragged along the unwell or were delayed by them; some [were] a delay, some rushed, all were a hindrance. Often too, when they looked back they were surrounded at the sides or from ahead, or if they had escaped into a neighboring area—since those places too were seized by fire—even areas which they had thought distant, they found in the same dire situation.

Tacitus's description of terrified inhabitants fleeing the fire only to find themselves "surrounded" (*circumveniebantur*) by the blaze at every turn extends the personification of the fire from the preceding section, further aligning the fire narrative with the *urbs capta* motif that he has developed elsewhere. Yet the dominant pattern of allusion in the fire narrative points consistently and specifically to *Aeneid* 2.

The spoiled Vergilian parallels in this passage highlight not just the obvious similarities between Rome's destruction and that of Troy but also a more subtle and distressing set of situational contrasts. Tacitus offers a description of "terrified women, those weary with age or those of youthful inexperience" (*paventium feminarum, fessa aetate aut rudis pueritiae*), who trap themselves and each other in their frenzied activity, evoking the *pavidae matres* mentioned twice in *Aeneid* 2 (for example, *pueri et pavidae longo ordine matres / stant circum*, *Aen.* 2.766–67).¹³⁰ While the conquered Trojans are aware of their enemy and resigned to their fate, the panicked Romans are not. The phrase *fessa aetate* also echoes the exhortation of Aeneas's mother Venus to save his father Anchises, whom she describes as *fessum aetate* (*Aen.* 2.596).¹³¹ Unlike Anchises, however, the victims Tacitus describes in these scenes have no hope of rescue by their dutiful offspring; instead they will perish in the blaze. Such a conflation of myth with history—and of poetry with reality—has in fact been imminent from the very start of the fire narrative.

Vergil's Greek invaders are able to take advantage of the city's festivities to attack a "city buried in sleep and wine" (*invadunt urbem somno vinoque sepultam*, *Aen.* 2.265). As Andreola Rossi points out, the celebration preceding the disaster in *Aeneid* 2 highlights the contrast between Troy's former state of foolish happiness and the catastrophic debacle soon to follow.¹³² As discussed

above, Tacitus's abrupt transition from Tigellinus's lake party and Nero's ensuing antics to the fire serves a similar dramatic function (*sequitur clades*, *Ann.* 15.38.1); this sentence also offers an unmistakable echo of the words with which Vergil's Aeneas introduces his account of the fall of Troy: *sive dolo seu iam Troiae sic fata ferebant* (*Aen.* 2.34).¹³³ Moreover, as Woodman further notes, listed among the buildings destroyed by the fire are an unnumbered quantity of *delubra deum* (*Ann.* 15.40.1), 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* (*Aen.* 2.248–49).¹³⁴ Vergil portrays the Trojans not just as blissfully ignorant but as dangerously susceptible both to internal conflict and to the lies of the Ulysses-figure Sinon; they are, in other words, complicit in their own destruction. Tacitus, in so directly signaling his text's indebtedness to these lines of Vergil, further suggests the Roman population's complicity in their own destruction. Thus the cluster of allusions to *Aeneid* 2 in *Annals* 15 invites not just a reconsideration of Julio-Claudian history and literature but a rereading of Tacitus's own account of this period as set down in the *Annals*. Yet if the fire is the final sack that literalizes the Julio-Claudian siege on Roman ideology, then this assault was initiated at the very the start of the dynasty.

In a brief sketch of the events that brought Augustus to power, Tacitus creates the expectation of a vivid account of a city on fire that he does not satisfy for (roughly) another hundred years (or fourteen books, textually speaking). As Michael Putnam has shown, *Annals* 1 figures Augustus as Rome's attacker with a transparent allusion to the Trojan destruction and the legendary trickery of the Trojan horse. These lines offer the first of the *Annals*' series of "loaded alternatives," and they signal the programmatic importance of *Aeneid* 2 to the entire project:

ubi decreto partum fascis et ius praetoris invaserit, caesis Hirtio et Pansa, sive hostis illos, seu Pansam venenum vulneri adfusum, sui milites Hirtium et machinator doli Caesar abstulerunt, utriusque copias occupavisse. (Tac. *Ann.* 1.10.2)

[and people said that] when by senatorial decree he invaded the insignia and legal authority of a praetor, Hirtius and Pansa having been slain—either the enemy had done away with them, or else in Pansa's case poison had been slipped into a wound, and in Hirtius's case his own soldiers and Caesar [i.e., Octavian],

the designer of the stratagem, did away with him—and he [Octavian] took over the troops of both [Hirtius and Pansa].

. . . *ipse doli fabricator Epeos.*
invadunt urbem somno vinoque sepultam;
caeduntur vigiles, portisque patentibus omnis
accipiunt socios atque agmina conscia iungunt. (Verg. *Aen.* 2.264–67)

[and out of the horse came the Greeks, including] Epeos himself, the constructor of the stratagem. They invade a city buried in sleep and wine; the guards are slain, and, gates thrown wide, they welcome their comrades and join their conspiring ranks.

Referring to the rumored poisoning of the injured consul Pansa by which Augustus (then known as Octavian) may have secured command over the Roman military, Tacitus describes the future *princeps* (through the distancing lens of unattributed reportage: *dicebatur contra*, *Ann.* 1.10.1) as *machinator doli Caesar*.

Machina, *dolus*, and related terms had a long history of employment in descriptions of the Trojan horse and the legendary trickery of the Greeks on the fatal night of Troy's destruction.¹³⁵ As Putnam demonstrates, however, the echo of *doli fabricator* in *machinator doli* is clear and specific; neither author elsewhere offers a parallel phrase.¹³⁶ In the Vergilian lines, the assault moves from Epeos (*doli fabricator*) to the Greeks entering the city (*invadunt urbem*) to the killing of the guards (*caeduntur vigiles*). Tacitus's sentence reverses this progression: the future *princeps* has already "invaded" (*invaserit*) the emblems and rights of praetor; Hirtius and Pansa, the consuls who should have acted as Rome's guards, have already been killed (*caesis*); the sentence climaxes at the naming of Caesar, the *machinator doli*. For Tacitus, then, Augustus was the original designer of the deceptive structures that would lead to Rome's ideological devastation. In effect, the Nero of the rumor at *Ann.* 15, inspired by Trojan myth and Roman history, has finally finished the job that Augustus (reportedly) began.

After the fire, a report of Nero's performance during the fire sweeps through the city (15.39: *pervaserat rumor*); the active "wandering" of this narrative both echoes the progress of the fire itself (*impetu pervagatum incendium*, 15.38.3) and evokes Vergil's famous allegory of Rumor from *Aeneid* 4.¹³⁷ Closely related is the damning perception that Nero "sought the glory of founding a new city and

calling it by his name" (*videbaturque Nero condendae urbis novae et cognomento suo appellandae gloriam quaerere*) reported at *Ann.* 15.40.2. Nero's rumored motivation for burning Rome, like the inverted assault of *Ann.* 1.10, reads as a reversal of the Augustan/Trojan legend: in hopes of "founding a new city," Nero unmakes Rome in imitation of the very myth that Augustus propagated as the basis for his claims to power. Returning to the memorable phrase *forte an dolo principis incertum* (*Ann.* 15.38.1), another reversal presents itself: is the Tacitean Nero perhaps not the *auctor* of his own purported fantasy but the ultimate exponent of the devious plan of Rome's original *princeps*, the *machinator doli* of *Annals* 1? The Tacitean Nero appears conscious of Augustus's *dolus* but takes it too far, literalizing a foundational myth as a means of legitimizing his own rule.

In embedding the Vergilian narrative of Troy's destruction into his account of the fire of 64, Tacitus is not simply aestheticizing a cataclysmic event; he is contextualizing the fire in terms that pair the city's physical fabric with its political collapse.¹³⁸ The previous figuration in *Annals* 1 of Augustus himself as attacker of Troy—in specifically Vergilian terms—constructs the Great Fire as Nero's inheritance from the dynasty's founder. This legacy grows ever more pernicious over the course of the Julio-Claudian dynasty, as the lineage discussed in this chapter of the metaphorically "fiery" impulses of Rome's previous emperors (and would-be rulers) shows. Thus the subversion of Vergil's foundational Augustan epic becomes a metaliterary illustration of the text's larger argument concerning the failure of Roman leadership. Rome is being destroyed in a literal sense in Tacitus's account of the fire; yet through the cluster of allusions to the Trojan destruction as narrated in Vergil's *Aeneid*, Tacitus also creates the sense that Roman society and Roman history alike are unmaking themselves throughout the Julio-Claudian period.

Further confirmation of the highly textual nature of the destruction narrative here comes in the summation of the irreplaceable buildings and objects destroyed in the fire:

domuum et insularum et templorum, quae amissa sunt, numerum inire haud promptum fuerit: sed vetustissima religione, quod Servius Tullius Lunae, et magna ara fanumque, quae praesenti Herculi Arcas Evander sacraverat, aedesque Statoris Iovis vota Romuli Numaeque regia et delubrum Vestae cum Penatibus populi Romani exusta; iam opes tot victoriis quaesitae et Graecarum artium decora, exim monumenta ingeniorum antiqua et incorrupta, ut quamvis in tanta resurgentis urbis pulchritudine multa seniores meminerint, quae reparari nequibant. (Tac. *Ann.* 15.41.1–3)

Difficult indeed, to attempt a reckoning of the private houses, *insulae*, and temples that were lost: but of the oldest religious sanctity, those burnt were [the temple] that Servius Tullius [built] to Luna, the great altar and shrine which Arcadian Evander dedicated to the Present Hercules, the temple to Jupiter Stator vowed by Romulus, and Numa's Regia and shrine of Vesta, along with the Penates of the Roman people; in addition, so many treasures acquired in victories and glories of Greek art; and beyond that, the ancient and unspoiled works of talented men; so that, however great the beauty of the re-arisen city, the elders recall much that was irreplaceable.

The loss of individual houses and *insulae* is claimed to be incalculable (*numerus inire haud promptum fuerit*), an *aporia* that recalls the epic device of claiming the impossibility of counting a massive military force, especially one that is lost in combat.¹³⁹ The "casualties" included in the list that follows is selective and somewhat tendentious, in that most of these "ancient" structures had in fact already been burned or otherwise damaged and replaced more than once over the centuries.¹⁴⁰ Yet Tacitus emphasizes their great antiquity; those singled out for special commemoration epitomize Rome's ancient religious foundations. Kelly Shannon suggests that the text's exclusive focus on religious structures here accentuates the pervasive impiety with which Tacitus characterizes Neronian Rome overall.¹⁴¹ The buildings listed here are also notable for their dual literary and ideological value; each of the structures listed by name is associated not only with a legendary leader but with the commemorations of them offered by Livy, Ovid, and Vergil.¹⁴² Finally, the commemoration of art and objects lost in the fire concludes with a phrase that appears to refer, via another allusion to Livy, to the stuff of history in material terms; as several scholars have argued, *monumenta ingeniorum antiqua et incorrupta* seems to indicate the texts and records preserved in the public and private libraries around Rome.¹⁴³ Thus Nero's alleged arson has, in effect, achieved an erasure of Rome's past in literary and material terms that vastly exceeds the impact of his Julio-Claudian predecessors.

Tacitus uses a specific set of intertexts to figure the Great Fire itself as the virtual Trojanification of Rome, an unmaking comparable to Troy's fall. The progression of intertexts offers an invitation to view the fire as the final step in a virtual "invasion" initiated on day one of the principate. If Rome is Troy reborn, as Augustan literature had once proclaimed, then experiencing a destruction comparable to Troy's is a bleak prospect. The *excidium Troiae* replayed in *Annals* 15 differs from the "original" in that Rome fails to recognize

the true enemy it faces; in this reading, the Great Fire becomes a physical manifestation of an ideological attack on the city that had begun had long ago. This literary strategy is highly reliant on the Augustan poetic legacy discussed in chapters 1 and 2, which had made the burning of Troy so central to the new Roman identity forged in the aftermath of the catastrophic fall of the republic. As this identity faces its own threat of annihilation in the increasingly unstable world of Neronian Rome, these same references emerge both as a commemoration of Rome's losses and as an implicit critique of the role that Tacitus's literary predecessors in the early imperial period had played in cementing the Augustan legacy.

Tacitus's method of allusion in the fire narrative demonstrates again how readily events at Rome, often figured as the center of the cosmos and the apex of human achievement, invited parallels from myth and legend. The fire sequence of *Annals* 15 offers insight into the way in which the figurative language of fire, as well as allusions to poetic disaster, operate in Tacitus's project as a whole. The Tacitean narrative of the Great Fire of Rome embeds a series of Vergilian citations within a set-piece of ancient monuments of Roman history, all of which are being destroyed. At the same time, the text quite possibly includes references to a number of now-lost disaster narratives retailed by authors active at the time of the fire: not only Lucan but also Nero himself. As the city burns in *Annals* 15, not only Rome's monumental heritage but also its literary legacy are ignited, as it were, "before our very eyes."

graviore aestu ardescere: The Aftermath of the 64 Fire in the *Annals*

Tacitus characterizes the establishment of the principate as a Trojan-esque assault with his initial Vergilian citation at *Ann.* 1.10, reversing the message of progress and recovery that Augustus once so skillfully projected with the same myth. Similarly, Tacitus characterizes each act of refoundation, rebuilding, and recovery after the Great Fire as yet another sack. As Paul Murgatroyd observes, Nero's spectacular execution of the Christians blamed for the fire "provides a pointed final image of people being done away with / consumed (by fire) to gratify Nero's savagery."¹⁴⁴ Nero's rebuilding, and especially his luxurious Golden House, which drains the coffers of cities around the empire, plunders not just (what survives of) Rome but also of Italy and the provinces. The hyperbolic statement that "Nero took advantage of the ruins of his fatherland (*patriae ruinis*) and built a palace" (*Ann.* 15.42.1) hints at the impact of Nero's building

not just on the city of Rome but on cities around Italy and the empire that were forced to contribute funds for the project; as Keitel notes, *Ann.* 15.45 again casts Nero as metaphorically plundering his own country.¹⁴⁵

Finally, Tacitus admits to the “great beauty of the re-arisen city” (*tanta resurgentis urbis pulchritudine*, *Ann.* 15.41.1), with its newly straightened streets, stone construction, and increased latitude between buildings; he also reports that the “new” version of Rome built to Nero’s standards had both practical and visual appeal (*ea ex utilitate accepta decorem quoque novae urbi attulere*, *Ann.* 15.43.5). Yet due to these very features the sunlight was more intense, since the former city’s narrower streets and higher buildings could not be “battered into by the sun’s heat” (*non . . . solis vapore perrumperentur*), a violent expression extending the *urbs capta* motif of the fire;¹⁴⁶ now the city “burned with greater heat” (*graviore aestu ardescere*, *Ann.* 15.43.5).¹⁴⁷ This description extends Tacitus’s initial characterization of the fire as “graver and more aggressive” (*gravior atque atrocior*, *Ann.* 15.38.1) than any previous destruction.¹⁴⁸ In effect, then, Nero’s anti-fire laws leave the city in a permanent state of thermal distress, “burning” Rome all over again long after his death.

The ironic proviso that Nero’s new city “burned with greater intensity” has implications that extend beyond the narrative of the Julio-Claudian period and into Tacitus’s contemporary surroundings.¹⁴⁹ In essence, this phrase suggests that the design principles inspired by Nero’s conflagration still oppress the city some fifty years later. Moreover, Trajan and Hadrian were responsible not only for rebuilding after several fires, but also for constructing new monumental structures of unprecedented scale. For example, the overall scope and creativity of projects like the Forum of Trajan or the Hadrianic redesign of the Campus Martius are highly reminiscent of Nero’s Golden House after the 64 fire, as well as of Domitian’s comprehensive renovations of the Campus Martius following the fire of 80.¹⁵⁰ Tacitus’s phrasing leaves it ambiguous as to whether the reported *pulchritudo* and *gravior aestus* reflect only the viewpoint of the *seniores* or are perhaps the opinions of the senatorial author himself.¹⁵¹ Yet if we consider the overarching principle that each rebuilding after a fire was an opportunity for the emperor to deepen his own imprint on the city, the “greater heat” that Rome suffers after such monumentalization is essentially a physical manifestation of the emperor’s ever-growing control over Roman society. The text’s criticism of Nero’s totalizing, self-deifying vision as an urban innovator might thus have served as a cautiously indirect (and indirectly cautionary) comment on the ambitious building programs of Rome’s current rulers.

In this chapter, the Tacitean Nero ultimately comes into contact with a fire that seems to literalize his own metaphorically fiery persona, even as it offers a graphic illustration of the corrosive effects of the Julio-Claudian principate upon the body politic. Similarly, Pliny's Domitian and Juvenal's Sejanus (or at least their statues) meet fiery fates, in what appears a fitting retribution for the red-hot violence that such figures had previously enacted against dissidents, real or perceived. The trajectories of these characters offer parallels not only with the myth and history that inform these texts on a literary level but also with the political present and future that Rome's current emperors were engaged in shaping. Pliny's image of Domitian's statue melting in the bonfire at *Panegyricus* 52 evokes the incendiary wrath that leaders could face from disgruntled or dissident segments of the population.

Full-throated in its optimism about Rome's new ruler, Pliny's *Panegyricus* presents incendiary recollections of the recent past in order to magnify the purported superiority of the new Trajanic present. The text's recollection of Domitian's cruel incendiary punishment of spectators at games cleverly anticipates the language with which the emperor's melting statue is described, suggesting that Domitian's cruelty provoked the violence later visited upon him. Similarly, Juvenal presents the fires that destroy the image of Sejanus in *Satires* 10 as a thematic pendant to (and poetic revenge for) the fires that threaten to consume a dissident writer in *Satires* 1. These reminders of past conflict voice (albeit indirectly) the potential for rulers not only to punish dissent but also to be punished in return.

Tacitus, in recording the fate of Cremutius Cordus, aims at a different form of posthumous revenge, commemorating the loss of a historical source even as he revives Cremutius's voice in a new historical narrative. Yet this episode's coda decrying the foolishness of those who think they can erase historical voices brings the warning into the time in which Tacitus lived and wrote. Such comments suggest again that the fires of past repression loomed large in the memory of writers in the early first century, and that such images had significant value as cautionary reminders to readers (if not the emperor himself, then certainly his more zealous supporters) who might be tempted to revive these practices.

Both Tacitus in *Annals* 15 and Juvenal in *Satires* 3 borrow from Vergil's classic account of the fall of Troy to describe the literal fires that (on different scales, at different times) consume Rome. Just as Vergil's account comes via his internal narrator, Aeneas, Juvenal's description of an everyday apartment fire is told

through the voice of a speaker who implicitly attempts to justify the decision to abandon the city as lost. Similarly, Tacitus presents Nero as the “author” (*author*) of Rome’s destruction both on the literal level of personal culpability and on the literary level of a poetic narrator. Taking the emperor as inspiration, Tacitus casts Neronian Rome as a (re-)sacked Troy in his own narrative; thus he positions himself both as an epic successor and as an ideological antipode to Vergil and his *Aeneid*.¹⁵²

Viewed in retrospect, the Trojan allusions at *Ann.* 1.10.2 suggest 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 text of the *Annals*, read *in toto*, forms a portrait of the slow-motion, manmade disaster that was the inaugural dynasty of the Roman principate; this destruction was initiated by Augustus, accelerated under Tiberius and his Julio-Claudian successors, and taken to a characteristic extreme by the immoderate Nero. In the episode of the fire, this process is finally unleashed upon the literal fabric of the city.

Ultimately, however, Tacitus’s account of the Great Fire reads less as a condemnation of Nero as an individual ruler—or the Julio-Claudians as a dynasty—than as a metaphorical illustration of the inherently destructive nature of the imperial form of government. Tacitus’ account admits that the “new” city built according to Nero’s plans is safer and more beautiful, but nevertheless contends that it oppresses its occupants with constant heat. Hadrian’s coinage appropriates willed conflagration as a symbol of the perpetual authority of the principate; it both destroys old debt and eternally renews the phoenix. Yet like the heat of the *nova urbs*, fires continued to threaten any figure invested with less power than the emperor himself. Though the rulers under whom Tacitus’s writing career flourished were not hereditary dynasts like the emperors of the *Annals*, the principates of Trajan and Hadrian were hardly less far-reaching in their capacity to define the existence of subjects at every level of life within the city of Rome, as well as in the wider empire. In the *Annals*, the Great Fire itself becomes a physical manifestation of the damage done to Roman society by political scheming, volatile crowds, and unstable leaders, which the text has characterized with a wide range of incendiary metaphors. Thus the devastation that Tacitus depicts is designed to provide insight not just about the Julio-Claudians but also about the nature of imperial rule.

Conclusion

Leaders, Conflagration, and Destruction in the Eternal City and Beyond

At Rome, the threat of fire grew as a function of the acquisition of empire and the concomitant concentration of power and wealth at the capital. This phenomenon fueled the physical development of the city to monumental proportions, population density, and an overall urban complexity unrivaled in its time. Because fire lends itself to metaphorical discourse, it became a focus of rhetoric in both political and literary spheres, a medium through which to conduct ideological debates while appealing to shared assumptions about the properties of fire. In an increasingly densely settled urban environment, with a volatile population prone to revolt and riot, *incendium*, *furor*, and *seditio* were living realities—and they came to represent each other to an arresting extent. Likewise, the texts examined in this book suggest a programmatic awareness of fire's rhetorical value on the part of leaders and literary authors alike. The pervasive urban phenomena of political instability and destructive fire offered a productive nexus of striking images and narratives, as well as ideological and philosophical issues; it was both a threat to be forestalled and an agent of change.

The city's status as the architectural expression of civic well-being meant that after a period of conflict, as after a flood or fire, a message of progress was powerfully communicated in the transformational remaking of Rome's urban facade, banishing the dilapidation and destruction of the previous era to memory. Although the association between civil unrest and urban conflagration is clearly already highly developed in late republican rhetoric, the converse

association—that fire could actually legitimate a leader who could use it to his advantage—seems to have taken hold quickly as the republic finally collapsed. This cyclicity of destruction cuts both ways. Destruction is necessary in order to create something new; yet this new creation inevitably relies, to a greater or lesser extent, on commemorating what was lost. The tension between the lingering memories of past cataclysm and the ever-present possibility of renewed conflict was preserved—and often even cultivated—in order to necessitate the ruler's continued authority. The Augustan model of leadership is predicated on this cycle of disaster, re-creation, and remembrance. The metaphor grew over time, but after the foundational period of the Augustan principate, the inherent instability of this message starts to become increasingly apparent.

The Trojan origins of Rome promoted in the Augustan era reminded Romans of the mythic past, celebrating Augustus's lineage and the legendary origins of the city's culture; yet they also worked to forecast Rome's future as a perpetuation of the themes of civil conflict and urban destruction that had brought Rome under one man's control. Augustus faced the task of renewing Rome after the defining rupture of the triumviral conflicts and the fall of the republic. As fire continued to pose a threat to Rome's stability—and as successive emperors displayed varying degrees of competence in the face of this and other problems—authors in the later Julio-Claudian era reframe the already ambiguous discourse established by their Augustan predecessors in more starkly negative terms.

Urban conflagration is the unconquerable enemy that exposes the falsity of imperial claims to control over *urbs*, *imperium*, and *cosmos*; at the same time, it appears as a potent expression of the imagined capacity of unstable rulers themselves to touch off a political catastrophe with universal consequences. Each of the later Julio-Claudians came to power amidst a variety of factors that jeopardized their respective successions, including the premature deaths of preferred heirs, the suspected murder of predecessors, periodic purges of political enemies, and at least one outright coup. These events produced significant civic anxiety and suspicion of new leadership, a precarious dynamic even before the accession of Nero and the unprecedented destruction of 64 CE.

The historical event of the fire of 64—"Nero's Fire"—seems to provide both definitive proof of and further provocation to these notions, effectively transforming Nero into a magnet for Latin literature's considerable legacy of material linking incendiary events with political catastrophe. Ultimately, Nero's rumored responsibility for the fire, as well as his storied musical

response to it, represent predictable outcomes of the ideological and literary climate created by earlier Julio-Claudian claims to control over Rome, the empire, and the cosmos. Just as Augustus once gained stature as the synechdochic hero who rescued Rome from cultural oblivion and physical collapse, Nero became an emblem of excess, overreach, destruction, and failure. Vespasian, founder of the Flavian dynasty, came to power in the wake of dynastic collapse and the violent (and incendiary) Year of Four Emperors (69 CE). Vespasian did much to stabilize the city politically and to revive it architecturally. Yet after the brief and disaster-plagued reign of the presumed heir, Titus, Domitian again sought to style himself as Rome's rebuilder as a way of legitimating his rule. Finally, the early adoptive emperors needed to normalize a new form of succession following the collapse of the Flavian dynasty and the assassination of Domitian.

Each ruler worked to equate his control over the city with his larger claims to political authority and even mastery of the cosmos; concern about repairing fire damage and preventing future fires offered a key link between the two concepts. Thus fire presented not only a consistent problem but also a significant opportunity for Rome's emperors from Augustus to Hadrian, offering the *princeps* the scope to become both a protector of and a provider for the urban population. The refashioning of Roman identity after a catastrophic destruction—an innately rhetorical and ideologically charged discourse—was further complicated by the ever-increasing sense of risk in presenting any direct challenge to Roman authority, now so totally invested in a single figure.

Equally, the authors of the early principate—poets, historians, philosophers, and playwrights alike—shared a preoccupation with the task of reimagining Rome after the fall of the republic. The set of metaphorical images and mythological tropes examined in this book's five chapters acquired new significance as a way of exploring problems presented by the radical alterations to Roman identity required in the new imperial cosmos, a space now dominated by the figure of the *princeps*. Likewise, for 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. Ultimately, even the most innovative creative and cultural endeavors entailed a certain amount of destruction. In attempting to exceed their models and update traditional images and narratives to suit their own needs, Roman writers inevitably created ruptures with the past. Yet these ruptures and reimaginings themselves had the effect of keeping

certain significant themes and motifs animated throughout Rome's ongoing history of conflict, conflagration, and recovery.

The extended reading in chapter 1 of episodes from Vergil's *Aeneid* demonstrates the significance of conflagration's value as an allusive proxy, commemorating the triumviral conflicts even as it foreshadows the possibility of future disaster. The intimations of Phaethon in the *Georgics* explored in chapter 1, as well as Dido's proleptically "fiery" characterization in the *Aeneid*, appear to influence the presentation of Ovid's Phaethon discussed in chapter 2. Post-Ovidian literature, in turn, enthusiastically exploits the mythological trope of Phaethon's disastrous ambition, bending its contours and merging elements of politics and poetics in novel ways. For Manilius, the inspiring image of Phaethon as a cosmic charioteer and epic successor appears in uneasy tension with the prominence of his destructive cosmic legacy in moments commemorating the recent internecine conflicts of the previous generation. Seneca, by contrast, uses Phaethon in discussions of history and natural philosophy to create new ethical lessons and aesthetic paradoxes that offer indirect hints about his own precarious position at court, with its attendant risks and rewards.

As demonstrated in chapter 3, the model of the easy leap from allusion or fantasy to a realized event in the text underpins the humor of the "escape" from Trimalchio's alarmingly Trojan-esque banquet in Petronius's *Satyricon*, as well as the ready association between Caesar's incendiary characterization and the recurring threats of universal conflagration in Lucan's *Bellum Civile*. In the *Bellum Civile*, Phaethon is associated with each of the text's main contenders for Rome's future leadership, in effect inviting the conclusion that they are all doomed to fail. This progression further destabilizes the proem's famously ambiguous celebration of Nero as a future divinity and Phaethon figure, taking the control of the "wandering fire" of the cosmic chariot. Finally, Seneca cleverly reworks the Augustan legacy of literary commemoration to present the conflagration of Lugdunum as an allusive proxy for Rome's destruction in 64.

The readings in chapters 4 and 5 demonstrate that Julio-Claudian literary portrayals of destructive leader figures as proleptically "afame" form significant precedents for the portrait of Nero handed down in our literary sources. As demonstrated in chapter 4's readings of Statius's *Silvae* 2.7 and the *Octavia*, the associations between and among Phaethon, Nero, poetic ambition, and political collapse drawn by Seneca and Lucan became eerily prescient in retrospect. Tacitus literalizes famous textual moments from *Aeneid* 2 in his account of the conflagration of Neronian Rome. Using the *Aeneid* this way is not just

literary but also political. It forges a fundamental link between Vergil's foundational text and the ideology that allowed Augustus to take control of Rome, suggesting how pernicious the ideological positions that established the Roman principate had been from the outset. While post-Neronian texts play up Nero's own apparently quite real penchant for mythopoetic self-fashioning with Trojan affinities, this tendency is revealed as an "inheritance" from his ancestor Augustus. Thus rather than misreading or failing in his attempt to replicate the Augustan legacy, the Nero of the *Octavia* and the *Annals* is shown to be reading it too astutely—and implementing its underlying principles too aggressively.

Ultimately, the memory of the 64 fire as we understand it today echoes and is shaped by literary fantasies that had dominated Rome's collective imagination well before the catastrophic real-life occurrence. In the remainder of this chapter, I present two postclassical elaborations of the associations between and among leaders, fire, and the city.¹ First I will briefly examine Raphael's famous fresco *The Fire in the Borgo* as an expression of papal authority that implicates Rome's incendiary past in formal terms, as well as in its underlying narrative of the leader's divinely appointed power to intervene in moments of crisis. Finally, I discuss a set of recent monumental art installations that convey a sense of how the incendiary destructions of Rome's urbanistic and literary legacy found ways of speaking to new problems—and to new cities—around the world.

Raphael's Fire in the Borgo and the Assertion of Papal Power

Dies irae, dies illa
Solvat saeculum in favilla,
Teste David cum Sibylla.

The day of wrath, that day
 will unmake the world in ashes,
 David is witness, along with the Sibyl.

—Requiem Mass in the 1962 Roman Missal

In an act of symbolic vindication, the potentates of the next great state to rise on the banks of the Tiber established the stronghold of the church on the very site where Nero had once presented his spectacular punishments of the Chris-

tians blamed for the fire of 64; one of these storied martyrs, St. Peter, became the namesake of the Vatican's central basilica. The leaders, artists, and architects responsible for the construction of the Vatican celebrated the revival of Rome's ancient glory, even as they spoliated the remains of the classical past to create new spaces celebrating the power of the church.² Completed in 1514 and measuring some seventeen by twenty feet, the *Incendio del Borgo* (*Fire in the Borgo*) was the first of several frescoes painted by Raphael and his assistants in the Stanza dell'Incendio, the private dining chamber of Pope Leo X (r. 1513–21).³ The fresco was also Raphael's first commission from the newly elected pope.⁴ Thus for both pontiff and painter the image represents a major opportunity to send a message about the future directions of the papacy, as well as about the place of art within that realm. Like all the frescoes in the room, the *Fire in the Borgo* depicts one of Leo X's predecessors and namesakes with the face of the current pontiff. The scene presents a signal moment from the life of the eighth-century Pope Leo IV, in which he is alleged to have extinguished with a simple sign of the cross a fire that had broken out in the Borgo district adjacent to St. Peter's (fig. 1).

The fresco's foreground is dominated on the left by human figures escaping from a fire that threatens to consume a massive semiruin classical building with fluted columns and a decorated entablature; flames and smoke billow from the arched internal doorway. In front of this flaming arch we encounter a group of male figures that unmistakably echo representations of Aeneas escaping from Troy with Anchises on his back and a young boy (presumably Ascanius) at his side.⁵ On the right, another facade featuring multicolored marble columns appears to have just caught fire, which several male and female figures are attempting to douse with water. In the center are terrified women with small children, much as Vergil describes the pitiful state of the *pavidae matres* on the night of Troy's destruction (*Aen.* 2.766);⁶ one of these women reaches out imploringly toward a figure on a balcony in the background. In the inscription underneath the balcony, this figure is identified as Leo IV. He appears poised at the moment when he first extends his hand to make the sacred gesture, but before the actual crisis is averted. Behind Leo, even farther in the distance, is a figurative rendering of the facade of the Old St. Peter's Basilica;⁷ this structure, which traced its origins back to the emperor Constantine, had recently been demolished by Leo's predecessor, Julius II, initiating a 120-year-long rebuilding project that resulted in the monumental environment of today's St. Peter's, with its imposing colonnade and massive central dome (fig. 2).



Fig. 1. Raphael, *Fire in the Borgo*, ca. 1514–17, fresco, 17 × 20 ft. (5.18 × 6.09 m). Stanza dell'Incendio, Vatican Palace, Rome. In the background note the facade of the early Constantinian basilica of St. Peter's. (Image courtesy of Art Resource, New York.)



Fig. 2. Detail of figure 1 showing water bearers and distressed mothers with children. In the background note Pope Leo IV (r. 847–855) in the Benediction Loggia of the Constantinian basilica of St. Peter's, making the sign of the cross to extinguish the fire. (Image courtesy of Art Resource, New York.)

The fresco's raking perspective and dramatic subject matter work in concert with design elements such as the columns of classical orders, the multiple doorways, and the statuesque poses of several of the human figures to present the scene as a theatrical performance enacted on a classical stage.⁸ As in Nero's restaging of Afranius's *Incendium*, then, this scene represents recognizably urban architecture set aflame as a familiar story unfolds before viewers.⁹ Unlike the farcical *Incendium*, however, it elevates a known historical narrative to the monumental register of tragedy and epic, in the manner of the anonymously authored *Octavia*.¹⁰ Although references to these specific texts are unlikely to have been direct or deliberate on the artist's part, the engagement with the *Aeneid* in the Aeneas/Anchises group is unmistakably pointed. As several scholars have pointed out, the scene represents an allegory of a new Rome; it juxtaposes the city's founding family, who escaped the burning of Troy, with its Christian present—and particularly with the creation of a new St. Peter's.¹¹ In representing classical architecture in dialogue with the new structures of the Vatican, Raphael also fashions himself as a new Vergil, creating an exposition on the Christian destiny of pagan Rome that becomes a new telos for the narrative of the *Aeneid*.¹²

The fresco also functions, however, as a meditation on the cycle of creation and destruction at Rome, as well as the leader's role in, at different points, halting or accelerating that cycle. Leo IV is positioned between the fire and the old basilica, intimating that his timely intervention prevented the conflagration from consuming the home territory of the church—and thus that he secured the future development of the institution itself. In effect, Leo IV replicates the role of divinely appointed savior from disaster assigned to Aeneas when the eponymous hero rescues the Trojan ships (i.e., Rome's future) from the fire set by the Trojan women in *Aeneid* 5.¹³ The monumental inscription on the facade of the building from which Leo performs his feat identifies him as LEO IIII PP; although the abbreviation PP in ecclesiastical documents is the imprimatur of the Pope (*Papa*), the letters might also be argued to align the pontiffs with their imperial predecessors, only some of whom were offered (and even fewer accepted) the honorific *Pater Patriae* in recognition of extraordinary services to their country in a time of need.¹⁴ The power to save Rome from fire through divine intervention is indirectly attributed to emperors in monuments such as the dedications to Stata Mater Augusta that began in the Augustan period. In a more direct sense, both the so-called Arae Incendii Neroniani, which represent Domitian's fulfillment of Nero's neglected vow to Vulcan, and Martial's *Epigram*

5.7 appear to predicate Rome's security from future fires on the ruler's privileged relationship with the divine.¹⁵

Ultimately, the notion of a leader who can miraculously rescue a city from conflagration—and thus a society from extinction—is a dream that dies hard. Raphael's fresco, however, troubles this fantasy by calling attention not only to the already battered and damaged state of the classical monuments being consumed by the Borgo fire but to the once-proud state of the old basilica in the background; by the artist's own time, this structure had become so dilapidated that Julius II—a self-proclaimed restorer of the Roman church who overtly claimed Rome's classical leaders (and monuments) as his models for expressing these ambitions—slated it for demolition.¹⁶ For much of Raphael's career, the Vatican bore no resemblance to the monumental zone we see today; rather it is better imagined as a construction site, in all likelihood strewn not only with the rubble of recent demolitions but with various pieces of classical architecture stripped from all over the city for reuse in the new St. Peter's.¹⁷ Leo X would go on to bankrupt the church within three years; he is most famous today for his association with financing the construction of the new basilica through the sale of papal indulgences, which led to a prolonged conflict with dissidents including Martin Luther (and hence the Protestant Reformation). Raphael's *Fire in the Borgo*, however, endures as a complex reflection of the ongoing struggle of Rome's leaders to reconcile the past and the present, as well as the human and the divine, in the face of inevitable decline, destruction, and challenges to their authority.

Fire and the Unmaking of Rome: Creative Destructions in the Modern City

*"While stands the Coliseum, Rome shall stand;
When falls the Coliseum, Rome shall fall;
And when Rome falls—the World." From our own land
Thus spake the pilgrims o'er this mighty wall
In Saxon times, which we are wont to call
Ancient; and these three mortal things are still
On their foundations, and unaltered all;
Rome and her Ruin past Redemption's skill,
The World, the same wide den—of thieves, or what ye will.*

—Lord Byron, "Childe Harold," Canto IV.145¹⁸

The essence of Roman culture is still linked to the physical landscape of the city; structures such as the Colosseum, the Column of Trajan, and the Pantheon act as metonyms for the Roman legacy of literature, art, and political institutions. 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 leading citizens of classical Rome were relentless restorers of damage and decay, seeing nothing picturesque about a ruin in their midst. Nevertheless, the Forum of today closely resembles the image of a sacked city: a wasted zone of toppled columns, palatial halls slumping into rubble, and all-but-illegible inscriptions.¹⁹ The memory of ancient conflagration has become closely linked to the popular conception of Rome's history, informing and inspiring a number of twenty-first-century spectacles that have garnered a great deal of media attention.²⁰

The conceptual components of fire, spectacle, and disaster were powerfully united in a set of installations designed by the Danish-Argentinean artist duo Thyra Hilden and Pio Diaz. From September 17th to the 19th, 2010, Hilden and Diaz created an installation that seemed to ignite a massive fire inside the Colosseum, Rome's most famous monument. Their video project "City on Fire"—subtitled "Burning the Roots of Western Culture"—devised site-specific video illusions on a scale of 1:1, projecting highly realistic images of conflagration onto the surfaces of famous monuments in various European capitals, so that they appear to be enveloped by flames. The spectacle served as a symbolic inferno of monuments that have endured for millennia.²¹

Hilden and Diaz sought, according to one commentator, to "destabilize European cultural history by setting buildings and monuments on fire,"²² as well as to (in their own words) "create an exchange of ideas with society on the theme of fragility and the transience of constructions built by man."²³ On the website for the project, the artists write: "This world is on fire. Modern life and technological development wipe away our cultural roots and heritage. . . . Cultural evolution involves destruction."²⁴ Hilden and Diaz used their series of "fictional" fire exhibitions to promote reflection and to draw attention to the problem of Europe's decaying cultural patrimony and lack of investment in the preservation of ancient remains.

Ironically, the focal points of the artists' efforts in Rome, the Colosseum and the Pantheon, were themselves originally built as emphatic expressions of imperial power that implied their builders' capacity to prevail over urban decline, civic disaster, and unrest around the empire. The unrelenting violence of the arena spectacle presented in the Colosseum was itself the product of

Rome's history of foreign conquests, internal conflicts, and technological marvels. These aspects were represented in the structure, respectively, by the inscription stipulating that the amphitheater had been 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;²⁵ 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;²⁶ and by the intricate set of mechanisms and vast array of human workers that made possible not just the construction of the massive edifice but the production on an everyday basis of its many effects.²⁷

Indeed, the amphitheater's very origins are bound up in Rome's fiery destruction, since its site was largely determined by the symbolic value of rededicating space once occupied by Nero's fantastical Golden House. As discussed in chapter 3, this architectural exploit occupied an expansive swathe of land cleared by the Great Fire of 64. Much as I have argued in chapter 5 of Tacitus's account of the Great Fire of 64, then, the vision of catastrophe the artists create is meant to call attention to a much lengthier problem of political and civic deterioration. Finally, the artists' 2010 project re-created (intentionally or otherwise) 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, the 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."²⁸ The event was seen as a dire portent, signaling the political disasters that were to come following the murder of the emperor Caracalla, and the structure thereafter seems to have fallen into disuse for many years.²⁹

Hilden and Diaz used their series of "fictional" fire exhibitions to promote reflection and to draw attention to the fragility even of monuments that we consider permanent or eternal. In an Italian press release from a 2005 version of the installation, the artists state: "At the time of the emperor Nero in 64 CE Rome burned due to conflicts never clarified between the emperor, the senate and the Christians. Similar 'political fires' might ignite at any time."³⁰ These comments suggest that, like the monuments the artists virtually "ignite," the legend of Nero's culpability in the fire itself has become a cultural icon, an irresistible site of contested ideology onto which we project current concerns.

Epilogue

We take great pride, at least in theory, in the monuments of antiquity and the cultural legacy they represent. We grieve when natural events such as fires, earthquakes, and floods take them from us, and we are outraged when human neglect or willed attacks are to blame. Yet we are also fascinated with the notion of self-reinvention, a “clean slate” upon which we can chart our own course; hence the attendant fascination with the idea of leaders willing to go to extremes to realize their ideals and exert their will upon the world around them. Such figures can for a time appear to be “synechdochic heroes,” embodying the collective values and expectations of society; the other side of this coin, however, is the apocalyptic vision of Nero. The condemnation of Nero implied in the tale of his performance can be, and often is, extended to modern leaders, elected and otherwise.

The fires that periodically erupt in protest of incidents in which police are believed to have disproportionately targeted minority populations in cities around the United States highlight the ongoing legacy of slavery and colonialism in the country’s social, political, and economic institutions.³¹ Yet even accidental or “natural” disasters often expose deep underlying problems and inequalities. For example, the wildfires ravaging California with increasing scale and frequency are reported as a beacon of the coming effects of climate change.³² Equally, both the use of incarcerated inmates as “volunteer” firefighters and the unequal capacity of rich versus poor to recover from such catastrophes serve as telling illustrations of the social and economic disparities that continue to deepen in the state overall.³³ Ultimately, the blame for such catastrophes all over the world is often laid, as it was in imperial Rome, at the feet of current leadership.

A legion of cartoons is readily available on the Internet depicting various world leaders in Nero-esque attitudes: toga-clad, bedecked in leafy chaplets, and brandishing stringed instruments. In one sense, these images offer a pictorial counterpart to the virtual cottage industry of journalistic “think-pieces” predicting imminent societal collapse by means of comparisons between various world leaders and an assortment of Roman emperors now legendary for their dastardly conduct. As powerful an accusation as the comparison with Nero would seem to be, the tremendous interpretive flexibility of the image has perhaps led to the easy dismissal of its use as a facile cliché. Yet it also reveals more universal anxiety concerning the consequences of placing too much power in the hands of a single individual.

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. 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 problems. The cultural impact of living with the constant threat of fire, as well as under the stifling awareness of imperial power, found expression in a wide array of genres and settings. Conflagration—a single and yet infinitely variable type of hazard—thus became a multivalent referent for the ideological threats and imagined catastrophes of the early imperial era.

In Latin 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. As this chapter's brief examination of postclassical art suggests, many points of inspiration in this literature remain profoundly influential in our wider cultural understanding of the forces and events that frame our world. 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 that shape our anxieties, our memories, and eventually our histories—remain the same.

Notes

Introduction

1. Limited excerpts of my discussion in this book (approximately 30 pages total) have been reworked in other recent or forthcoming publications: portions of chapters 1 and 3 in Closs (2020a); portions of chapters 2 and 4 in Closs (forthcoming, 2016); and portions of chapter 5 in Closs (2020b).

2. Cf. Dominik, Garthwaite, and Roche (2009), 1–2.

3. On “figured” speech and safe criticism, Ahl (1984a) is the classic study, with further important developments from Bartsch (1994) on “doublespeak” in imperial literature from Nero to Hadrian; see now also Cordes (2017) on the “coding and recoding” of literature representing Nero and Domitian.

4. On *cosmos* and *imperium* in the *Aeneid*, see Hardie (1986); see also Hine (2006) on the implications in Seneca, and Rehak (2006) on a related reading of Augustan topography and monuments. On Rome’s centrality to visual representations of the earth, see Talbert (2010), 86–122, for arguments concerning the Peutinger map and its probable models.

5. Bachelard ([1938] 1964, 64) notes how far the idea of a fire’s need to “feed,” as well as the notion that it is “living” and “dying,” has entered into our subconscious, suggesting the ways in which we animate this element to a pronounced degree. On floods in Rome, see Aldrete (2007).

6. Johnstone (1992), 41. On the problems of urban fires more generally, see Baillie Reynolds ([1926] 1996); Canter (1932); Ramage (1983); Rainbird (1986); Rubin (2004). Sablayrolles (1996) includes a final appendix listing eighty-eight major conflagrations in the city of Rome recorded between 275 BCE and 410 CE, a number that surely belies a far greater incidence of unrecorded blazes. Literary sources tend to record only fires of exceptional size or those that affected sites of ideological importance, but this bias makes them no less valuable for understanding the political importance of these incidents.

7. So Rankov (2000), 357.

8. Cf. Woodman (2012), 391–92.
9. Putnam (1989).
10. Fundamental literary terms such as “metaphor,” “metonym,” and “synecdoche” have acquired significant baggage with the successive elaborations of Jakobson ([1956] 1971); Barthes (1968), 87–88; and H. White (1973). Further complicating the use of these basic terms are the cognitive-linguistic applications proposed by Johnson and Lakoff (1980); Lakoff (1987). See also Lakoff and Turner (1989). The insights of Lakoff and his collaborators have offered productive avenues for studies in Latin cognitive metaphor; see, e.g., Short (2012). On ancient metaphor, see, e.g., Barker (2000) and the discussions in Boys-Stones (2003). Ultimately, however, the major investigative questions here will not require recourse to the advanced debates that each of these interventions has sparked. I use “metonym” and related terms primarily as a way of suggesting that a single image or individual comes to represent a much more complex assemblage or series of ideas; I use “synecdoche” to connote a similar process, cf. the arguments of Vout (2012), 1–12, and Roman (2010) on Roman landmarks as synecdochic or metonymic representations of the whole city and its history; cf. also Edwards and Woolf (2003), 5n8, on Rome’s metonymic representation of the world. I use “metaphor” and “metaphorical” more freely throughout the book to refer to various items described in ways that are not literal.
11. Bachelard ([1938] 1964).
12. Bachelard ([1938] 1964), 112. See also Bachelard ([1958–61] 1991).
13. This book attends not to the complexities of how metaphor operates across language but rather to how a specific metaphor or figure of thought develops ideological and commemorative dimensions in a specific range of Latin texts; cf. the approach to Lakoff et al. in P. Miller (1995) and Riggsby (2016).
14. J. Assmann (1992), 19; cf. Connerton (1989); Nora (1989), (1992); Bell (1992). See also A. Assmann (2011); Assmann and Shortt (2012); cf. Ginsberg (2017), 10–15.
15. For good introductions to the concept of social memory, see Fentress and Wickham (1992), 1–40; Olick and Robbins (1998). For the related concept of cultural memory, see J. Assmann (1988a), (1988b), (1992). Stein-Hölkeskamp and Hölkeskamp (2006) and Galinsky (2014) offer overviews of cultural memory in the Roman world. Much recent work demonstrates the value of this approach in the study of Latin texts., e.g., Gowing (2005), Meban (2009), Seider (2013), Goldschmidt (2013), and Ginsberg (2017).
16. Hoffman (2002), 115. Alexander (2004, 1) defines “cultural trauma” as the phenomenon that occurs “when members of a collectivity feel that they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways.”
17. *optima civilis belli defensio oblivio est* (Sen. *Controv.* 10.35); after Ash (2010).
18. The “art of forgetting”: see Flower’s (2006) study on memory sanctions (or so-

called *damnatio memoriae*). The classic study is Vittinghoff (1936); Varner (2000, 2004) details the posthumous attacks on the images of various emperors.

19. “*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 to convey the shock of realizing a narrative previously imagined only in fantasy form; cf. Žižek (1992), (2002).

20. Johnson and Lakoff (1980), 145; Hoffman (2002), 115.

21. As Barthes (1968) outlines, signs in the second order of signification operate in two distinct ways: as mythmakers and as connotative agents.

22. Intertextuality: i.e., the creation of meaning through a dynamic mosaic of “quotations,” both direct and indirect; see Kristeva (1980), 66; Conte (1986), 29; D. Fowler (2000), 115–37, esp. 117–18. The fundamental questions troubling any discussion of “intertextuality” and “allusion” apply here: Would the readers recognize these references? If so, how many readers, and how many references? (cf. Pucci [1998], 83–108). Evidence from antiquity amply demonstrates that the interactions between author and audience—as well as between texts and predecessors—were substantive and complex. For this debate in Latin poetry, important discussions include, e.g., Hinds (1998), 22–34; Edmunds (2001), 105–7; Farrell (2005); Trinacty (2009). For historiography, see O’Gorman (2009); Pelling (2013); Levene (2015). Intermedial reference differs from intertextuality in that it connects two entirely different systems of meaning; it alludes not to another text but to another semiotic system; see Wolf (1998, 1999); Rajewsky (2002).

23. Gowers (1993); Ramsby (2007); Edwards (2007); Erasmo (2008). See also Manolaraki (2013) on literary depictions of Egypt. Building on the insights of Ramsby (2007), Dinter (2011, 2013a, 2013b) has done much to further the study of the relations between the narrative and inscriptional modes in literary epigram.

24. See D. Fowler (2000), 64–85; Squire (2009), (2013), (2014); Platt (2002), (2003), (2009); Vout (2012), (2013). See also the discussions of visuality in Latin epic in Lovatt and Vout (2013).

25. Cf. Hinds (1998), 132: “every allusion made by a poet . . . mobilizes its own *ad hoc* literary historical narrative.”

26. B. Knox (1950).

27. For fire imagery in Juvenal’s *Satires* 1, see Bertman (1968). For fire imagery in Catullus, see Clarke (1968); for fire in New Comedy and Ovid’s *Fasti*, see Fantham (1972) and (1983), 206–9; for fire and water in Ovid, see A. Henderson (1979), 55.

28. P. Miller (1995); Riggsby (2016).

29. Clauss (1997), followed by Rossi (2004b); Levene (2010), 102, points out further allusions to Sallust’s *Jugurtha*.

30. Clauss (1997), 184.

31. O’Gorman (2007) and (2009); Damon (2010a).

32. Keitel (1984) and (2010); Joseph (2012a) and (2012b); Edwards (2013).

33. On the “spatial turn” more generally in ancient literary studies, see, e.g., Leach (1988); Edwards (1996); D. Fowler (2000), 193–217; Barchiesi (2005); Edwards and Woolf (2003); T. Welch (2005); Jaeger (2007); Roman (2010); Fredrick (2003), 203–5, reasserts the value of investigating Rome’s materiality as a powerful force in shaping the experiences and mentalities of its inhabitants. Cf. Favro (1992) and (1996) on “reading” the city as a text.

34. Morris (1997), 96.

35. Dinter (2012), 41–42.

36. Later accounts (e.g., Suet. *Aug.* and Dio 51–56) can be read against Augustus’s own account of his reign, the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*. In response to the arguments of P. Zanker (1988), the influence of the emperor on visual media, and especially on the city of Rome, has come under extensive scrutiny. Likewise, the “instant classic” status of many Augustan authors has ensured their survival up to the present day, provoking a vast body of scholarship detailing every knowable aspect of their production, state of completion, and contemporary reception.

37. On the publication dates of second-century authors, see discussion in chapter 5. The younger Pliny’s letters comment on various events but do not constitute a continuous narrative. The history of Cassius Dio on these years is epitomated.

38. Polyb. 38.22; Hom. *Il.* 6.448–49.

39. Paul (1982) is the fundamental treatment of the *urbs capta*.

40. Paul (1982), 154. For the *urbs capta* in Roman historical writing, see Rossi (2004a), 23–24; in Ennius and Vergil, see Goldschmidt (2013), 175–76.

41. Rossi (2002), 234, discusses the transformation of the *Iliupersis* theme in Attic tragedy (cf. Euripidean tragedies of the Trojan War and its aftermath, e.g., *Troades* and *Andromache*) into the *urbs capta* topos (cf. Aeschylus, *Seven against Thebes*). The motif is further exemplified in rhetoric; Paul (1982), 15, notes explicit references in several of Cicero’s speeches, while Rossi (2002), 234–35, notes typical elements of the *urbs capta* in Demosthenes’s description of the fate of Phocis (*De falsa legatione* 65).

42. Claudius 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. On representations of the conquest of Jerusalem in Flavian Rome, see Millar (2005). On incendiary military attacks depicted on the Columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius, see Thill (2011).

43. For the site of Troy and the historical imagination, see C. Rose (1998) and (2012). For Greek reinterpretations of the sack of Troy after Athens was itself sacked in the fifth century BCE, see Ferrari (2000).

44. Libby (2011); cf. Rossi (2004a), esp. 29–30.

45. For Caesar’s Venus/Aeneas coinage, see Weinstock (1971), pl. 6.10–12; *RRC* 458/1; Seaby (1978), 12; Sear (1998), 55. Erskine (2001), 17–23, offers a survey of evidence for the Julian emphasis on their family’s link to Troy.

46. On Vergil, especially *Aeneid* 2's role as an analogue for the fall of Troy, see Narducci (1973); Moles (1982); Hinds (1998), 8–10; Morgan (2000). Further discussion and references in chapter 1 below, 50–54.

47. P. Zanker (1988) cites ancient descriptions of Augustus's forum and demonstrates how the Forum of Augustus unified a series of originally separate political myths: the myth of Troy intertwined with the myth of Romulus, thus linking Mars (the father of Romulus and Remus) with Venus, mother of Aeneas and ancestor of the Julian line.

48. On the new "Golden Age," see, e.g., Verg. *Ecl.* 4; *Aen.* 6.791–95, 8.314–36; Ov. *Am.* 2.276–78; *Met.* 1.89–112; Hor. *Carm. saec.* and German. *Arat.* 103–41 also play on this theme. For ironic commentary on the concept in later Julio-Claudian literature, see, e.g., Sen. *Controv.* 2.7.7; Sen. *Apocol.* 4.1; Sen. *Ep.* 90.5, 115.14.1; Calp. *Ecl.* 4.5–8. Good accounts of the overall concept can be found in Gatz (1967); Johnston (1980); Kubusch (1986). For its possible eastern cognates, see Gatz (1967), 1–27; M. West (1978), 172–77. For assessment of the concept's role in Roman culture, see Binder (1971), 282n34; for coinage relating to this theme, see series in *RIC*, pp. 1–119; Wallace-Hadrill (1982). For discussion of the origins of this concept and its expression in Roman literature, see Baldry (1952); Binder (1971), 92–93; Horsfall (1976); on the ambiguity of this notion in Augustan literature, see Gale (2003), 335–36, and A. Zanker (2010).

49. About Aeschylus's *Heliades* we know almost nothing, but we can reconstruct a great deal of Euripides's *Phaethon* thanks to the survival of fragments; see Diggle (1970).

50. Eur. *Phaethon*, fr. 52.

51. Schiesaro (2014), 97–98, mentions Oedipus and Telemachus (cf. Murnaghan [2002]), 139, 142–45.

52. On earthly disasters as cosmic conflagration see also Plat. *Tim.* 43b–c.; cf. Arist. *Metaph.* 1.8.345, explaining that "some of the so-called Pythagoreans" say the Milky Way is the path of one of the stars that fell from heaven at the time of Phaethon's downfall, while others say it is where the sun once moved in its ecliptic; cf. also Diod. Sic. 5.23.2; Philostr. *Imag.* 1.11.

53. Diodorus Siculus informs us (5.23.2) that "many of the poets and historians" of his day looked to Italy's Po River as the site of Phaethon's final crash. Timaeus of Tauromenium also connected Phaethon and the Po; cf. Polybius (9.1–2). On the Hellenistic interest in the location of the Po, see Diggle (1970), 6–7; cf. Apollonius 4.597ff; Aratus, *Phaen.* 360. See also Feeney (2007), 94–95. It is clear that in Latin poetry the identification of the Eridanus with the Italian Po held great appeal; see Verg. *Aen.* 6.656–59; G. 1.481–83. Intimations of Phaethon in *Georgics* 1 are discussed in chapter 1; chapter 2 discusses Phaethon and the Po in Ovid and the *Consolatio ad Liviam*; for these topics in Lucan, see chapter 2.

54. Schiesaro (2014). Lucretius tells Phaethon's tale (*DRN* 5.396–415) explicitly to debunk it; yet Phaethon arguably reappears as a positive metaphor for poetic creativity at 6.47 (*insignem conscendere curram*). See A. Henderson (1970). As Nelis (2008),

507n37, points out, “that Lucretius thinks of [this journey’s] course specifically as a chariot race becomes explicit” at *DRN* 6.92–95, making the philosopher himself a potential Phaethon figure.

55. Variations on the phrase also appear at *DRN* 5.1000 and 3.898–99. Roman epic frequently anticipates the specific day of the world’s doom. Lucan *BC* 5.615–17 and Ovid *Am.* 1.15.23–24 allude to this passage (cf. Matthews [2008] *ad BC* 5.615–17); see also Ov. *Fast.* 2.235–36 (cf. Campbell [2003] *ad Lucr. DRN* 5.999–1000); *Met.* 1.253–58. Vergil’s emphasis on the impact of the “one night” (*illius noctis*) in which Troy fell at *Aen.* 2.361 may also owe something to this theme (cf. Hardie [1986], 190n85). Ov. *Tr.* 2.425–26 also refers directly the Lucretian passage; cf. Barchiesi ([1994] 1997), 24n22. On the “day of doom” in Lucan, see Joseph (2017). Seneca’s references to the concept are discussed in chapter 3.

56. The standard classical references to the concept of *ekpyrosis* are in Long and Sedley (1987), 1.274–79 and 2.271–77; and Inwood and Gerson (1988), 96–127. Other influential discussions include Lapidge ([1979] 2010); Mader (1983); Hardie (1986), 191–93; Roche (2005); Long (2006), 256–84. See Long and Sedley (1987), 311, on the simultaneous conflagration and realignment (*palingenesis*) of the universe. See Lapidge (1978) for an overview of Stoic cosmology generally. On these themes in Seneca (cf. Sen. *QNat.* 3.29.5–30.8; *Ben.* 6.22.1; *Ad Marciam* 26.6–7), see Colish ([1985] 1990), 24–25; Gar. Williams (2012), 34, 37, 125n112. The famous reference at Luc. *BC* 1.72–80 is discussed below in chapter 2.

57. On the cosmological anxieties of the mid-first century BCE, see J. Miller (2009), 254–60. Augustan poets in particular display concern over the temporal boundaries of Rome’s *imperium sine fine*. See, e.g., Verg. *G.* 1.489–500; Hor. *Epod.* 16; *Carm.* 3.3.37–48.

58. On “brilliant dynasts,” see Griffith’s (1995) article with this title, identifying the central tension that animated much of Athenian drama as the contrast between the brilliant but self-destructive dynasts of the tragic stage and the civic orientation of the fifth-century polis. Here I combine Griffith’s insight into Athenian drama with Boyle’s (2008, xxii) observation that 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, performing internal conflict on the public “stage” of the imperial court.

59. Schiesaro (2014), 98, citing a psychoanalytic term coined by Choisy (1950).

60. On the ancient testimonia for the phoenix, see Ajello, Gatti, and Portolano (1974); Bömer (1986), 356–57. On the phoenix generally, see van den Broek (1972). On the phoenix in Roman tradition, see McDonald (1960); Walla (1969), 103–6; Strati (2007). On the exotic landscape inhabited by the phoenix in Roman literature, see Evans (2003), 286–91; on Stat. *Silv.* 3.2, see Manolaraki (2012), 198–206; on the reference to the phoenix at Tac. *Ann.* 6.28, see Keitel (1999).

61. Habinek (2016), 30–32.

62. Cf. Tac. *Ann.* 6.28.

63. Chaudhuri (2014), 46n64. Despite the questionable authorship of the *Phoenissae*

passage (on which see Mastronarde [1978], 122–24), it nevertheless reflects the ancient mindset concerning incendiary figures.

64. 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).

65. Legally speaking, as W. Anderson (1970), 362n1, points out, arson was a serious crime. It was punishable by deportation in the late first/early second century CE, and by execution under the Severans. See *Dig.* 48.8.3.5.

66. Ramsey (2007), 128. The mob rallied in support of Clodius (on whom, see below, pp. 16, 17, 21, 31, 65, 71).

67. On Cicero's invective generally, see Gildenhard (2010).

68. On the destruction of the Capitol in 83 BCE, see, e.g., Steel (2013), 104; and Plut. *Sull.* 9, 12–13. 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 the evident concern over *incendium* reflected in the laws enacted by Sulla and Caesar, see Johnstone (1992) and Saumagne (1962), 344–45.

69. On Antony's alleged incendiary tendencies, see, e.g., Cic. *Phil.* 2.48: *eius omnium incendiorum fax*; 11.37: *comites vero Antoni . . . huic urbi ferro ignique minitantur*.

70. Variations on the combination of *caedes* and *incendium* appear thirteen times in the *Catilinarians* alone (e.g., Cic. *Cat.* 3.9: *caedis, incendia, interitum rei publicae comparari*). The more alliterative pairing of *ferrum* and *flamma* appears twice in the *Catilinarians*, as well as in Cicero's later poetic account of the incident: *clades patriae flamma ferroque parata* (*Div.* 1.21; *Cons. suo fr.* 12.60–65 Courtney). On Cicero's rhetorical targeting of Catiline, see Brunt (1957); Batstone (1994). On the reworking of this motif in Sallust, see Waters (1970); Johnstone (1992), 42. On in the theme of *incendium* in Cicero's speeches, see Achard (1981), 348–51. On fire's rhetorical vividness in Cicero, see Innocenti (1994), 172–73; Webb (1997), 20. On Catiline and fire imagery, see Vasaly (1993), 75–80; see also Johnstone (1992), 48–49.

71. On Publius Clodius (b. Claudius) Pulcher, the standard biography is Tatum (1999); see also Lintott (1967) on parallels between Clodius and Catiline. For invective against Clodius, see Steel (2007) and (2013), 169–75. See also Nippel (2000) and Tan (2013) on Clodius and his manipulation of Roman political spaces. The house of Clodius's rival Milo narrowly escaped the same fate; see Asc. *Mil.* 33 (Clark), 12, and Nippel (1995), 37–41. Per Wiseman (1969), 64n48, these gangs may have been targeting lists prepared by Pompey. Dyck (2004) comments on the ways in which Cicero's fire imagery forges a rhetorical kinship between Clodius and Catiline. Cicero also describes how Clodius, having forced Cicero into exile in 58, burns Cicero's house (*Dom.* 111–12); on the burning of Quintus Cicero's house and the attempted arson of Milo's house, see *Att.* 4.3; *Cael.* 78; *QFr.* 2.4.2, 2.4.3, 2.8–10.

72. Cic. *Cael.* 79; *Mil.* 73; *QFr.* 11.3.2; *Paradoxa Stoicorum* 4.31.7; Dio 39.24.1–2. The dates of this incident are uncertain. The public records in question may have been used to record public debts as well as to allot grain distribution, two issues of major impor-

tance to Clodius's supporters among the populace. For discussion, see Nicolet (1976), 29–51; Nippel (1995), 76–77; Tatum (1999), 211; Wallace-Hadrill (2008), 292; Davies (2017), 224.

73. Dio 39.9.2–3, 39.28–29. On the performative aspect of political violence, see Goldstein (2004).

74. On the burning of the Curia in 52: Cic. *Fin.* 5.2, *Mil.* 90; Dio 40.49.2–3. On rebuilding: Augustus, *Res Gestae* 19.1; Dio 51.11.1. See “Curia Iulia” in Haselberger, Roman, and Dumser (2002); Claridge (1998), 70. See also Nippel (1995), 75–80. See Dyck (1998), 238–39, on how Cicero's defense of Milo conflates Clodius's funeral with an incendiary attack on the state.

75. Twelve Tables 10.2.

76. Cic. *Phil.* 90; Plut. *Brut.* 20.1–8; Nic. Dam. 17.50; App. *B Civ.* 2.147–614. See also Nippel (1995), 37.

77. 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 in chapter 5 below: 185–87.

78. Johnstone (1992); on the ideological dimensions of damage to the landscape (including fires) in Cicero, see also Vasaly (1983).

79. So Commager ([1957] 2007).

80. The precise date of the flood Horace mentions is debated (see Aldrete [2007], 21–22), but matters little for my purposes here.

81. Stoics on fire of the soul: Heraclitus, DK B60; cf. Cic. *Nat. D.* 1.37.

82. Vergil on fire and consciousness: Lapidge (1973), esp. 252–55; Inwood (1985), 21, 256; Colish ([1985] 1990), 24.

83. See Dewald (2003) on the “despotic template”—an ideal form of tyranny that all forms of one-man rule reflect at least in part; cf. Seaford (2003) on “tragic tyranny,” arguing that such characteristics are not just character defects, but instruments of (and to) power.

84. E.g., in Seneca's *De ira*, as recently argued by Riggsby (2016).

85. Pseudo-Longinus (*Subl.* 12.4) describes the oratory of Demosthenes and Cicero as, respectively, a bolt of lightning that sets the audience alight and a rolling conflagration.

86. Griffith (1995, 96n110) uses the term to describe the *kommos* over the king's tomb in the *Choephoroi*; Brink (1994, 258) uses it to describe public speech fired by emotion, as discussed in Tacitus's *Dialogus*.

87. Arguably, this phenomenon is already at work in the *Iliad*, as several similes foreshadow the destruction of Troy at the hands of the Greeks; e.g.: Achilles's *aristeia* is compared to the smoke ascending from a burning city, afflicted by the wrath of the gods (*Il.* 21.522–25); when Achilles lends his support to the rescue of Patroclus's body, the flare of light around his head is like the distress signal of a beleaguered city (*Il.*

18.207–13). Whitman (1958), 130–45, discusses the assimilation of fire and warriors more generally in Homeric texts (e.g., in Achilles's battle with the river Scamander at *Il.* 21.138–44). Mackie (2008), 180–86, argues for the generally “fiery” portrayal of Achilles (as well as his apparent immunity to fire) as a marker of his more than mortal status.

88. Plut. *Crass.* 2.3–5; trans. Perrin (1916): see also Canter (1932), 278n2; Newbold (1974), 862; Favro (1992), 68.

89. Trans. Neel (2015).

90. On exemplarity in Roman historiography, see, e.g., Miles (1995); Chaplin (2000); Roller (2004), (2009); Kraus (2005). As Barchiesi (2009a) points out, *exempla* are not exclusive to verbal communication, because their presence in art is significant and often analyzed by ancient authors themselves.

91. Livy 1.39; see also Plut. *Mor.* 10.64 (“On the fortune of the Romans”).

92. For the rescue of the Palladium, see chapter 1 below, 20, 35–36.

93. Livy 29.10.5; Ov. *Fast.* 4.293–328. See also Wiseman (1985), 174–77; Gruen (1990), 5–23, (1992), 229; Bremmer (2004).

94. On Augustus as a synecdochic hero, see Hardie (1993), 4.

95. Varro ap. Lactant. *Div. inst.* 1.6.9–10; Gell. *NA* 1.19. Buitenwerf (2003), 99–100. Howley (2017) admirably summarizes the history of book burning in Rome; here I condense and reformulate a number of his points to frame the issues most germane to my arguments.

96. Livy 40.29. Other accounts at (*inter alia*) Dio 7.34; Plin. *HN* 13.84–88 (citing other pre-Livy sources); Val. Max. 1.1.12; Plut. *Num.* 22.2–5. For a detailed consideration, see Gruen (1990), 161–70; Beck (2017).

97. E.g., Catull. 36, on burning the work of the *pessimus poeta* Volusius. Similarly, Juvenal (7.24) and Martial (5.53.4) both suggest bad poetry should be burned. Apuleius (*Apol.* 10.7) and Diogenes Laertius (6.95) refer to Greek philosophers burning their poetic juvenilia.

98. Howley (2017), 221.

99. Suet. *Aug.* 32.2.

100. Debt records were likewise burned by Nero and Vespasian, as well as by Hadrian; see discussion in chapter 5 below, 181 and 205.

101. Dio 55.8.6–7.

102. Plin. *HN* 7.114; Gell. *NA* 17.10; but see also Donat. *Vit. Verg.* 38f; *Anth. Lat.* 653, 672. See also Forbes (1936), 116; Krevans (2010).

103. Howley (2017), 217.

104. *Res Gestae* 1.3–4. The phrase *res publica ne quid detrimenti caperet* reworks the language traditionally used to declare a state of emergency and appoint a dictator. See Cooley (2009), *ad loc.* On Augustus and the *Curia Iulia* see P. Zanker (1988), 54–55, 79–81, with images of the building on coins that “symbolize Octavian’s promise . . . to restore the Republic.” See also Lamp (2013), 6.

105. Restored peace: *Res Gestae* 25–26. Restored traditions: *Res Gestae* 8. Rebuilt buildings, aqueducts, and roads: *Res Gestae* 20.

106. A note on the texts and translations printed herein. For extended quotations (roughly, of 100 or more words), the following critical editions were used: Text of Manilius is from Goold's 1998 Teubner (corrected edition); Martial (*Ep.*) text is from Shackleton Bailey's 1990 Teubner (reprinted in the 1993 Loeb edition); *Octavia* text is from Ferri (2003); Ovid texts are from Tarrant's 2004 OCT (*Met.*) and Hall's 1995 Teubner (*Trist.*); Petronius (*Cena Trimalchionis*) text is from Öberg (1999); Seneca text is from Reynolds' 1965 OCT (*Ep. Ad Luc.*) and Reynolds' 1977 OCT (*Ad Marc.*); Tacitus text is drawn from Heubner's 1983 Teubner (*Annals*); Vergil text is from Mynors' 1969 OCT. For ease and consistency of reading, I have omitted initial capitalizations and brackets around a small number of conjectured words or letters; where applicable, I have changed *u* to *v*. All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

Chapter 1

1. On the notion of a Golden Age, see discussion in the introduction.
2. Hardie (1993), 1–18, sums up the “maximizing” and “totalizing” aspects of early imperial Roman poets, noting their reflection of the current political climate.
3. Rexine (1961), 1. Barchiesi (1994; 1998) treats the integration of Trojan narrative into works of art in Vergil's Carthage but also considers the themes of *translatio imperii* and the reworking of Trojan narrative in the Augustan period. Momigliano (1987), 31–57, discusses *translatio imperii* as a constitutive topos of universal history, a theme also inherent to Ovid's project in the *Metamorphoses*. See also Habinek (2002), 53–54.
4. For connections between Amata and Dido: Zarker (1969).
5. Iulus founds Alba Longa: Verg. *Aen.* 1.267–71; Livy 1.3; Tullus Hostilius conquers and demolishes it: Livy 1.22–30; cf. Vergil's indirect reference at *Aen.* 8.642–45. Vergil's “Iliupersis” in *Aeneid* 2 is supposed to have been modeled on Ennius's destruction of Alba (Serv. *ad Aen.* 2.313, 486); see Skutsch (1985), 146, 279–80; Rossi (2004a), 27–47; Keith (2016), 157–62. For further discussion of the imperial implications here, see Casali (2007).
6. On the imperial implications of *Aeneid* 1–7, see Nelis (2015), 28–29. The insights of Parry (1963) on the ambiguities of leadership and empire in the *Aeneid* remain useful starting points.
7. Sall. *Hist.* 1.10.
8. Verg. *Aen.* 5.4–7. See Newton (1957), 53; cf. Fletcher (2014), 166n11.
9. On Fama in the *Aeneid* and elsewhere in classical literature, see Hardie (2012); Syson (2013).
10. On the sound of earthly conflict reaching the *aether*, see also Verg. *G.* 3.150–51 (*furit mugitibus aether / concussus*); *G.* 4.78–79 (*aethere in alto / fit sonitus*); *Aen.* 2.337–38 (*in flammas et in arma feror, quo tristis Erinys, / quo fremitus vocat et sublatus ad aethera clamor*).

11. On the close connection between vital heat (*pneuma*) and the element of the stars (*aether*) see Solmsen (1957); Lapidge ([1979] 2010).

12. On *ekpyrosis* and the human soul, see Lapidge ([1979] 2010); Colish ([1985] 1990), 29–31.

13. Classic accounts of the siege of Tyre (332 BCE) include Diod. Sic. 17.46; Curt. 4.4.10–21; Arr. *Anab.* 2.24. Tyre was sacked following Alexander's siege in 332. For the burning of Carthage (146 BCE), the classic accounts are Polyb. 38.19–22; App. *Pun.* 19.132; Sall. *Iug.* 18.11–19.2, 41.2, 79.1.

14. As Barchiesi (1994) has pointed out, Aeneas himself has already recollected (or rather anticipated) the tears of Scipio, weeping as he gazes upon images of the destruction of Troy at Dido's temple of Juno in Carthage.

15. Polyb. 38.22; Hom. *Il.* 6.448–49. Citing Polybius, Appian (*Pun.* 19.132) says that Scipio explained that seeing Carthage aflame prompted fear that his own country one day would meet the same fate. See Astin (1967), 182; O'Gorman (2000), 168–73; Edwards (2013), 542–43.

16. 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 *Aen.* 4.667–71 likewise nods 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 μάλιστα ἄρ' ἔην ἐναλίγκιον ὡς εἰ ἅπανα Ἰλίου ὄφρυόεσσα πυρὶ σμήχοιτο κατ' ἄκρης ("it was very like as if all of towering Troy were utterly smoldering with fire"); see Bremer (1986), 371.

17. P. Zanker (1988), 177–79.

18. The nine recorded conflagrations between 31 BCE and 14 CE date to 31, 29 (or 25; see Sablayrolles [1996], 782n5), 23, 16, 14, 12, and 7 BCE, as well as 3 and 6 CE. Likewise, the damage from the dozen fires recorded between 58 and 31 BCE may have still been apparent in a number of cases (or only freshly repaired).

19. On the archaeology of the Circus Maximus, see Humphrey (1986); Ciancio Rossetto and Filetici (1993), 272–76; s.v. "Circus Maximus" in Haselberger, Roman, and Dumser (2002), 87–89. See further discussions of the symbolic importance of the circus by Feeney (1998), 96; Nelis-Clément and Roddaz (2008).

20. Dio 50.10.3–6. The dual causality of the fire illustrates the close association between popular and divine favor underpinning Roman leaders' claims to power.

21. Augustus's repairs to the Circus perhaps only finalized improvements planned by Julius Caesar, but Augustus mentions at least the *pulvinar* as his own contribution (*Res Gestae* 19); see "Circus Maximus" in Haselberger, Roman, and Dumser (2002), 87–89. Regardless, the fire can be seen as a precipitating factor in the overhaul.

22. On the religious and symbolic significance of the *pulvinar*, see Humphrey (1986), 78–83.

23. The dominant ancient model of the *mundus* was geocentric, not heliocentric. Nevertheless, the Circus's structure and function suggested a circular motion similar to the imagined orbit of the cosmos. It had a temple to Sol rising out of the stands on the Aventine side; the entire Circus, Tertullian tells us, was dedicated to Sol. Augustus's obe-

lisk added multiple solar affinities. See Weinstock (1971), 67–73, for Sol, Scipio, and Caesar; see also Putnam (1979), 68, for Julius Caesar’s affiliation with the sun. The exact nature of the solar complex on the Campus Martius has no major bearing on the arguments in this chapter, but the debate concerning the possible alignment(s) of the obelisk/*gnomon* of the Campus Martius monument is best reviewed by the various contributors to Haselberger (2011) and (2014); see also Frischer et al. (2017).

24. Takács (1995), 270.

25. Kuttner (1995), 54, comments that the Actian coin issue was an assertion of Rome’s military and political superiority in which Octavian appears a quasi-divine figure.

26. See App. *B Civ.* 5.67–68; cf. Dio 48.31. For discussion, see Garnsey (1988), 208–9.

27. See Dio 54.1–4. Garnsey (1988), 219, draws out the political impact of this incident.

28. Dio 54.1; trans. Cary (1914–27).

29. On the incendiary activities of Clodius, see introduction above, 17.

30. Dio notes (54.1–2), however, that since Augustus “was superior to the dictators in the power and honour he already possessed,” he declined the position to avoid “the jealousy and hatred which the title would arouse” (trans. Cary [1914–27]).

31. Robinson (1992), 132.

32. Aug. *Res Gestae* 5.

33. On Egnatius, see Yavetz (1958), esp. 512, (1969), 95–97; Raaflaub and Samons (1990), 427; Phillips (1997); Southern (1998), 128–29; Yakobson (1999), 36–37; Sablayrolles (1996), 9, 22–23.

34. Dio 53.24. Presumably the law that Egnatius’s candidacy violated was the stipulation against holding the aedileship and praetorship in successive years.

35. Some evidence indicates that Egnatius’s aedileship and firefighting efforts took place in 22 BCE, rather than (as Dio asserts) in 26. If so, they would have come in addition to (and perhaps as a pointed improvement over) Augustus’s own measures; otherwise they could have set the example for Augustus’s own measures after the disasters of 23–22. See Sablayrolles (1996), 910.

36. Pollio’s library: Plin. *HN* 7.30, 35.12; cf. Morgan (2000).

37. Egnatius’s pamphlets and Augustus’s “brick to marble” rhetoric are known only from later sources, so it is impossible to assign them secure dates (or be entirely sure they are not embellishments by these sources). One possible source for Augustus’s boast (and a major source for Suetonius) is his own memoirs, which are thought to have been published in the mid-20s BCE (cf. C. Smith [2009]).

38. Dio 54.4–5.

39. Dio (54.4) describes Augustus as the major force behind the new initiatives: he “entrusted” (ἐνεχείρισεν) the task of firefighting to the aediles, “giving” (δοῦς) them slaves as assistance.

40. On the fire of 7 BCE: Dio 55.8.6. See Purcell (*LTUR* s.v. “Roman Forum: Imperial Period”).

41. Sablayrolles (1996), 783.
42. The exact number of *vici* is not available in the Augustan period; in the second century, there were about 265 per region. See Galinsky (1996), 300–312; Wallace-Hadrill (2008), 276n47; S. Dyson (2010), 27–28.
43. 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.
44. During the last decades of the republic, the *vici* had achieved notoriety as the chief organizing unit for mob violence. See Laurence (1991); Lott (2004), 45–60; Wallace-Hadrill (2008), 267.
45. The blaming of debtors for the fire seems too reminiscent of Sallust's Catiline narrative (*Cat.* 50) to deny the possibility of literary allusion rather than accurate reportage.
46. Ulp. 1.15.2: *pluribus uno die incendiis exortis*.
47. Freedmen were ineligible for regular military service. The rights afforded to *vigiles* were an exception, eventually including the right to a military will and, for Junian Latins, the granting of citizenship after a given term of service. 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. See Sablayrolles (1996), 25.
48. On the question of the degree to which the *vigiles* were viewed as a military or police force, see Johnstone (1992) and Sablayrolles (1996), 24–27; on the estimated number of troops in the *vigiles* at the start of the first century, Sablayrolles (1996), 27–29, 371.
49. Night watches were ordered 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.
50. Livy 1.31.
51. Hor. *Carm.* 1.31; Prop. 2.31; Verg. *Aen.* 8.720; Ov. *Fast.* 4.951–54, 3.1.59–64; Aug. *Res Gestae* 19.1, 24.2; Vell. Pat. 2.81.3; Asc. 90C; Plin. *HN* 36.11, 24–25, 32, 37.11; Suet. *Aug.* 29.3, 52.1; Dio 53.1.3. On the temple of Palatine Apollo, see Hekster and Rich (2006); Zink (2008), (2012), (2015); Claridge (2014) with bibliography; see also J. Miller (2009), 185–254. Ovid's House of the Sun in *Met.* 2 as a poetic response to this temple will be discussed in chapter 2.
52. On *pignora imperii* (cf. Serv. *ad Aen.* 7.88): Herbert-Brown (1994), 77–80.
53. See discussion below, 43–44.
54. Dio 54.24.1; Aug. *Res Gestae* 19.
55. See Van Deman (1913).
56. Herbert-Brown (1994), 77–78.
57. Kleiner and Buxton (2008), 63. See also Herbert-Brown (1994), 77.
58. Herbert-Brown (1994), 77.
59. Ov. *Fast.* 4.949–54.

60. On the burning of the Sibylline books: Livy 5.50; Tac. *Ann.* 6.12, 15.46. See Santangelo (2013), 134–39, and Takács (2003).

61. Cf. Norden (1901), 2.

62. The exact date of the transfer of the Sibylline books is disputed. Suetonius (*Aug.* 31) claims 12 BCE, but some scholars have questioned the accuracy of this date; Dio (54.17) reports that the quindecimviri recopied damaged passages of the books in 18 BCE. See Price (1996), 827.

63. Tac. *Ann.* 6.12; the date of Livy's claim (43.13.1–2) that in his day people no longer report and record prodigies is uncertain. See Stadter (1972), 291.

64. On accidental destructions of Augustus's residence: Hekster and Rich (2006). On the Hut of Romulus in the Augustan era: Balland (1984), 57–80; Royo (1999), 174–81; Rea (2007), 21–43. Roller (2001), 202–3, connects the donations to Augustus in 3 CE with the aristocratic practice of soliciting donations from clients after fires and other misfortunes.

65. *Aug. Res Gestae* 19; Val. Max. 1.8.11; Suet. *Aug.* 57; Dio 55.12.4.

66. Cf. Paul. Fest. 416L. On Stata Mater: Preller and Jordan (1881–83) s.v. Stata Mater; Wissowa (1912), 230; Daremberg and Saglio (1919), vol. 3, 782; vol. 5, 830; Walde and Hoffman (1960), vol. 5, 130, 337; Radke (1965), 292n31; Pastor (1987); Papi (1994), 139–66. This section relies most heavily on Pastor (1987), Sablayrolles (1996), 453–68, and Lott (2004), 3, 79, 98, 166–68, 189. See now also Flower (2017), 240, 286, 318, 329–31, 337.

67. On Stata Mater at Veii, see Torelli (2001). Other inscriptions have been found in Etruria (*CIL* XI.3.321; see Taylor [1923], 3) and in the central Apennines (see Letta [1992]). Outside of Italy dedications have been found in Dalmatia (*AE* 1910, 81), Patras (*CIL* III.500 = 7256), and Baetica; see Pastor (1987), 243–44.

68. Radke (1965), 292.

69. Livy 1.41. Jupiter Stator's name may derive not from *sistere* but from the related *stare*, “to stand”; cf. Cic. *Leg.* 11.28: *Statae (standi) cognominaque Statoris et Invicto Iovis*. Sablayrolles (1996), 466, reads *Stata* as a past participle, arguing that Stata Mater symbolized the city's security in a fixed state.

70. Macrobius (*Sat.* 1.12.18) reports that the *flamen* of Vulcan sacrificed to Maia Volcani on the kalends of May. Both Stata Mater and Maia Volcani should probably be connected with other subsidiary female deities that personify a single aspect of a more prominent god. See Carcopino (1968), 90–92; Pastor (1987), 244; Sablayrolles (1996), 464.

71. Sablayrolles (1996), 466–67, suggests that the divine pairing of Vulcan and Stata Mater is a variation on Cacus and Caca; cf. Servius's comments (*ad Aen.* 8.190) concerning Cacus's sister in whose shrine an eternal flame dwelled.

72. The mutilated text of Festus (416L) says the following: *Statae Matris simulacrum in foro colebatur . . . ne lapides igne corrumperentur . . . magna pars populi in suos quique vicos rettulerunt eius deae cultum*. On the Vulcanal's origins, see Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 2.50.54.

73. 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; Lott (2004), 167–68. On the transfer of her worship to the *vici* in the Sullan era, see Flower (2017), 240.

74. For the importance of Stata Mater to the Augustan reorganization of the *vici*, see Papi (1994), 139–66; for lustration in conjunction with Stata Mater, see *CIL* VI.766.

75. See examples in Lott (2004), 167–68.

76. Cf. *CIL* VI.762–66, 802, 975, 36.809; *CIL* L.994.

77. NSA, 179–88; Gatti (1906), 186, 197; *CIL* VI.975; Platner and Ashby (1929), 578.

78. 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. Flower (2017) provides important new discussion of the social and political dimensions of these shrines. For other newly “August” gods in the imperial era, see, e.g., Lott (2004), nos. 35 and 54; further examples in Flower (2017), 331–35.

79. *CIL* VI.761.

80. Pastor (1987), 245.

81. See Champeaux (1982), 319–20.

82. The Ara Fortunae Reducis, erected in 19 BCE, marked the return of Augustus to Rome from Asia Minor.

83. As the studies of Hinds (1987), 29, Feeney (1992), Bartsch (1994), Gar. Williams (1994b), 154–209, Gibson (1999), Pagán (2000), Fear (2010), Ziogas (2015), and Howley (2017) show, the risks of offending the *princeps* with speech and writing alike was certainly already felt in the period. For a skeptical approach to notions of oratorical decline, see Rutledge (2007).

84. Murgatroyd (2005), 118n37; cf. Verg. *Aen.* 2.624–25, 3.3. See also Murgia (1989). These lines also echo the speech that Horace’s Hannibal makes in *Carm.* 4.4.49–60, comparing Rome’s rise from “burnt Troy” (*cremato . . . Ilio*) to a holm-oak (*ilex*) that draws strength from the very blade that hacks at it. The attack on the state is often envisioned as a cut tree rather than a burnt city; e.g., Verg. *Aen.* 2.626–31 compares Troy’s fall to a felled ash tree; Hor. *Carm.* 4.6 figures Aeneas, wounded on Troy’s battlefield, as a felled tree (rescued, significantly, from funeral flames by Apollo).

85. On fire in the *Georgics* generally, see Ross (1987), esp. 27–31, 46–51, 71–72, 150–56. On Vergil’s pointed valorization of unremarkable farming techniques here, see Thibodeau (2011), 143–44. On Empedoclean subtext in this passage specifically, see Farrell (2014), 73–75.

86. Livy’s metaphor elaborating on Rome’s historical resurgence invites metaliterary comparisons not only between Livy’s own first pentad to the new beginning here, but also in between Livy’s history as a whole and everything that came before it. See Kraus (1994); Vasaly (2002, 2014) for the structure of Livy’s pentad; see also comments in conclusion of Vasaly (2015) on the artificiality of Livy’s claims to improved accuracy here.

87. On the burning of prophetic writings and the ban on publication of Senate records under Augustus: Howley (2017), 224.

88. On Timagenes: McInerney (2010).

89. Sen. *Controv.* 10.5.22; *De ira* 3.23.

90. Fear (2010).

91. Sen. *Controv.* 10.5.22; see also Sen. *De ira* 3.23.

92. Ovid's claims (*Tr.* 1.7.13–24, 4.10.63–64) to have burned his poems may well be false; see Gar. Williams (1994b), 80–81. See also Feeney's suggestion (1992), 19, that Ovid may have left the *Fasti* incomplete as a form of protest. On book burning as a form of self-censorship in Ovid, see Martelli (2013), 52–53.

93. As quoted in Sen. *Ep.* 91. The full implications of this letter will be discussed below in chapter 3.

94. Sen. *Controv.* 10.5.22. On the burning of Titus Labienus's books by senatorial decree, see introduction.

95. Morgan (2000) assesses Asinius Pollio's literary and historical significance. See also Nisbet and Hubbard (1978) *ad* Hor. *Carm.* 2.1.

96. On the disputed date of *Odes* 2.1, see Lyne's (1995), 93n102, conclusion that regardless of the possible earlier composition of the poem, "it was issued in 23 [BCE] . . . as part of the collection of *Odes* Books 1–3, necessarily having an impact on that collection."

97. With Ahl (1984b), 146: "This latent fire of civil war threatens both winner and loser." J. Henderson (1998), 117–20, observes that these lines offer an implicit comparison between Pollio's project and Vergil's *Aeneid*, which also seeks to retrace Rome's history from a period of destruction. For discussion of this poem's implied attitudes toward writing politics and civil war, see, e.g., Sallmann (1987); Lyne (1995), 92–94; J. Henderson (1996), 59–136; Lowrie (1997), 175–86; J. Henderson (1998), 108–62; Bowditch (2001), 72–84. On the connections between this poem and others in *Odes* 2 addressing political figures, civil war themes, and poetic patrons, see Santirocco (1994), 84–85. On the implicit message that Pollio should avoid writing history, see T. Johnson (2009). On the connections between *Odes* 2.1.29–35 and Vergil's *Georgics* 1.509–11, see S. Harrison (2013), 378–79.

98. On Apollo Soranus: Plin. *HN* 7.19; Serv. *ad Aen.* 11.784–85; Strabo 5.2.9; Sil. *Pun.* 5.175–81; Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 3.32. For a full discussion of this rite see Taylor (1923), 83–91.

99. On the celebration of the Parilia in the imperial period see Beard (1987).

100. While no frank evidence accuses Augustus of "abducting" Vesta's cult, some (e.g., Korten [1992]; Newlands [1995], 138) have read Ovid in these terms. Vesta is certainly the target of an attempted rape/abduction by Priapus at 6.321–48, which informs the more subtle reference here to the *dea rapta*.

101. I do not subscribe to Korten's (1992), 137–45, suggestions that veiled accusations of sacrilege, the violation of Vesta among them, led to Ovid's exile. Nevertheless, Ovid

may acknowledge the possibility of such accusations in these lines. On Ovid's ambiguous doubles for Augustus in the *Fasti*, see Murgatroyd (2005), 93–94; on Ovid's treatment of Vesta in relation to Augustus, see Fantham (1983), 207–11; Newlands (1995), 130–40; Barchiesi ([1994] 1997), 137–40. On Ovid and Augustus in *Fasti* 6, Littlewood's (2006) introduction provides a balanced overview.

102. As Feldherr (2010), 314 and 61–81, contends, while Augustus himself was not an “artist” per se, he was certainly a consummate curator of images.

103. The focus in this section on a broad 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, and that allusion in Vergil “therefore offers useful literary-historical evidence.” Nonetheless, as Farrell (1997), 223, acknowledges, “Virgilian intertextuality shows every sign of being the distinct creation and in many ways the artistic signature of classical antiquity's greatest poetic craftsman.” Giusti (2016) offers a useful overview of the impact and influences of Kennedy's (1992) now-classic overhaul of the debate surrounding the putative pro- or anti-Augustan stance of Vergilian and Ovidian texts.

104. On fire in the *Aeneid* generally, see Schwarz (1983); Battezzazzore (1983–84); Zoicas (1989); Scully (2000).

105. For a discussion of the possible historical models for the statesman in this simile (*Aen.* 1.145–56), see Morwood (1998), citing Austin (1971) *ad loc.* and S. Harrison (1988), 55–59. On this passage generally, see Austin (1971), 124–71; Kühn (1971), 17–19; Gor. Williams (1980), 177–78; S. Harrison (1986), 102; S. Harrison (1988); Spence (1988), 11–21; Cairns (1989), 93–94; Galinsky (1996), 20–24; Morwood (1998); Schmit-Neuerburg (1999), 66–71; Spence (2002), 48–51; Adler (2003), 92–93.

106. On Vergil's linkage of Empedoclean theory with epic predecessors, see, e.g., Hardie (1986), 191–93; Nelis (2001), 82–86; Nelis (2004); Nelis (2014). As Seneca suggests, (*QNat.* 6.18.4), the power of Vergil's stormwinds also touches upon volcanic theory, in which volatile air causes stones and fire to fly; cf. the description of Aetna at *Aen.* 3.575–77. See Gar. Williams (2006) and (2017), 33–38; see also Garani (2009), 109–10.

107. The idea of the chariot of state is at least as old as Plato (*Resp.* 566d). Rebeggiani (2013), 188n4, reviews the common metaphorical use of *habena* as an image for control of various sorts. On the importance of charioteering in the *Georgics*, see, e.g., Balot (1998); Freudenburg (2001), 42–53, 78–82; J. Henderson (2002), 62–65; Volk (2003); Hardie (2004); Lovatt (2005), 32–39; Nappa (2005), 66–68, 119–33, 158, 220; Nelis (2008). Hardie (2005), 24–28, reads chariot imagery as a metaphor for Roman history in *Georgics* 1.

108. Gale (2000), 35, argues that the juxtaposition of the chariot simile with the image of the mourning sun (1.466–68) and the reference to the Eridanus (1.482) constitutes an allusion to Phaethon.

109. Pliny (*HN* 2.30) mentions solar eclipses as a portent of Caesar's death, but no eclipse would have been visible at Rome in 44 BCE; rather, it is almost certain that an

eruption of Aetna in 44 would have obscured the sun and led to an overall darker, gloomier atmosphere in that year; cf. notices in Dio (65.17.5) and Tibullus (2.5.75–76). So Ramsey and Licht (1997), 99–107, 193–94. The identification between Caesar/Octavian and Phaethon is dismissed by Lyne (1987) but convincingly argued by Gale (2000), 188–92, and endorsed by Nelis (2008).

110. Suet. *Iul.* 82.2; cf. Gale (2000), 35; Hardie (2004), 89.

111. 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.

112. I thank Julia Scarborough for helpfully discussing this passage with me.

113. Nelis (2008), 510n70.

114. Cf. R. Thomas (1988) *ad Verg. G.* 501–2; Nisbet and Hubbard (1970) *ad Hor. Carm.* 1.2.13. For discussion of Caesar's comet in terms of the event itself and the tradition around it, see Ramsey and Licht (1997); Gurval (1997); Pandey (2013).

115. Caesar's comet may well have seemed an ambiguous portent (at best) in light of the view expressed in Aristotle's *Meteorology* (1.8.345a) that the Phaethon myth recalls a meteor shower that brought about a near-total destruction of human civilization.

116. On *Aeneid* Book 2's depiction of the fall of Troy as an analogue for the collapse of the republic, see, e.g., Morgan (2000). For various aspects of Roman history and topography referenced in *Aeneid* 2, see Hardie (2013). On Priam as a Pompey figure: Ahl (1989); Austin (1964), 164; J. Dyson (2001), 88–89; Horsfall (2008), 384–85; O'Hara (2007), 86. Quint (1993, chap. 1) argues, e.g., for Vergil's struggle within the *Aeneid* to break through a circular narrative that endlessly reprises Troy. Kraus (1994) shows a similar phenomenon in Livy's historiography.

117. Realized metaphors in the *Aeneid*: see Hardie (1986), 232–33.

118. The assault is itself touched off with a signal fire raised on the royal galley (*Aen.* 2.256–57).

119. For the meaning of *pyrrhus* as “red-haired,” see, e.g., R. D. Williams ([1972] 1996) *ad Aen.* 2.469; cf. *LSJ* s.v. πυρρός, -ός, II. The etymological root, however, makes available a connection to fire that resonates with the larger narrative, especially since the name appears twice as often as “Neoptolemus” (as the character calls himself at *Aen.* 2.549); cf. O'Hara (2017), 106.

120. On this episode generally, see Sklenář (1990), 67–75; T. O'Sullivan (2009).

121. Cf. Monti (1981), 72; J. Miller (2009), 13.

122. On the symbolism of Vesta's fire here, see Fletcher (2014), 62.

123. This image is echoed later when Aeneas looks back and sees flames overwhelming (*Aen.* 2.759: *exsuperant flammae*) his own house as he leaves the city.

124. The only other time that Vergil uses the phrase *furentibus Austris* (*Aen.* 2.304) is in the description of Aeolus's Cave, a space filled with *furentibus Austris* (*Aen.* 1.51, in the same line position). See Putnam (1965), 15; as Geller (2015), 109, remarks on the parallel nature of these forces of violence from the past, which periodically wreak havoc on the established order of life. At *Aen.* 2.498–99 Pyrrhus and his troops are similarly

compared to a flood destroying forests, fields, and livestock; R. Thomas (1999), 126–27, connects this this language with the overflowing Po from *Georgics* 1.

125. An Iliadic intertext reinforces the contrast with Aeneas's present situation; at *Il.* 4.275–79, a shepherd sees an approaching storm bearing a mighty whirlwind, but (unlike the *pastor* Aeneas describes) he is able to drive his flock to safety. The formulaic phrase “shepherd of his people” appears numerous times in the *Iliad*, applied to major leaders such as Agamemnon (e.g., *Il.* 2.85, 2.105, 2.243, 2.253) and Hector (10.406, 15.262), as well as to less prominent characters, including Aeneas himself (5.513). See W. Anderson (1968); Hornsby (1968); W. Johnson (1976), 80–82; see also the more recent contributions of Haubold (2000), esp. 10–15; Chew (2002), 616–20; Suerbaum (2005); Scarborough (2014), 115–74.

126. While herdsmen in the *Eclogues* are portrayed as innocent musicians attacked by violent outsiders, those in the *Aeneid*, as Scarborough (2014), iii, observes, “unwittingly catalyze and deliberately take part in acts of war; they never make music.” Building on Shaw's (1984) findings, Habinek ([1990] 1998) reviews the societal implications of Cicero's use of images and characterizations suggesting links between banditry and shepherds/herdsmen.

127. See R. Thomas (1988) *ad loc.*; Malamud (2009), 295–97.

128. On these lines generally, see Austin (1964), 253–57; Kühn (1971), 47–49; Hardie (1984), 409–12.

129. Baraz (2009), 326, points out the parents' limited perspective here.

130. Hardie (1984), 409.

131. Anchises has “first-hand experience of the effects of divinely-sent fire” (Hardie [1984], 409n20), i.e., Jupiter's thunderbolt (*Aen.* 2.648–49) punishing his affair with Venus.

132. E.g., Ov. *Met.* 15.787. See also the Augustan “Divus Julius” comet coins, minted 19–18 BCE; cf. *RRC* 2.140, 422; *RE* 1.328, 59; *RIC* 1.38b, 44. On the significance of the *sidus Iulium* see Pandey (2013). On the traditional association of comets with Phaethon, see introduction.

133. Each of these aspects in turn is discussed in the introduction.

134. Good assessments of the (especially enormous) bibliography on Dido as a figure of tragedy are in Mastronarde (2002) and Baraz (2009). On Euripides, Apollonius, and Vergil, see Collard (1975); Nelis (2001), 93–96, 276–80, 377–81. On Dido's historical and literary models: Horsfall (1973) and Nappa (2007).

135. Putnam (1998), 85, outlines the chain of causality between the fall of Troy and Dido's pyre. On Dido's death and the eventual fall of Carthage, see discussion above of the simile at *Aen.* 4.666–71.

136. *Iliacas vestes*, *Aen.* 4.648. On the ominous nature of these gifts: O'Hara (1993a); Krevans (2002); Nappa (2007); Baraz (2009), 320n15.

137. Dido is called “Phoenissa” twice as Cupid's magic begins to take effect (*Aen.* 1.671, 1.714); although (as Bömer [1986], 356–57 points out) no ancient source explic-

itly connects the phoenix with Phoenicia, the name in this context could plausibly have foreshadowed Dido's well-known fate on the pyre.

138. On the pervasive imagery of flame and fire in Dido's characterization, see, e.g., Newton (1957), 39–43; Moorton (1989), 156–57, 163–64; Sternberg (2006), 291–92. More generally, as P. Miller (1995), 225, notes, “fire is a recurring motif throughout the *Aeneid* and is associated with the dangers of uncontrolled passion of either an erotic or a heroic nature.”

139. Viewing Dido as metonym for her city has been suggested by several scholars; see, e.g., Feldherr (1999); Putnam (2010), 17–38. Panoussi (2002), 104–5, identifies intertexts between the Homeric and the Sophoclean Ajax and Vergil's Dido, suggesting their parallels as powerful yet doomed leaders. See Monti (1981), 22, on political aspects of Dido's enterprise; Rudd ([1970] 1990) on her comparability with Aeneas. Pöschl (1962), 97–138, links Dido and Turnus as doomed leaders.

140. On *Aen.* 4.66–73: Austin ([1955] 1982), 45; R. Williams ([1972] 1996), 339–40; Pöschl (1962), 78–81; W. Anderson (1968), 8–9; Ferguson (1970–1971), 57–63; W. Johnson (1976), 81; Briggs (1980), 41–44; Vögler (1981), 55–56; Day (1984), 29–30; Lyne (1989), 77–79; Keith (2000), 113–14; Armstrong (2002), 329–34; Chew (2002). On the significance of the “Cretan” location, see Duclos (1971); P. Miller (1995), 238.

141. *Anth. Pal.* 5.124. Trans. adapted from Macleod (1979); cf. also *Anth. Pal.* 9.15, 12.79.

142. Gell. *NA*, 19.9.12–13 (Loeb ed., vol. 3). See also the second poem by Valerius Aedituus (Gell. *NA* 19.9.12; cf. Courtney [1993], 70). For Porcius Licinius's circle of poets, see Courtney (1993), 70–78, 82; W. Johnson (2009), 9–10.

143. O'Hara (1993b) identifies three allusions to medicine and topography in *Aeneid* 4 that Vergil associates in *Ecl.* 6 and 10 with Cornelius Gallus, a noted erotic poet who ended his own life after a series of political missteps in the 20s BCE; thus we might be invited here to associate Dido's suicide with that of Gallus, another figure who might be said to have nurtured the twin “flames” of erotic passion and political ambition.

144. The oleaster is a tree that Vergil associates closely with Italian identity, as well as with civil conflict at *Aen.* 12.766–90, when Aeneas strikes an oleaster sacred to Faunus with his spear; the Trojans then cut down the sacred grove to leave the area open for fighting. See Schell (2009), 69n136.

145. As Horsfall (1976), 84, points out, *Aen.* 6.888–89 also echoes Sallust (*Iug.* 4.5); cf. Polyb. 6.53–54, esp. 6.53.10.

146. Cf. Homer's Ἡέλιος φαέθων (*Il.* 11.735; *Od.* 5.479, 11.16, 19.441, 22.388).

147. Nethercut (1986), 104.

148. Important discussions of the ship-burning episode in *Aeneid* 5: Monaco ([1960] 1972), 153–62; Bertram (1971); Kühn (1971), 76–83; Thornton (1976), 102–13; Holt (1979–80); Gruen (1992), 6–51; Nugent (1992); Farrell (1997); La Penna (1997); Schmit-Neuerburg (1999), 273–76; Bouquet (2001), 30–31; Oliensis (2001); Merriam (2002); R. Smith (2005), 44–48; Fratantuono (2007), 149–51; Reed (2007), 121–22; Powell (2008), 100; Casali (2010), 43–46; Fletcher (2014), 176–84.

149. On the allusions to Euripides's *Bacchae*: Oliensis (2009), 70; Rogerson (2017), 96–98.

150. As at *Aen.* 2.40–56, the crowd at *Aen.* 5.643–63 pursues its destructive course in the face of clear warnings from a prominent authority figure and a frightening portent.

151. Nethercut (1986), 107.

152. Hector first attempts this feat at Hom. *Il.* 8.150–565. The Trojans' struggle to burn the Greek ships occupies most of the narrative of *Il.* 15 (328–478), but success eludes them until Hector finally prevails against Ajax (*Il.* 16.112–24).

153. Forms of *immissus* also describe the attacking Greeks in Book 2 (*Aen.* 2.495) and the fires rushing at each other in the simile at *Aen.* 12.521.

154. Stata Mater: see above in this chapter.

155. Conington and Nettleship ([1883–98] 1963) *ad Aen.* 7.79; B. Knox (1950), 398n42. See also Servius's comment (*ad loc.*) that words “signify the fire of war” (*incendium belli significant*).

156. See Johnston (1981), 25–26. On comparisons between Dido and Turnus, see Bowie (1998). On fire imagery in Book 7 overall, see Putnam (1970). Marinčič (2002), 158n63, suggests that similarities between Cacus and Turnus are perhaps attributable to Turnus's putative origins as a chthonic deity closely connected with fire.

157. On fire as a structuring device in *Aeneid* 8: Gransden (1976), 14–20; Scully (2000). On the Cacus episode generally, see Galinsky ([1966] 1999) and Morgan (1998). See Hardie ([1986] 2008), 115–17, 266; (2009b), 97, and Scarth (2000), 601–5, on Cacus and his relation to volcanic imagery. See Paschalis (1997), 288–89, on the semantic associations of Cacus's name. See also F. Sullivan (1972), 190; Johnston (1996), 60–61; Gar. Williams (2017), 37. On Vulcan and Aeneas's shield, Gor. Williams (1983), 152–56; Hardie ([1986] 2008), 336–76; D. West (1990); Boyle (1999), 156–61; Putnam (1998), 154–56; and Feldherr (2014) are good starting points.

158. Cacus spews smoke or fire not just at *Aen.* 8.198–99, but again at 252–53 (*ingentem fumum . . . evomit*) and 259–50 (*incendia vana vomentem*). As Boyle (1999), 158, points out, repeating the image in connection with Octavian at *Aen.* 8.861–62 both balances and intertwines the destructive and positive of fire in *Aeneid* 8. See also W. Anderson ([1969] 2005), 93–94.

159. On this episode generally, see Fantham (1990); Glei (1991), 204–6; Hardie (1994), 101; E. Harrison (1995); Phillips (1997); Zgoll (2004), 263–68; Hejduk (2009), 295–96. On metamorphosis elsewhere in the poem, see Hardie (1994), 77–122. For comparisons between Vergil's treatment of this scene and Ovid's, see Papaioannou (2005), 167–80, and Solodow (2014), 125–27.

160. For the Homeric precedents to this simile, see Hardie's ([1986] 2008), esp. 80, comments *ad Aen.* 9.47–147; the chief models are Hom. *Il.* 8.158–565 (cf. Knauer [1964]), 270–72, and *Od.* 13.125–65 (cf. Fantham [1990]). On Turnus's fundamental similarities to Pyrrhus as described in *Aeneid* 2, see Schenk (1984), 189–288.

161. Hardie (1995) *ad loc.*

162. Hardie (1995) *ad loc.*

163. On the besieged Trojan camps in Italy as a Troy *redux*: Keitel (2012), 41, 42n16.
164. Serv. *ad Aen.* 9.81.
165. Hardie (1987), 143–64, compares the transformation of the Trojan ships to that of the Phaeacian ship in *Odyssey* 13. Fantham (1990) links the transformation of the ships here with the later function of the nymphs in Book 10. O'Hara (1990), 74–78, connects the scene with the portents Aeneas receives in Book 8. Phillips (1997), 52–55, discusses Turnus's failure to understand the significance of this transformation. Papaioannou (2002) analyzes this episode alongside the transformation of Diomedes's companions into birds (*Aen.* 11.271–78).
166. Nymphs and clouds/water: Hes. *Theog.* 346–55 and Ar. *Nub.* 264–67; in visual representation, see LIMC 8.1, 891–902. At Rome, the Nymphs received sacrifice on Vulcan's festival day, August 23, along with other female counterparts including Juturna, another figure associated with water. See W. Fowler (1899), 210–11.
167. On Clodius, see introduction, 16–17.
168. Davies (2017), 224. On the perpetuation of Clodius's memory well after his death, see K. Welch (1995).
169. The identification of this temple on the Campus Martius is disputed. See "Nymphae, Aedes" in Haselberger, Roman, and Dumser (2002). Davies (2017), 224, considers Temple D at Largo Argentina to be the most likely candidate for the identification of the Temple of the Nymphs, interpreting the rebuilding of this temple in the mid-first century BCE as a "visible reassertion of the *mos maiorum*." Ultimately, the exact identification of the physical temple is not crucial to the broadly symbolic understanding of the purported arson advanced here.
170. For Fantham (1990), 105, *virgineae . . . facies* stresses human appearance. Yet the phrase could apply to objects symbolizing the nymphs rather than goddesses themselves; cf. Ov. *Met.* 10.250: *virginis est verae facies*.
171. Davies (2017), 224.
172. At *Aen.* 11.71–75, Aeneas sets on Pallas's pyre the cloak Dido wove for him, signaling his close bond with both characters; at 142–44 the Arcadians snatch up torches to attend the funeral and proceed in a "long column of flames" (*longo / ordine flammorum*) to the cremation site; at 146–47 when the women of Pallanteum grieve for Pallas, they metaphorically "inflamm" the city: *matres succedere tectis / viderunt, maestam incendunt clamoribus urbem*; altogether, the chaos and human cost of this civil war is described as a "fiery turmoil" (*flagrante tumultu*, 225).
173. Cf. Hannibal as the equivalent of a forest fire or storm wind at sea in Horace, *Odes* 4.4.42–44.
174. The fundamentally ambiguous message of Aeneas's decision to slay his rival has been debated at length between Putnam (1972), 15–20, (1990), (1995), (2011), and Galinsky ([1988] 1999), (1994). See also Pöschl (1980); Schenk (1984), 382–95; Renger (1985), 49–105; Stahl (1990); Potz (1992); Hardie (1997a), 142–51, and (1997b), 315–17; Nicoll (2001); Boyd (2002); Farrell (2012), 305–9; Esposito (2016).
175. Lowrie (2005), 948.

Chapter 2

1. On the political use of the Phaethon myth generally in the later Julio-Claudian period, see Degl'Innocenti Pierini (1990), 251–70; Nauta (2002), 332–33; Rosati (2008), 187–92.
2. On imperial sarcophagi the deceased is fairly commonly portrayed as a charioteer who falls from his chariot during the race. The theme seems especially associated with premature deaths (children and adolescents), with Phaethon's untimely fall serving as a symbol of the youth's premature death. See Zanker and Ewald (2008), 89–90, and Rebeggiani (2013), 191n13.
3. On the symbolic significance of imperial heirs (and of their deaths), see, e.g., Champlin (1989), 157–58; Fantham (2006), 93–107; Phillips (2011), 381n44.
4. Jenkins (2009), 1.
5. On the *Cons.* generally, see Schoonhoven (1992); see also González Rolán and Suárez-Somonte (1993); Jenkins (2009). On the significance and probable date of the *Cons.*, see Jenkins (2009), 3–4.
6. Habinek (2016), 14–18.
7. On Phaethon and the Nile, see introduction, 13–14. On Phaethon and the Po, see above, 225n53. Barchiesi (2005 *ad Met.* 2.324) points out the paradox here: the Eridanus is commonly identified with the Po, yet the Po is listed among the rivers already scorched dry by Phaethon's chariot at *Met.* 2.258.
8. See Dio 56.33–44. Commonalities between the funerals of Julius Caesar and Augustus included wax images displayed in place of the actual body, the heavy participation of military units, and the supposed signs of apotheosis (discussed below, 71–72). On Augustus's funeral generally, see Toynbee (1971), 56–60; Davies (2004), 10–12; Swann (2004), 319–45; Sumi (2005), 256–61; Erasmo (2008), 61–68; Luke (2014), 268–71.
9. On eagles at subsequent imperial funerals, see Davies (2000a), 10–11; Sumi (2005), 260; Cumont (1942), 293–302. Luke (2014, 282n27) argues that this ritual originated with Augustus and was not simply retrojected into accounts of Augustus by later sources.
10. On the politics and poetics of Caesar's comet, see chapter 1, 90–91.
11. Cf. Aug. *Res Gestae* 35; on the *quadriga* in Augustus's funeral see Sumi (2005), 256–61.
12. Luke (2014), 268–72 and 271n35.
13. See, e.g., Coarelli (1983), 4–6; P. Zanker (1988), 160–61; Galinsky (1996), 141–55; Eck (2003), 122–23; Jacobs and Conlin (2014).
14. Suetonius tells us 28 BCE (*Aug.* 100–101).
15. On the Mausoleum and *ustrinum*, see Boatwright (1985); “Mausoleum” and “Ustrinum” in Haselberger, Roman, and Dumser (2002); Davies (2004), 165–68; Rehak (2006), 25–61; Pollini (2012), 216–18. Note, however, Gallia's (2007) caution in a review of Rehak (2006): “we do not know when [the location of the *ustrinum* Augusti] was established. In fact, Strabo (who refers to the monument as a *καύστρον*) may be describing a monument set up by Tiberius on the site after Augustus's body was cremated.”

16. D'Ambra (2011) vividly characterizes Roman imperial pyres as “incendiary devices,” imagining an explosive effect upon ignition.

17. Tac. *Ann.* 1.7.4–5.

18. Habinek (2016), 4.

19. Suet. *Tib.* 75.1: “Tiberius to the Tiber”; famously, the bodies of condemned criminals were deprived of a tomb and dumped in the river.

20. On the power of death and death ritual to “[transform] an urban setting into [a setting] of death,” which both separates the living from the dead and unites generations through recollection, see Erasmo (2008), 63–69 and 210n14.

21. The Aventine fire (36 CE) damaged the Circus Maximus and adjacent neighborhoods. Tacitus emphasizes that the money was explicitly designated for replacing and repairing commercial and residential properties, possibly with an eye toward distinguishing Tiberius’s motives for rebuilding from those of his monumentalizing predecessor.

22. *Annals* text, here and elsewhere, is from Heubner’s 1994 Teubner.

23. Cf. Ov. *Fast.* 4.305–12.

24. On the imperial *genius* and the images representing it, see Fishwick (1991), 375–87, with bibliography.

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

26. The fire occurred in Aemiliana District, not as yet securely located. Suetonius records Claudius’s efforts to put out a later fire in what is apparently the same location as part of a larger passage illustrating his scrupulous attention to the supply and distribution of grain (Suet. *Claud.* 18).

27. See Barrett (1989), 195.

28. Suet. *Claud.* 25.2; see Sablayrolles (1996), 45.

29. Solar eclipse and “glowing embers” falling from the sky: Dio 56.29.2. Fire on the Palatine: Dio 57.14.10.

30. Dio 57.18.4–5.

31. The Tacitean account of the alleged sighting under Tiberius is discussed in chapter 5.

32. Dio 58.23.4. This fragment (*adesp.* 513) is sometimes attributed to Euripides’s lost *Bellerophon*; see Collard and Cropp (2008), 292.

33. Dio 58.23.5.

34. On Caligula as Phaethon: see Degl’Innocenti Pierini (1990), 251–70. Suetonius (*Tib.* 62) may give us some further sense of the contemporary context of Tiberius’s other apocalyptic musings (discussed above, 77–78).

35. See further discussion in the introduction, 14–15.

36. On possible changes to the text of the *Metamorphoses* in the Tiberian period, see Zwierlein (1999), esp. 235–64.

37. On the topic of epic successors, see Hardie (1993). On poetic succession in Ovid see now also Ingleheart (2010).

38. Widely discussed since P. Zanker (1988), the topic of Ovid's relationship to Augustan ideology has been scrutinized by a vast array of scholars. Gar. Williams (2009b) gives a recent overview of the most important scholarship pertaining to this aspect of the *Metamorphoses*. On Ovid's gods see especially Feeney (1991), 188–249, and von Albrecht (1999), 177–96. On the relationship between Ovid and Augustus, Barchiesi ([1994] 1997) remains fundamental; for a survey of the question see Schmitzer (1990), 1–14; for the putative pro-Augustan and anti-Augustan aspects of Ovid's work (in connection with the limited biographical details we know about the poet) see P. White (2002); see also Barchiesi (2001), 69–78. On the wider notion of “politics in Ovid,” see, e.g., Habinek (1998), 13–14, 151–69, and (2002), esp. 55–57; see also Gar. Williams (2009a) and (2009b). On the “politics of fiction” in Ovid, see Feldherr (2010). For the larger idea that Ovid's ever-shifting cosmology and disrupted teleology aim at exposing the “arbitrary, indeed even fictitious character of the supposed cosmic order established by the power of Augustus” see Rosati (2002), 280–81. On the elasticity of narrative and the multiplicity of voices as features that ultimately work against authoritative account (or authoritarian ideology), see, e.g., S. Wheeler (2000); Rosati (2002), 282–304; Barchiesi (2001), 45–78. Keith (1992) argues persuasively for the narrative cohesion of *Met.* 2 overall, but the book's in-depth analyses begin after Phaethon's fall.

39. Feeney (1992), 6. See also Hinds (1987).

40. On Augustan monumental rhetoric, see chapter 1, 21–23.

41. Feldherr (2002), 176. On metaphor and allegory in Ovid, see especially Hardie (1999). See also Zgoll (2004); Barchiesi (2009b); Platt (2009).

42. Barchiesi (2005), 230. On these themes more generally, see Hardie (1993).

43. The lines telling Phaethon's story run from *Met.* 1.747 to 2.400. See Otis (1970), 108. The assertion of W. Anderson (1997), 269, that the Phaethon episode concludes at 2.366 has not gained wide acceptance. See, e.g., Schiesaro (2014), 97: “Phaethon's story is both a tale of contested paternity and of failed succession.” On Phaethon's epitaph, see Feldherr (2002), 17, and (2016), 39–41. See also Ramsby (2007), 131–42, and Coleman (2008), 23–24.

44. For bibliography on possible Greek models for Ovid's Phaethon, see Bömer (1969), 74; Diggle (1970); Wise (1977); Csaki (1995), 8–37. P. Knox (1988) discusses Ovid's models by way of arguing that Nonnus did not read or imitate Ovid directly. Van der Sluijs (2008) discusses Phaethon's role in astrological calculations of the “Great Year.” Döpp (1996, 109–11) suggests possible shared models for Ovid's Phaethon and that of Quintus Sulpicius Maximus. On the overall structure of the episode, see Bömer (1969), 223, and Bass (1977), with bibliography. In Ovid's treatment of the Phaethon episode, Barchiesi (2005 *ad loc.*; 2009b) and Schiesaro (2014) identify the themes of height and ambition in the poem primarily with reference their impact on notions of the sublime. Morgan (2003) discusses the Ovid's Phaethon with reference to issues of poetic filiation. On the sun as a marker of time (and thus a metaphor for control) in *Met.* 2, see Zissos and Gildenhard (1999). Feldherr (2010, 278–300) offers a subtle reading of the

techniques of visualization in the episode, which leads to discussion of the allegorical and metaphorical dimensions of Phaethon's journey to destruction. See now also Schiesaro (2014) and Feldherr (2016).

45. This chapter's discussion of the mourning for Phaethon (2.367–400) is brief but nevertheless presents it as a crucial section of the episode overall.

46. See, e.g., Barchiesi's comments on the Iron Age and the Gigantomachy (Barchiesi [2005] *ad loc.*, esp. 1.144–48, 151–62), 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.

47. Sen. *QNat.* 3.27.13. See Bömer (1969) *ad loc.*; cf. introductory remarks in W. Anderson's (1995) commentary *ad loc.*

48. Barchiesi (2005) *ad loc.* On these lines as a reference to Stoic *ekpyrosis*, see Due (1974), 31, 72, 108; Vanhaegendoren (2005), 203–5. Bömer, however (1969 *ad loc.*), expresses doubt about the Stoic origins of Ovid's imagery at *Met.* 1.252–61.

49. O'Hara (2007), 112; see also O'Hara (2007), 113n27. The most of extensive discussion of ideology in the Phaethon episode is Schmitzer (1990), 89–107. Schmitzer offers detailed analysis of the several features of Ovid's Phaethon narrative in relation to their probable models in the *Aeneid* but focuses primarily on analyzing the episode's toponyms and ekphrastic passages for possible allusions to Augustan politics and monuments. For the fundamental ambiguity of Phaethon's story, see Rebenich (2009). Fratanuono (2011) briefly summarizes some of the episode's potential ideological subtext (34–35) but focuses more on clarifying the episode's relationship to the *Aeneid* and situating it as a preparatory narrative for later sections of the *Metamorphoses* (31–60). See also Hinds (1987), 28–30.

50. Chaudhuri (2014), 92, remarks on Jupiter's lightning as the force that polices the boundary between human and divine, striking down mortals (e.g., Lycaon, Phaethon) who test that boundary.

51. On the importation of Lucretius's Phaethon at *Met.* 1.253–61: Bömer (1969) *ad loc.*; Otis (1970), 92; S. Wheeler (2000), 26–28. For textual problems in the remainder of line 258 and Ovid's humor here, see Vanhaegendoren (2005). For further bibliography, see S. Wheeler (2000), 28nn68–69, 28n72.

52. At *Met.* 1.276–82 (*immitite habenas*, 280; *defrenato . . . cursu*, 282), Jupiter's command for the unleashing of torrents echoes the tone of Neptune's imperious reproach to the storm winds at *Aen.* 1.124–41, but with opposite effect; so Barchiesi (2005) *ad loc.*

53. Ovid's reference to fresh mud “set ablaze with cosmic rays” (*aetherioque . . . exarsit sidere*, *Met.* 1.426) as a productive union of the opposing elements of fire and water (*ignis aquae pugnax*, *Met.* 1.432) suggests parallels with Vergil's comments on the benefits of heat and fire for growing crops and purging pestilential influences in *Georgics* 1 (see chapter 1, 40).

54. 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.*; J. Miller (2009), 259.

55. Morgan (2003), 76. Ephaphus claims superiority since Jupiter, the paramount leader of the poem, fathered him in an illicit dalliance with Io (*Met.* 1.747–50), adding another element of vexed filiation to the story.

56. Lovatt (2013), 103. See now also Feldherr (2016), 28–29.

57. For the brilliant array of precious construction materials common to both structures, see, e.g., von Albrecht and Zinn (1968), 443; Brown (1987), 215; W. Anderson (1997), 230; Platt (2009); Barchiesi (2009b); see also Barchiesi (2005) *ad loc.* For thematic relevance of ekphrasis to the Phaethon narrative, see Bartholomé (1935) and S. Wheeler (1995), 117.

58. Barchiesi (2009b).

59. Feldherr (2002), 177.

60. Feldherr (2002), 177; see also Cole (2008), 92–93. For discussion of the twin obelisks at Augustus's so-called Horologium and Circus Maximus, see chapter 1, 29–30 and 44. On the identification of three figures surrounding Pax in the reliefs on the east facade, south segment on the Ara Pacis as the *Horae*, see de Grummond (1990).

61. See discussion of Augustus's Circus and Palatine residence in chapter 1, 33–37.

62. Fränkel (1945), 86, Bartholomé (1935), 75, and Wilkinson (1955), 156, all offer important early discussions of the disrupted cosmos in Ovid.

63. Schmitzer (1990), 91; cf. Bömer (1969) *ad loc.*

64. As discussed in chapter 1 (33–37); Augustus's Apollo-adjacent home actually did burn down in 3 CE (cf. Dio 54.27.3, 55.12.5; Suet. *Aug.* 57.2). If published after the conflagration, these lines may have evoked the memory of the recent fire directly; if before, in retrospect the joke may have hit closer to home (so to speak) than intended.

65. Propertius (2.31.12) describes the ivory architectural elements of the Palatine Apollo temple; Barchiesi (2005), 237, and Bowditch (2009). Zink (2015) discusses the temple and its color scheme in detail.

66. E.g. Ennius fr. 91 Jocelyn, in which Andromache recollects Troy's gleaming palace halls as “royally fitted out with gold and ivory” (*auro ebore instructum regifice*), only to conclude: “I saw it all go up in flames” (*haec omnia vidi inflammari*); see Barchiesi (2005) *ad loc.* and Reed (2007), 101–2.

67. On ekphrastic descriptions as sites of poetic competition (i.e., passages that reflect the poet's own art while describing the art of another): S. Wheeler (1995), 117; Leach (1974), 104, and (1988), 311. On ekphrasis and its relationship to poetics generally, see D. Fowler (1991) and Elsner (2002). Cf. the Lucretian Phaethon's failure to withstand fire (*DRN* 5.396: *ignis enim superavit . . .*). Schiesaro (2014) offers many points of contact between Ovid's Phaethon narrative and Lucretius's direct and indirect treatments of the same myth/theme but does not mention this line specifically.

68. Schmitzer (1990). See also S. Wheeler (1995), 117; Feldherr (2002), 177; Brown (1987).

69. Brown (1987), 214.

70. *materiam superabat opus*: TLL s.v. *materia* III.B.2.a: *aliarum rerum: specierum*

expresse significatarum: ligni; See Bass (1977), 404n2, on other anticipations of disaster in the description of the Palace of the Sun.

71. Proleptic fire imagery in Vergil's Dido narrative is discussed in chapter 1.

72. Ancient interpretations of physiognomy might take a red flush as evidence of *pudicitia* (Polemo 38) or of inward rage (Sen. *De ira* 1.1.3–4); so Hulls (2007), 203.

73. Note a similar play on *emicat* at Verg. *Aen.* 6.5, on which see the note of Servius *ad loc.*

74. TLL s.v. *aethēr*: Gloss. αἰθήρ, ἄήρ (*caelum, quia nobis non videtur, et igneum esse dicitur*). *Emicat*: TLL s.v. I.3.a.a (*generatim de fulmine, igni, aliis rebus nitidis*). *Concipit*: cf. Verg. *Aen.* 4.474, 502; of something catching fire, see, e.g., Caes. *BCiv.* 2.14.2 (literal); Ov. *Met.* 7.17, 9.520, and Catull. 64.92 (figurative). See Bass (1977), 403nn5–6, and Barchiesi (2005) *ad loc.*

75. On the childishness of Ovid's Phaethon, see Morgan (2003), 76. On the “madness” of the burning imagery here, see also Chaudhuri (2014), 137.

76. *Met.* 2.50–102. In this exchange, we see a great deal of the Roman language of the *suasoria*, as well as terms laden with connotations of statecraft and urban spectacle. See Barchiesi's (2005) comments *ad loc.*

77. On the debt to Lucretius in this line, see Barchiesi (2005) *ad loc.*; for other Lucretian citations in Ovid's Phaethon episode, see Barchiesi (2005), 229–30.

78. Perhaps this term also figures Phaethon as a throwback to the violence of the people of the antediluvian *genus sanguineum*, who invite Jupiter's wrath in Book 1 by becoming *ingentes animo* (*Met.* 1.166).

79. Cf. D. Fowler (1990). Focalization here goes beyond verbalizing a character's inner state or perspective through indirect discourse—rather, the narrator tells us directly what the character sees and feels; cf. Peek (2003), 36.

80. *Met.* text, here and throughout, is from Tarrant's 2004 OCT.

81. Habinek (2016), 33–34, notes similar undertones in the description of Tellus that follows.

82. See chapter 1, 57–58, 61.

83. See chapter 1, 47–50.

84. For a different approach to the chariot in this episode, see Zissos and Gildenhard (1999).

85. *Aen.* 2.307–8: *inscius . . . pastor*; *Aen.* 4.71–72: *pastor . . . nescius*.

86. See discussion in chapter 1, 45–47.

87. For other examples of the *ter . . . ter* motif in Ovid (e.g., *Met.* 11.419; *Fast.* 2.823; *Ars am.* 1.552; *Tr.* 1.3.55) see Bömer (1969) *ad loc.*

88. Habinek (2016).

89. Tellus's plea at *Met.* 299–300 reworks both Hector's command in a dream that Aeneas rescue himself from the flames of Troy (*Aen.* 2.289: *teque his eripe flammis*) and Aeneas's own panicked inquiry about the security of the state when he awakens to find the city already aflame (*Aen.* 2.322: *quo res summa loco. . . ?*).

90. Myers (1994), 4, after (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 that bookend the Phaethon narrative, in which his sexual pursuit of two female characters results in lasting harm. See Evans (2008), 48–49, 91; Richlin (1992), 158–79.

91. On this section of *Georgics* 1, see chapter 1, 45–50.

92. On Phaethon's tombstone, see above, 79, and below, 102. On the imperial *ustrina*, see above, 72. On the use of *vestigia* as a technical term for the sun's ecliptic, see Loos (2008), 283–84. Likewise, the hyperbolic mourning of Phaethon's mother and sisters suggests parallels with the grief that marked the death of several of Augustus's heirs. Cf. the *Consolatio ad Liviam*, discussed above at 70–72; cf. also the mourning for Marcellus at *Aen.* 6.854–55.

93. For Marcellus, e.g., we see the commemorative dedications of the Theater of Marcellus and a library in the *Porticus Octaviae*; for posthumous honors at Rome for Gaius and Lucius Caesar, see Fantham (2006), 104–5. For the Arch of Gaius and Lucius in the Roman Forum, see Gorski and Packer (2015), 24–27. Outside of Rome, there were further monuments, e.g., the Arch of Gaius Caesar at Pisa (*CIL* IX.1421; see Lott [2017]).

94. Alternately, the trail of mourning that follows Phaethon's fall might evoke the ceremonies through Roman territory that attended the return of a dead family member's remains to Rome (e.g., the funerary rites for Drusus and for Lucius Caesar). Dio (55.2) tells us that honors for Drusus included statues, an arch, and a “cenotaph on the bank of the Rhine itself,” which again is reminiscent of the monument for Phaethon on the banks of the Po. On the empire-wide mourning for Drusus, see Champlin (2011), 76–81, with bibliography. On commemoration of Lucius Caesar in the cities through which the cortege traveled, see Lott (2017).

95. See discussion in Hardie (2002), 89. See also W. Anderson (1989). Bömer (1986) outlines the main philosophical issues of the passage, as well as possible literary models, with extensive bibliography (268–71). For the theological implications of Numa as a Pythagorean, see Silk (2004), especially 869–72. As Herbert-Brown (2002), 124n80, and McGowan (2016) note, Ovid's characterization of Pythagoras as an astral voyager and astrologer (*Met.* 15 145–52) may owe something to the Pythagorean leanings of first-century BCE thinkers like Nigidius Figulus. For the construction of Ovid's Pythagoras as an “Apolline” (and thus Augustan) wisdom figure, see J. Miller (2009), 361–62. Schiesaro (2014), 99, situates Pythagoras's speech within Ovid's attempt in the *Metamorphoses* to claim a place of honor in the “genealogy” of epic; cf. Hardie (1993), 106.

96. Hardie (1995), 211n35.

97. For the many literary allusions present in the speech, see J. Miller (1994). For the ironies and contradictions of the Pythagoras episode, see Barchiesi (1989), 73–83; Myers (1994), 142–44, 157–59; Galinsky (1998), 331. Segal (1969) influentially argues for a parodic tone to *Met.* 12–15 overall; see also Moulton (1973). See also Hardie (1995) and

(1997c); Holzberg (1997), 151–53; Galinsky (1998); S. Wheeler (2000), 115–27; Segal (2001); Gildenhard and Zissos (2004).

98. *Met.* 15.74. Yet Numa returns to Rome with a “heart filled with these and other teachings” (*Met.* 15.489–90) and thereafter “assumes the reins” (*accepisse . . . habenas*, *Met.* 15.491) as head of state.

99. Before turning to the phoenix, Pythagoras discusses the following theories and cycles: metempsychosis (143–75); the eternal flux of the cosmos (176–98); the Four Ages of Man (199–236); the four elements, of which fire is the purest and loftiest (237–58); geological and physical changes (259–360); and the generation and decay of living things (361–90). On jumbled chronology in the *Met.*, see Zissos and Gildenhard (1999), but see Feeney (1999) on the possible underlying structures of time in the poem. Cole (2008) discusses time with specific reference to Pythagoras and Pythagoreanism at 136–40 and 145–46.

100. On the ancient testimonia for the phoenix, see introduction, 15–16. Only Martial and Ovid refer to the bird as Assyrian; it is more usually associated with Arabia or Egypt. As Bömer (1986), 356–57, points out, no ancient source explicitly connects the phoenix with Phoenicia, despite the suggestively similar name.

101. On Pythagoras’s unreliable memory, see J. Miller (1994); S. Wheeler (1999); Segal (2001). Pythagoras himself weakens the credibility of his account at various junctures, e.g., *haud equidem credo . . . memorantur* (15.359–60); of the phoenix, he qualifies his report as what others say (*ferunt*, 15.401) rather than what he has witnessed personally.

102. Cf. van den Broek (1972), 52.

103. The fifth-century BCE historian Ctesias, for example, reports (5 Hellanicus, F 63 Jacoby) of an Assyrian empire stretching back a millennium before the Trojan War. See Drews (1965), 130–33. On Varro’s presentation of Assyria as one of the two earliest regions to be repopulated after the flood (and his larger theory of cyclical destruction and rebirth), see Cole (2008), 63–69.

104. Cf. Tib. 3.2.17–18 and Stat. *Silv.* 2.6.85–89, listing the exotic locales from which spices and unguents will be collected for a pyre; Habinek (2016), 30–31.

105. On *translatio imperii* and periodizations of empire in Ovid, see Habinek (2002), 55; Cole (2008), 69–71, 145–46.

106. Ov. *Met.* 15.418–52.

107. J. Miller (1994), 485.

108. W. Anderson (1963), 27; after Segal (1969), 288.

109. Cf. Cole’s (2008), 63–69, comparison of cycles of empire in Ovid with Varro’s theory of a 440-year cycle of destruction and rebirth.

110. Comparing textual and numismatic sources, Pandey (2013) has convincingly argued that much of our perception regarding the *sidus Iulium* is the result of Ovid’s literary retrofitting of his contemporary world to prior events.

111. On Caesar’s catasterism in Ovid: Bömer (1986), 452; Gurval (1997); Barchiesi (2001), 75; Pandey (2013), 417, 422–23, 427.

112. *ne foret hic igitur mortali semine cretus / ille deus faciendus erat*. On Ovid's conspicuously awkward and tendentious presentation of the bloodline connecting Caesar and Augustus here, see Hill (2002), 145.

113. Famously, the young Octavian unceremoniously removed Livia from her former husband when she was pregnant with Tiberius (Suet. *Aug.* 62).

114. On the bird's piety, see Lecocq (2016), 455–56.

115. See Gildenhard and Zissos (2004), 70–71.

116. On the defiant tone of Ovid's claims to immortality and the appeal to the topos of the "textual monument" at 15.871–79, see, e.g., Hardie (1997c), 192–94; Nisbet and Rudd (2004), 367; Gar. Williams (2009b), 169. On the politics of Ovid's claims to poetic immortality here, see, e.g., Habinek (2002), 54–55; Gildenhard and Zissos (2004), 71; Chaudhuri (2014), 114–15.

117. Ovid says that he was not an exile, but that he was "relegated"; see *Tr.* 2.137, 4.4.45, 4.9.11, 4.5.7, 5.11.21. Yet Ovid frequently refers to himself as an exile (*exul*) from the beginning of the *Tristia*; cf. *Tr.* 1.1.3, 1.2.37, 1.2.74, 1.3.82, 1.5.66. Claassen (1996), 571, offers a brief explanation of relegation versus exile, but the major consideration is A. Wheeler's (1988), xviii, point that "[r]elegatio was milder than the *exilium* of the late republic in that the poet's property was not confiscated and his civic rights were not taken from him." On exile and poetic immortality in Ovid, see Claassen (1996), (1999), 239–41.

118. On Ovid's self-proclaimed forgetfulness in exile, see, e.g., *Tr.* 4.1.39–40, 5.7.67–68.

119. Putnam (2001), 184. At *Tristia* 2.179–80, Ovid again presents himself as the victim of Phaethon's punishment, pleading to a *princeps* (here imagined in triumphal costume as Jupiter): "Show mercy, and sheathe the thunderbolt, your savage weapons—weapons, alas, all too familiar to wretched me!" Directly comparing his situation and that of Phaethon, Ovid claims that he deserves the sympathy of friends and family despite his exile, he declares (*Tr.* 4.3.65–66), "Nor because the king of the world extinguished fire with fire (*conspescuit ignibus ignes* ~ *Met.* 2.315, *saevis conspescuit ignibus ignes*) should Phaethon be rejected by his own."

120. Scholars have debated whether the "Caesar" mentioned in the poem is Augustus or Tiberius. For this and controversies surrounding the date, see Volk (2009), 1, 136–39, 156–58.

121. On Manilius and his place in the poetic milieu of the early first century CE, see especially Volk (2009) and Glauthier (2017); for political implications see Barton (1994); Gale (2011).

122. Gale (2011), 213; Bajoni (2004).

123. Manilius refers to the Punic conflict explicitly in his description of the wasteland of Libya (*Astr.* 4.658–61), which produced Hannibal, an incendiary figure who "blasted with fire the Alpine peaks . . . and poured Libya into Latium."

124. According to Volk (2003), 631, Manilius again figures himself as a cosmic chari-

oteer in the poet's second book (*Astr.* 2.138–40); see also Volk (2002), 225–34 on the triumphal imagery here. Volk comments on the prevalence of chariot imagery in Manilius generally but does not mention Phaethon specifically. Given his explicit reference to Phaethon's unsuccessful ride through the cosmos in Book 1, it would appear that 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/clear circuit/orbit” (*vacuo . . . orbe*) around the earth.

125. Glauthier (2017).

126. Gale (2011), 216–18.

127. As Glauthier (2017), 285, points out, “numerous writers of both poetry and prose traced the origins of the Milky Way back to Phaethon's disastrous chariot ride . . . although some sources attribute a version of this theory to the Pythagoreans (Arist. *Mete.* 1.8 345a14–16, *Aët.* 3.1.2 *Dox. Graec.* 364 / DK 58 B37c), Manilius remains vague.”

128. Glauthier (2017), 285.

129. *TLL* s.v. *patrius* II.A; cf. also Serv. *ad Aen.* 12.736 (*patrium a patria est derivativum*) and Serv. *auct. Aen.* 11.374 (*et a patre et a patria potest dici*). The image and term recur at *Astr.* 4.34 (. . . *cum patrias Phaethon temptavit habenas*).

130. Cf. Cic. *Rep.* 6.16 (Milky Way as the abode of heroic souls) and Verg. *G.* 1.34–35 (anticipation of Augustus's place in the firmament); cf. also Ovid's identification of the Milky Way as Jupiter's celestial residence (*Met.* 1.168–76) (on which see Nadeau [2000], 311–12).

131. Cicero also identifies the Milky Way with the abode of history's heroes in the *Somnium Scipionis* (19).

132. Phaethon also reappears at *Astr.* 4.834–37. On myth in didactic poetry: Gale (1994); Taub (2008).

133. Cf. Lucr. *DRN* 6.1138–1286.

134. Glauthier (2017), 292; see Benario (2005) on the possible connection of these lines (*Astr.* 1.896–903) to the disaster at Teutoburg in 9 CE.

135. Cf. *G.* 1.491–92, “fertilized a second time with Roman blood.” On poetic doubling in these lines see Lyne (1974). See also Joseph (2012a), 162; Gale (2011), 216.

136. Lowe (2004).

137. On the strict boundary of the *mundus* (cf. *Astr.* 1.456–531), see above, 27. On Manilian self-contradiction, see Volk (2011). D. Fowler (2000), 297–98, reads this passage as a fittingly “deconstructive” ending (of sorts) to the poem.

138. On the gradual restriction of free speech in Augustus's later years (especially after the disgrace of his daughter, the elder Julia, in 2 BCE) see Feeney (1992), 6–7; Newlands (1995), 175–76; P. Knox (2004), esp. 1–3, 12–17; Gar. Williams (2009b), 155.

139. Sen. *Controv.* 10.7; cf. Suet. *Calig.* 16.1. On the dating of this incident to between 6 and 8 CE, see F. Cramer (1945), 173n70; Hennig (1973) argues for a later date. See Howley (2017), 217–18, for a recent discussion.

140. See Tac. *Ann.* 4.34.1–2.

141. An anecdote from Seneca (*Dial.* 6.22.4), to be discussed further in this chapter's next section, suggests that personal animosity between Cremutius Cordus and Sejanus may have been the more proximate cause of his undoing. See Bellemore (1992).

142. Tac. *Ann.* 4.35.4.

143. McHugh (2004), 402, with bibliography.

144. Tac. *Ann.* 4.34.

145. Quintilian (10.1.104) could only read a mutilated (or perhaps expurgated) version of Cordus's account of Octavian's rise to power. See Howley (2017), 218, 227. The treatment in Tacitus is discussed in Suerbaum (1971), and reviewed in McHugh (2004).

146. Rudich ([1997] 2013), 16. The incident (from Suet. *Calig.* 27) is but one of a list of Caligula's depredations offered here by Rudich.

147. On Cordus in Seneca, see Bellemore (1992). See also F. Cramer (1945); Pease (1946), 145–60. Tacitus's account is to be discussed in more detail in chapter 5.

148. Seneca celebrates the survival of the texts on two levels (*Ad Marciam* 1.4): "He is now read, he flourishes: taken 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."

149. See chapter 1, 41–42, and chapter 3, 136–138.

150. As Wilcox (2006), 81, observes, Marcia's revival of her father's memory further develops the themes of preservation and reproduction, demonstrating her virtue in ways that transcend her status as mother to a (now deceased) son.

151. On the *Ad Marciam* and other early consolations as part of Seneca's generic experimentation with and development of the "cosmic viewpoint": Gar. Williams (2012), 214. On the *Ad Marciam* and Seneca's later discussion of natural disasters in *Natural Questions* 3.27–30: Weiner (2006), 224–25. On this passage's relationship to Lucan's cosmology: Weiner (2006), 224; Narducci (2004), 14–19.

152. Ker (2009), 122–25, assesses Seneca's extraction of philosophical lessons from tragic figures including Dido, Phaethon, and Medea.

153. Cf. *Met.* 2.327–38: *Quem si non tenuit / magnis tamen excidit ausis*; after Ker (2009), 123. Motto (2009), 120, characterizes the date as 58–59 CE, at the close of the so-called *Quinquennium Neronis* (54–59); during this period Seneca was at the height of his influence in the Neronian court.

Chapter 3

1. "Nero fiddled while Rome burned": see Gyles (1947).

2. See Elsner and Masters (1994), 4–5. See also Champlin (2003) *passim*; Libby (2011), 209–11. With Libby (2011), 211, when I speak of Nero, I refer "to the legendary Nero as characterized by the historiographical sources and the poetry of the first and second centuries."

3. Eleven ancient authors mention the fire altogether: Tac. *Ann.* 15.38–43; Suet.

Ner. 21.1, 38; Dio 62.16–18; Plin. *HN* 18.5; Pseud. Sen. *Ep. ad Paul.*, 11 (12); Stat. *Silv.* 2.7.60–61; anon. *Oct.* 831–33; Aur. Vict. *Caes.* 5; Euseb. *Chron.* 64; Eutr. *Brev.* 7.14; Sulp. Sev. *Cron.* 2.29; Oros. 7.7.4–6. Lucan's *De incendio urbis* does not survive.

4. On Nero's cultivation of a literary circle at Rome, see Sen. *Apocol.* 4; Calp. *Ecl.* 1.33–88; *Einsiedeln Eclogues* 1.38–41, 2.15–38; Morford (1973), 210–15, and (1985), 2003–30; Griffin (1984), 146–55; J. Sullivan (1985), 19–56. Sullivan (1985), 56–59, reads *Einsiedeln Eclogues* 1.38–41 as an ironic comment on Calpurnius Siculus's praise of the new Neronian “Golden Age.”

5. On the blend of real and fantastical elements of Roman funerary culture in the *Cena Trimalchionis*, see Erasmo (2008), 22; Hope (2009); on authorship and death in the *Satyricon*, see Connors (1994).

6. Slater (1990), 86; cf. Bartsch (1994), 198. On this episode generally, see Arrow-smith (1966), 304–31; see also Conte (1987), 530; Rimell (2002), 165–70; Edwards (2007), 169–75; Rudich ([1997] 2013), 225–54.

7. On Trimalchio's theatricality, see Sandy (1974), 329–46; Saylor (1987), 593–602; Slater (1990); Rosati (1999); Rimell (2002); Frangoulidis (2008). On “fatal charades”: Coleman (1990), 44–73, discusses the term and vets the ancient sources. See also Kyle (1998); Champlin (2003), 122–24.

8. In the extended conflation of myth and reality that precedes the passage quoted above, Trimalchio has already recited a garbled version of the Trojan Horse story (*Sat.* 52.2). In Trimalchio's version, Daedalus is the mastermind; Trimalchio apparently conflates him with another “Daedalus”—Trimalchio's chef, who has just served a sausage-stuffed *porcus Troianus* (*Sat.* 49.9–10). Bodel (1994) notes a probable allusion to the underworld to which Aeneas descends in *Aeneid* 6 when Encolpius and his companions enter Trimalchio's house and find themselves “trapped in a new kind of labyrinth” (*novi generis labyrintho inclusi*, 73.1).

9. The ambiguous instructions to “play something cute” (*dicite aliquid belli*) could also mean “say something nice.” When removed from context, *aliquid belli* could mean “something from the War,” i.e., a song related to the Trojan cycle.

10. As Schmeling (2011 *ad loc.*) points out, this phrase may also indicate that Encolpius et al. made some sort of exculpatory gesture as they gave Agamemnon the slip.

11. On Trimalchio as a figure for Nero, see Walsh (1970), 137–39; K. Rose (1971), Appendix A. Bartsch (1994), 199, sums up the most compelling parallels. See also Vout (2009), 101–2.

12. On the blurring of performance and reality in the era, see Boyle (2006), 145, 160–88; Bartsch (1994), 1–62 on Nero's propensity for “stage invasion.”

13. 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], 644–45), not to mention the booby-trapped boat he devised for his first attempt to kill Agrippina: the collapsing boat mechanism he had seen at a spectacle. Suetonius (*Ner.* 21.3) reports that the sight of Nero bound in chains as the title

character in *Hercules Furens* so distressed a newly recruited soldier that he disrupted the performance, gauchely rushing to his emperor's aid, much as Petronius's *vigiles* imagine Trimalchio's house fire; see Bartsch (1994), 47–49. On myth in this episode, see Schmeling (2002), 162.

14. Edwards (2007), 256n37. Vout (2009), 102, argues that shifting the frame to consider the overall representation of reality allows us to see “not that Trimalchio is Nero, for this would be to simplify them both, but that they are painted using a similar palette.”

15. Rimell (2002), 39, comments: “[T]he framing of [the *Cena*] defines authorship as control of representation, the ability to manipulate an audience which on the surface at least must enjoy being deceived (*totum populum sibi suaviter facientem*, 71.1).” On the connections between the grandiose self-stylization of the characters of the *Satyrice* and the extreme aestheticization of politics in Neronian Rome, see now also Freudenburg (2017).

16. Tacitus's account of the fire (*Ann.* 15.38–41) is discussed in chapter 5.

17. On history as intertext, see introduction.

18. The argument for Nero's innocence is most clearly laid out in Bradley's (1978) commentary on Suetonius. See also, e.g., Warmington (1969), 123–24; Griffin (1984), 133; Wiedemann (1996), 250–51; S. Dyson (2010), 164–65; Panella (2011a), 85–86; Pollini (2017), 213n1. The outlier is Champlin (2003), 178–209, who asserts that both the swift and brilliant execution of the plans for the Golden House and the contemporary accusations of the would-be assassin Subrius Flavus point toward the conclusion that Nero did indeed set the fire to realize his dreams of building a new Rome.

19. Fires of sufficient severity create their own weather, sucking wind inward from different directions to create a kind of cyclone effect (observable in modern calamities such as the 1945 destruction of Dresden), which even today is extremely difficult to extinguish; Rubin (2004), 103–4.

20. Rubin (2004), 103–4.

21. Trans. Cary (1914–27).

22. See above, 12–13.

23. For the Tiberian fire on the Caelian, see chapter 2.

24. See also Rubin (2004), 104, and Pollini (2017), 222, on firebreaks as a likely explanation for the rumors of arson and demolition.

25. There is some debate about exactly which regions were spared, which were partially damaged, and which were 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 partial waste.

26. See Closs (2016). On the 64 fire and Nero as a religious failure in Tacitus, see Shannon (2012).

27. On Roman funerary practice (and the risks of ritual pollution, if procedures were not followed) see Toynbee (1971), 43; Morris (1989), 296–320, and (1992); Erasmo (2008).

28. See above, 36–41.

29. These altars are discussed extensively in Closs (2016) and more briefly in chapter 4; see below, 145–150.

30. Tac. *Ann.* 15.44. Shaw (2015) has recently advanced the controversial premise that the Christians were not specifically targeted as arsonists, but rather that they were punished (or rather “persecuted”) for their faith alone. C. Jones (2017) rebuts these claims at length, while Pollini (2017), 213, does so more briefly. See now also van der Lans and Bremmer (2017). Ultimately, the accuracy or falsity of Nero’s accusations against the Christians—as well as what exactly these accusations entailed—is irrelevant to the arguments advanced in this study, which focuses more on the myths and legends that attached to Nero as creative expressions in their own right.

31. For example, 7 Daniel 2; 6 Revelation 13–14; see Harrill (2010) and Pollini (2017), 234–36, with bibliography. As Pollini (2017), 236, suggests, a belief may have spread that the Christians’ disregard for Rome’s traditional gods had led to a “disruption of the *pax deorum* and consequently the loss of divine good will and protection” from the fire.

32. Tacitus (*Ann.* 15.44.5) asserts that Nero’s Christian victims deserved harsh punishment, although he remarks that Nero’s inventively cruel punishments ultimately dismayed onlookers. On the lasting blame Nero’s persecutions attracted from the early Christian tradition (e.g., association with the Antichrist) and his consequent elevation to folkloric villainy, see Champlin (2003), 1–35.

33. Tac. *Ann.* 15.44. The *tunica molesta* or flaming shirt was commonly used to execute criminals in ancient Greece and Rome (cf. Juvenal 8.235; Martial 10.25.5; Sen. *Ep.* 14.5), but its widespread use elsewhere does not preclude the idea that it would have a special significance for accused arsonists; see Barrett (1977); Pellegrino (2000). On the theatricalization of death as punishment and entertainment in “fatal charades,” see Coleman (1990).

34. These punishments, as Champlin (2003), 136–39, has shown, employ a highly allusive form 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; another starred in a re-creation of the gruesome death of Dirce, tied to a rampant bull, reflecting the lost Amphitheater of Statilius Taurus.

35. Cf. the remarks of Owen and Gildenhard (2013) *ad* Tac. *Ann.* 15.43.

36. Owen and Gildenhard (2013) *ad* Tac. *Ann.* 15.43.2.

37. See Gyles (1947); Champlin (2003), 60–65.

38. Champlin (2003), esp. 48–50, makes this point about a great number of stories concerning Nero.

39. Suet. *Ner.* 38.2: *e turre Maecenatiana prospectans*; Dio 62.18.1: ἔς . . . τὸ ἄκρον τοῦ παλατίου . . . ἀνῆλθε. It seems unlikely that Nero would have come as close as the Palatine, which was extensively damaged in the fire (cf. Champlin [2003], 123). Dio may have been using the term in a more generic sense of “imperial residence.” The literary

pedigree of Maecenas himself would suggest Maecenas's property as an ideal "observatory" for Nero to perform his song as he gazes upon the city in flames. See Labate (2016), 79–80, and Wiseman (2016).

40. Suet. *Ner.* 38.2; Dio 62.18.1.

41. If Nero performed with a *cithara*, as the costume Dio describes would suggest, the song was presumably long-format narrative poetry; the costume described by Suetonius suggests a tragic monologue. See Fantham (2013), 21–25.

42. Dio tells us that from Nero's high vantage point "the overview of the majority of conflagration would be best" (μάλιστα σύνοπτα τὰ πολλὰ τῶν καιομένων ἦν); Suetonius tells us Nero said he "delighted in the fire's beauty" (*laetusque "flammae," ut aiebat, "pulchritudine"*).

43. Dio calls Nero's song ἄλωσιν Ἰλίου, but of course he was writing in Greek; Suetonius uses a Latinized version of the same Greek term, *Halosin Ilii*. This may be a generic term for the song's topic, however, rather than an indication of the language Nero used.

44. Dio (62.29.1) describes Nero's performance of the *Troica* at the Second Neronia in 65. The poem was probably either an epic or a series of shorter vignettes. Courtney (1993), followed by Rudich ([1997], 2013), 229, and Rimell (2002), 66n14, posits that the fall of Troy that Suetonius reports as Nero's "performance" during the fire is drawn from this work. On Nero's poetry, see notes to Champlin (2003), 82–83, with bibliography. On the *Troica*, see J. Sullivan (1985), 91–92; the fragments, with commentary, in Courtney (1993), 359; further discussion in Morelli (1914), 135–38.

45. Champlin (2003) argues for Nero's own agency in advancing his identity as a mythic figure, but see also Bartsch (1994) on the performative culture of early imperial Rome more generally.

46. Champlin (2003), 185–91, cites, e.g., Nero's temporary blindness at the threshold of the Temple of Vesta as an allusion to Caecilius Metellus (cf. Ov. *Fast.* 6.453–54).

47. Two of Nero's more notorious attributed remarks suggest a desire to imitate Priam (Dio 62.16.1) and see his city burn (Suet. *Ner.* 38.1). Yet as Champlin (2003), 319n13, convincingly demonstrates, both these comments are also attributed to Tiberius and have denser contexts in the Tiberian narratives in which they appear. Suetonius and Dio may simply have "harvested" these anecdotes and replanted them in their respective Neronian narratives, where they made comfortable bedfellows with the profusion of other incendiary material.

48. Champlin (2003), 96–111, connects Nero's embrace of the roles of Oedipus, Orestes, and Periander of Athens to (respectively) 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 his own pregnant wife.

49. Pliny would later disparage Nero as the *imperator scaenicus* (*Pan.* 46.4). On Nero's obsession with the theater and the arts, Bartsch (1994) is fundamental, esp. 1–62; see also Gyles (1962); Frazer (1966); Griffin (1984), 160–63; Morford (1985); Woodman

(1993); Boyle (1994), 34–37; (2006), 183–88; Edwards (1994); Champlin (2003), 53–83; Libby (2011), 212.

50. See Feeney (2007), 105–7.

51. Tac. *Ann.* 11.11.5; Suet. *Ner.* 7. For other claims to Trojan myth, see Suet. *Iul.* 39; Aug. 43.2. See O’Gorman (2000), 162–75; Edwards (2013), 553.

52. O’Gorman (2000), 179.

53. Nero assumed the *toga virilis* a year early, at the age of thirteen; see Tac. *Ann.* 12.41.

54. See Sage (2000) on the Trojan landscape in the Roman imagination. Suet. *Ner.* 6 specifies that the speech for Bononia, in Latin, was Nero’s first, but Tac. *Ann.* 12.5 identifies the Troy speech (in Greek) as his first. See Freudenburg (2009), 204; Edwards (2013), 553.

55. Bononia had been under the patronage of the Antonii in the late republic and followed Antony, who reestablished a colony there, in his war against Octavian (*PECS* s.v. Bononia). Bononia was also the site of the meeting between Antony, Octavian, and Lepidus in 43 BCE, which resulted in the formation of the Second Triumvirate (Cic. *Fam.* 11.13, 12.5; Dio 46.36.54; Suet. *Aug.* 96). Appian (*B Civ.* 3.69) alone gives a different location. See Southern (1998), 53, for discussion of sources. An inscription found at Bononia shows that Nero followed through, providing a new bath complex (*CIL* XI.720); cf. Collins-Clinton (2000), 103n11.

56. On the vituperation of Antony’s memory, see Gurval (1995), 234; Flower (2006), 116–18.

57. The text does not survive, but the *Incendium* was presumably a broad comedy that was set, as Afranius’s other works were, at Rome. On Afranius generally, see, e.g., Kenney and Clausen (1982), 193–94; Manuwald (2010), 150–52.

58. On the performance of *Incendium*, see Suet. *Ner.* 11.2; on the balcony, Suet. *Ner.* 12.1. See also Kelly (1979), 30n6; Champlin (2003), 287nn46–47.

59. Champlin (2003), 69.

60. See Manuwald (2011), 119.

61. If, on the other hand, the reperformance of the *Incendium* dates to after the Fire of 64, Nero could be seen as playing on the recent memory of the Great Fire.

62. During his lifetime, Nero generally enjoyed great popular favor and was mourned after his death for many years; see Flower (2006), 198–99.

63. Tac. *Ann.* 15.22.

64. Tac. *Ann.* 14.59–65. On the disputed date of the Pompeii/Campania earthquake(s), see Hine (1984); Wallace-Hadrill (2003); Gar. Williams (2012), 10n26. For the earthquake in Seneca, see Ker (2009), 107–9; Gar. Williams (2012), 213–18.

65. Tac. *Ann.* 15.33–34.

66. Tacitus (*Ann.* 14.14), Suetonius (*Ner.* 19), Dio (61.17.5, 62.6.3–5, 62.24.2, 62.29.1, 63.1.1), and Juvenal (8.219–30) all view Nero’s interest in creative expression as unforgivably inappropriate. See Erasmo (2004), 117–21; Fantham (2013), with bibliography.

67. On Troy's foundational role in Latin literature, see in introduction, 12–13. Surviving indications of the Trojan trend in the Neronian era include Seneca's *Troades* and *Agamemnon*; Lucan's *Bellum Civile* 10 and (lost) *Iliacon*; and the *Ilias Latina*, produced around 60–70 CE; see also Pers. *Sat.* 1.1–5, which mocks Attius Labeo, a Neronian-era poet, who translated the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* word for word. Persius also mentions here his own *Polydamas et Troiades* (*Sat.* 1.4).

68. Serv. *ad Aen.* 5.370: *sane hic Paris secundum Troica Neronis fortissimus fuit, adeo ut in Troiae agionali certamine superaret omnes, ipsum etiam Hectorem*. See Freudenburg (2001), 156, and (2009), 204.

69. Champlin (2003), 83.

70. The tradition of Hecuba's dream is at least as old as Pindar (*Paean* fr. 8 Loeb) and is further elaborated in Euripides (*Tro.* 595–600, 922); see Koniaris (1973).

71. See, e.g., Amata's lines at Verg. *Aen.* 7.319–22.

72. Lovatt (1999), 126; see also La Penna (1987); Mader (1997); Feldherr (1995); after N. Bernstein (2004), 62.

73. Verg. *Aen.* 2.303: *summi fastigia tecti*. At *Aen.* 2.469–558, Aeneas witnesses the death of Priam inside the palace, apparently from the rooftop where he and his doomed group of warriors have just toppled a tower onto a column of Greeks. On *Aeneid* 2 as an analogue for the fall of the Roman republic, see Hardie (2013).

74. Owen and Gildenhart (2013), 192.

75. For Augustus as Nero's model (cf. Suet. *Ner.* 10.1), see Griffin (1984), 50–66, esp. 62–63, 96, 115, 200–205, 216; Champlin (2003), 139–44.

76. Cf. Champlin (2003), 237.

77. Tac. *Ann.* 15.41. For interpretation and bibliography, see Feeney (2007), 105–6, 259n222.

78. Suet. *Ner.* 39; cf. Liv. 5.49–55.

79. See also Astin (1967), 182; O'Gorman (2000), 168–73; Edwards (2013), 542–43.

80. Owen and Gildenhart (2013), 192.

81. Imaginative operations including rumors, performances, and legends are no less based on literary impulses—pattern recognition, memory, allusion, audience—than written texts. See, e.g., Colebrook (1997), 24; Laden (2004), 1–2.

82. Nero's *domus/urbs* conflation in Tacitus: *Ann.* 15.37.1. See Cogitore (2002).

83. Griffin (1984), 140. See also K. Welch (2007), 157–58, on the resemblance between Tacitus's descriptions of the party on the *Stagnum Agrippae* and the design of the *Stagnum Neronis*.

84. Tac. *Ann.* 43.1; Suet. *Ner.* 39.2. Pliny (*HN* 33.54, 36.111) and Martial (*Spect.* 2.4), both supporters of the Flavian dynasty's efforts to assassinate Nero's memory, echo these accusations.

85. The idea of the Golden House's likely accessibility to (at least some) of the public was first advanced by Griffin (1984), 139–41, and further elaborated by Ball (1994) and Champlin (2003), 187–210. Champlin (2003), 208–9, further speculates that at least

some segment of the public had some access to the property's bath, entertainment, and park zones. See also Flower (2006), 231, 340nn75–76; La Rocca (2017), 206.

86. Cf. the view awarded to Scipio in the *Somnium* (Cic. *Rep.* 6.11.20). On the philosophical appeal of this perspective in Seneca, see Gar. Williams (2012), esp. 336–39.

87. Suet. *Ner.* 31.1–2; Tac. *Ann.* 15.42; see also Champlin (2003), 200–202.

88. See Bergmann (1998), 133–230; Albertson (2001). Champlin (2003), 129–31, and Rutledge (2012), 126–27, provide further argument and bibliography. On the architectural innovations of the Golden House generally, the treatments of Panella (2011b), Meyboom and Moormann (2013), and La Rocca (2017) are good starting points.

89. As Champlin notes (2003), 115–20, we see representations of Nero as Apollo Citharoedus as early as 62, but this is in a capacity distinct from his solar associations. Only after 64 do we see the radiate crown in Nero's portraiture; Nero's public appearances as a charioteer also date to 64.

90. For further discussion, see Champlin (2003), 112–44; Pollini (2012), 151–53.

91. Pliny (*HN* 36.136); also mentions a brilliantly translucent yellow-white Cappadocian stone used to build temple housing an ancient statue of Fortuna; see Champlin (2003), 129.

92. As Pollini (2012), 161n111, suggests, the banner may have formed a model or pendant for the Colossus itself.

93. Castagna (2000), 36n11.

94. Champlin (2003), 306n37, with bibliography; see also Bergmann (1993), 5–6, 14–16, and (1998), 123–230.

95. Nero's apparent mania for amber may also suggest a subtle nod to the amber tears of Phaethon's sisters; see Champlin (2003), 134–35.

96. Heslin (2007), 19–20. Heslin's arguments draw to some extent on Plin. *HN* 2.182–87, 6.211–18, 7.212–15, 18.326–33, and 36.71–73; as listed in Heslin (2007), 4nn14–15.

97. Fantham (2011) provides a fine biographical sketch of Lucan, with bibliography. On fire as Caesar's defining element, see Rosner-Siegel ([1983] 2010); Tracy (2011), 37.

98. *Aen.* 1.7, cf. *BC* 1.24–26: *at nunc semirutis pendent quod moenia tectis / urbibus Italiae lapsisque ingentia muris / saxa iacent*. . . . On Lucan's engagement with Vergil, see especially Narducci (1979) and Conte (1988). On Lucan's radical approach to blending politics and poetics more generally, see Narducci (1985) and (2002); J. Henderson (1987); Masters (1992); Bartsch (1997); Sklenář (2003).

99. Trans. Roche (2005), 59. With Roche (2005), 60n22, I accept *excutiet* over *excipiet* as more consistent with the imagery of dissolution here. Hudson-Williams (1952) argues for an emendation to the latter; Mackay (1953) for the former.

100. So Morford (2002), 188.

101. *Aen.* 1.148–53; on which see above, chapter 1, 45–48. The points of comparison between Lucan's first simile and Vergil's statesman simile are largely summed up by Roche (2005), 59. On Lucan's relationship to Vergil more generally, see Casali (2011).

102. Masters (1992), 98, after Thompson and Bruère (1968), 5, points out the emphasis on balance in this passage. Yet we should note that this is not the only “mechanistic” feature of the passage. Lapidge ([1979] 2010), 310, points out that the *conpages* which dissolve “originally meant ‘putting together’ (*con* + *pingo*) and hence ‘structure’ or ‘framework’ (of a ship, for example).” In the first century CE, 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* (Man. 2.803) (so Lapidge [(1979) 2010], 310).

103. 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, 804–7). On Stoicism in Lucan, see, e.g., Radicke (2004); Roche (2005); Weiner (2006), 131–44.

104. Roche (2005), 61–62, sums up the attitudes apparent in the majority of Greek and Latin treatises on the topic, concluding that universal conflagration was not merely or even primarily viewed as a destruction but as the necessary prelude to *palingenesis*, rebirth and reconstitution. The idea that regeneration is somehow to be excluded from Lucan’s conception of *ekpyrosis*, perhaps with recourse to an imagined lost Stoic text which denies the postapocalyptic recovery, would seem a counsel of despair; cf. Roche’s (2005), 68–69, comments on Rosenmeyer. See also Rosenmeyer (1989), 149. Sklenář (1999), 284n12, however, suggests that Lucan reacts here to the inherently problematic nature of the doctrine, citing Philo (*Indestructibility* 87–93), who points out the “fatal gap in the Stoic cyclical theory”; i.e., that given fire’s reliance on the other elements for fuel, it “destroys its own means of sustenance” and thus would “be left with no power to generate a new cycle” after *ekpyrosis*.

105. S. Wheeler (2002), 373–76. For continuity between Ovid and Lucan generally, see also Feeney (1991), 292–301; Tarrant (2002), 356–60.

106. Cf. Hinds (1987), 28–29; S. Wheeler (2002), 370.

107. Whether Lucan’s protestations work to allay the fears that Phaethon represents, or if they in fact draw attention to their frightening implications is much discussed; Duret (1986), 146–48, and Champlin (2003), 134–35, think that the Phaethon myth is implied but in a positive sense; see also Hinds (1987), 26–29; Dewar (1994), 211; Auhaugen (1997), 96–99; Lovatt (2005), 38–40; Rosati (2008), 186; Nauta (2010), 260–65; Rebeggiani (2013), 188; Cordes (2017), 184. More generally, whether to take the praise of Nero in the proem ironically or seriously is a famous crux of scholarship: Grimal (1960), 299, Ahl (1976), 30, and Dewar (1994), 199–211, have been particularly influential. The choices and their implications are deftly delineated, with bibliography, in O’Hara (2007), 133–44.

108. On Lucan’s models for cosmographic praise, see Gee (2000), 188–89.

109. As Barchiesi ([1994] 1997), 82, makes clear, we need not think that political *laudes* and playfulness are totally incompatible; cf. Gee (2000), 188.

110. On Tellus’s pleas in the *Metamorphoses* for Jupiter to stop Phaethon’s rampage, see above, chapter 2, 86–87.

111. Cordes (2017), 184.
112. Bexley (2009), 460, after Masters (1992), asserts that Nero's role in the proem at *BC* 1.53–58 introduces Lucan's preoccupation with the politics of space and one-man rule: "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."
113. Fantham (1992), 392–438.
114. *Iliakon* fr. 6, in Lact. Plac. on Stat. *Theb.* 6.322 (Courtney [1993], 353–54).
115. This image also may recollect Vergil's recollection of the overflowing Po in *Georgics* 1 (*G.* 1.481–83), discussed above in chapter 1, 48–49.
116. Luc. *BC* 1.120–57; cf. Cat. 64 (106–12), figuring Theseus as a lightning bolt destroying an oak tree, which represents the Minotaur. On the irony of Pompey's "greatness" in the poem, see Feeney (1986).
117. Rosner-Siegel ([1983] 2010), 187. For further discussion of Caesar's persistent association in Lucan with fire and (to a lesser extent) wind, see Tracy (2014), 206–7, 228, 243–45. On the symbolic relation between Caesar and lightning, see Chaudhuri (2014), 156–94. Curio's speech of encouragement "inflames" Caesar's passion for bloodshed (1.191–92, *addidit irae / accenditque ducem*); later, the sight of Pompeian soldiers enjoying a brief reprieve from fighting at Dyrrachium is enough to "inflamm" Caesar with sudden rage (6.282, *accendit pax ipsa loci, movitque furorem*). For fire's association with civil war more generally in Lucan, see Tracy (2014), 224.
118. See also Tracy (2014), 110n31, who sees a patriotic "correction" of Ovid's version here: "[a] rivalry with the Nile is also implied by Lucan's account of the Po's resistance to Phaethon's conflagration because, according to Ovid, the Po was dried up with all the rest of the world's rivers during the catastrophe, and only the Nile escaped by concealing its source in remote regions (*Metamorphoses* 2.254–59)."
119. For discussion of the eclipse in *Georgics* 1, see chapter 1, 48–49. For the mourning of the Sun/Phoebus in *Metamorphoses* 2, see chapter 2, 87. As Chaudhuri (2014), 166–67, notes, Ovid's description of Phoebus's mourning for Phaethon (*Met.* 381–93) bears a number of lexical similarities to the eclipse in Lucan (*BC* 7.1–6). For related imagery in Seneca's *Thyestes*, see Chaudhuri (2014), 168–69.
120. Chaudhuri (2014), 168.
121. See J. Thomas (2008), 89–90.
122. Asso (2011b).
123. 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. Bourguery (1928) lays fundamental groundwork in this line of thinking. Likewise, the importance of geographical symbolism is acknowledged implicitly by J. Henderson (1998), 189, on Lucan's "geophysical poetics"; Bartsch (1997), 13, on rivers; and Rossi (2000), 579, who argues that Lucan creates a reversal of the *Aeneid*'s progression from east to west.
124. As Asso (2011b), 393–96, points out, Libya's "hostile" geography at several points

recalls the description of Caesar as a thunderbolt (*BC* 1.151–57), and the North African weather itself becomes a metaphor for civil war when a storm is described as raging against its own people, bringing “more devastation than fire” (9.445–53). See also Pogorzelski (2011) and Tracy (2014).

125. See above, chapter 2, 85.

126. As Behr (2007), 164, argues, the central figures of calamity from *Aeneid* 2, fire and serpents, are introduced in Lucan’s *Libya* to emphasize Cato’s immunity to them (in contrast to the susceptibility of all his comrades).

127. The situational irony serves to undercut the use in *BC* 9 of geographical and astrological knowledge to valorize Cato’s character; see Seewald (2008), 391–410.

128. Leigh (2000); after Seo (2011), 218–19.

129. See above, chapter 1, 58.

130. Cf. Joseph (2017).

131. Meyboom and Moormann (2013, Vol. I) compile a range of Senecan texts that they speculate are covert responses not to the fire per se but to Nero’s elaborate Golden House; on which see now also Edwards (forthcoming).

132. Death of Agrippina: Tac. *Ann.* 14.1–9; death of Octavia: Tac. *Ann.* 14.60–64; suspicion of poisoning the praetorian prefect Burrus: Tac. *Ann.* 14.51. Following the philosopher’s attempt to further distance himself from the emperor in the fire’s aftermath, Nero attempted to poison him (Tac. *Ann.* 15.45.3).

133. For discussion of these letters and the questions surrounding their composition and publication, see Griffin (1976), 416–19; Wilson (1987), 103–4, with bibliography; Richardson-Hay (2006), 34n55; Ker (2009), 149n10.

134. Only one contemporary event at Rome (mentioned only in passing) can be assigned a firm date: at *Ep.* 70.26, Seneca mentions a water-combat show which ought to be that of 64 CE; see K. Rose (1971), 70–71.

135. See Koestermann (1963–68), vol. 4, 360, for the date of the Lyons fire; Tacitus (*Ann.* 16.13) lists Nero’s large financial gift to the city following an unspecified disaster in his end-of-year report for 65 CE, which (as Koestermann points out) does not permit any certainty about dating. The date of *Letter* 91 has most recently and thoroughly been discussed by Griffin (2013), 95–97; Gar. Williams (2014), 138–39, with bibliography.

136. See Bedon (1991), 47–48; Viti (1997); André (2002), 171; Ker (2009), 149; Edwards (2011), 651; (2013), 549–50; Gar. Williams (2014), 138–46. Modern archaeological efforts have yet to uncover a trace of any destruction at Lyons dateable to this period. See Pelletier (1999), 21, although Griffin (1984), 267n21, speculates that fire damage caused an apparent gap in the chronology of the Lugdunum mint in 65. See also Ker’s (2009), 108, comments on disagreements in the sources about Seneca’s potential contributions to Nero’s rebuilding program at Rome, as well as for indications in Tacitus that the two fires were seen as reciprocal events.

137. On the “specularity” of Seneca’s letters, see Rimell (2013), esp. 15–19.

138. Siwicky (2015), 257.

139. Gummere (1920) *ad loc.*
140. Seneca mentions destructions in Asia, Achaea, Syria, Macedonia, and Cyprus (Sen. *Ep.* 91.9).
141. Ker (2009), 108. The emphasis is Ker's.
142. Sack of Ardea: see Gummere (1920) *ad loc.* Ruins of Ardea: Verg. *Aen.* 7.411–13. Ov. *Met.* 14.573–80.
143. Most notably in *Ep.* 86; see especially J. Henderson (2004), 53–61, 93–176; Ker (2009), 344–51; Rimell (2013). See also Gowing (2005), 80–81.
144. Sen. *Clem.* 1.9–11; see Braund (2009), 61–64, on this passage.
145. This remark is generally taken to refer to the peace following the cessation of campaigns against the Parthians in 63 (Tac. *Ann.* 15.29). Nero went on to issue coins (e.g., RIC 50) that bore the legend PACE P R TERRA MARIQ PARTA IANVM CLVSIT, “The Peace of the Roman People having been established on Land and Sea, [he] closed (the Temple of) Janus.”
146. Verg. *Aen.* 1.2 (*multum ille et terris iactatus et alto*), 1.5 (*multa quoque et bello passus*).
147. On Vergilian *labor*, Altevogt (1952) remains fundamental; for more recent reevaluations, see, e.g., Ross (1987), 76–81, 139–42; R. Thomas (1988), 16–24; Batstone (1997), 137–38; R. Cramer (1998), 28–43; Jenkyns (1998), 678–84; Nappa (2003).
148. Suet. *Aug.* 25. On Augustan poets' playful variations on the Latinized motto, see Savage (1966).
149. Tacitus (*Ann.* 15.41) reports the destruction of buildings in Rome in 64 dating back to Rome's mythic regnal period. See Platner and Ashby (1929), 58–60, 440–43; Scott in *LTUR* 4:189–92, *LTUR* 5:125–28.
150. Dio (46.50) says the Senate ordered the foundation of Lugdunum to keep a group of displaced Roman citizens from joining Mark Antony's side and bringing their armies into the conflict with Octavian.
151. Censorinus *DN* 17.5–6. See Hall (1986); Feeney (2007), 145–49; Luke (2014), 15–18.
152. On cosmic dissolution generally, see introduction, 13–15. On Seneca's Stoicism and Lucan's poetics, see Weiner (2010).
153. See, e.g., Sen. *QNat.* 3.29.9; Sen. *Dial.* 11.1.2 (*dies aliquis*); Sen. *Ep.* 102.22 (*dies ille*).
154. Cf. *nimium felix* (Cic. *Phil.* 2.39.8; Verg. *Aen.* 4.657; Luc. *BC* 8.139); *nimia felicitate* (Curt. 10.3.9.2). See also Prop. 2.32.43 (*o nimium nostro felicem tempore Romam*).
155. See Colish (2014), 97–100. At *Ep.* 91.4, Seneca specifically invokes the technique of pre-rehearsal. Weiner (2010), 164–65, offers a brief but revealing analysis of *Ep.* 91 as a form of Stoic *praemeditatio*.
156. See Griffin (1992), 455–56. At *Ben.* 6.22.1, Seneca imagines Liberalis inadvertently provoking a universal conflagration with his insufficiently rigorous understanding of Stoic cosmology and ethics. Liberalis's prior brush with incendiary metaphor in

Seneca's work may well have gained new significance, at least for Seneca's informed readers, in the summer of 64.

157. Seneca also calls to mind his former pupil in *Ep.* 91 with an anecdote concerning Alexander the Great's recalcitrance with his teacher (*Ep.* 91.17). Seneca's use of Alexander's exemplum in the *Ep. ad Luc.* typically illustrates tyrannical and excessive behavior. See Graver and Long (2015) *ad Ep.* 59.12. For Alexander in Lucan and Seneca, see Tracy (2014), 118–19.

158. Ker (2009), 107–8, suggests multiple puns at work here: “The letter's real purpose may be partly to present the disaster as an opportunity for Liberalis to live up to his name and contribute *beneficia* for the rebuilding of his native city, though there is some satire in his depiction (note, for example, the fire imagery of *flagranti*).”

159. OLD s.v. *incredibilis*; cf. TLL VII.1.1037, 40–41 (I. *sensu passivo*, i.q. *fide non dignus, quod credi non potest*).

160. Bedon (1991), 55, argues that Seneca's silence on the Rome conflagration is an indication of his belief that Nero was responsible for the fire. Tracy (2014), 247, remarks that at least an incidental reference to Nero in this letter would not be out of place, especially since Tacitus notes that Nero sent financial relief to Lugdunum. Yet given Seneca's general silence in the *Ep. ad Luc.* about current events in Rome, this may be overstating the case; cf. J. Henderson (2004), 158–59. I thank my student John Herring for pointing out the possible significance of Seneca's remarks at *Ep.* 91.20.

161. Sen. *Ben.* 6.32.3. At *Ep.* 81.3, Seneca refers to the *De beneficiis* as a completed work, implying that it was finished by the letter's dramatic date of June 64. See Griffin (2013), 91–96, with bibliography.

162. On Seneca's assumption of the persona of “departed consoler” during his earlier relegation to Corsica, see Ker (2009), chap. 4. For similar interpretations of Senecan tragedy, see, e.g., Lawall (1982), who argues that the destruction of Troy in the *Troades* mirrors the dissolution of contemporary Roman society.

163. Libby (2011), 209.

164. So Libby (2011), 229.

165. Although few of the passages discussed in this chapter can be securely identified as pre- (or, less commonly, post-) conflagration, the likelihood is that much of this material was written before the disaster, since Seneca and Lucan both died in April of 65; Petronius (in all probability) followed them a year later.

Chapter 4

1. Elsner (1994), 2–8; Sablayrolles (1994); Champlin (2003), 43–44, 85–101; Varner (2004), 10–11; Flower (2006), 197–232, esp. 212–22.

2. To give only the most iconic example, the vituperation of Nero's memory and renewal of Augustan-style civic building was implicitly suggested by the Flavian Amphitheater, built on the outline of Nero's private lake; it found further and more explicit

expression, however, in Martial's *Liber spectaculorum* 2. See, e.g., Coleman (2006) *ad loc.*; Rimell (2008), 117–18; Roman (2010), 94–96. See also Walter (1998), 240–41; Gunderson (2003), 636–58; Cordes (2017), 67–79.

3. *Nova Roma*: Mart. *Ep.* 5.7.3, to be discussed below in this chapter; cf. also the description in Tac. *Ann.* 15.43, discussed further in chapter 5. See also Closs (2016), 16n69.

4. Plin. *HN* 17.5.

5. Statius frequently alludes to Horace, Vergil, and Ovid as his predecessors in the role of *vates*, a comparison that indirectly flatters his patron Domitian as a new Augustus. His attention to Lucan and the Neronian poetic legacy is more ambiguous; while these references still cater to Domitian in that they advance the Flavian vituperation of Nero's memory, they also deal with a historical and poetic legacy that is still relatively fresh in Roman memory; see Rosati (2014).

6. Ahl (1971). The suggestion of McGann (1975) that the *De incendio urbis* may actually have been a prose composition has not found wide acceptance, but in any case the question has little impact on the arguments here.

7. Rebggiani (2013), 194. See also van Dam (1984), 480–81, and Newlands (2011), 237–38.

8. Martial's *Epigrams* (7.21, 7.22, 10.64) offer further evidence of Polla Argentaria's active cultivation of Lucan's memory.

9. That Statius reads Lucan's epic as an anti-Neronian work is clear from *Silvae* 2.7. Cf. Nauta (2010), 264; Rebggiani (2013), 194n31.

10. Cf. Closs (2016).

11. For the fire of 80 as inspiration for *Ep.* 5.7, see Howell (1995) and Canobbio (2011) *ad Ep.* 5.7; see also Walter (1996), Otto (2010), and Mindt (2013), 521, on the poem's "transformative" nature.

12. On the many monuments dedicated by or to Nero that continued to stand with his name intact or conspicuously removed, see Flower (2006), 197–232; on his posthumous popularity, see Champlin (2003), 1–35.

13. Suet. *Vesp.* 8.5.1.

14. Tac. *Hist.* 3.71–72. The Flavian Temple of Peace included peperino walls to protect it against fire. See Darwall-Smith (1996), 55–68.

15. Suet. *Vesp.* 9.

16. Part of the Colosseum valley's pre-64 history is richly detailed in Panella (1996) and (2006).

17. Vesuvius is now thought not to have erupted on August 24 but later in the year (possibly October). See Cooley (2004), 43.

18. Sablayrolles (1996), 794, details the probable extent of the fire of 80 CE, speculating that Statius's allusion to fire damage in Domitian's new palace (*Silvae* 1.1.35) means that the fire of 80 reached the Palatine. Since *Silvae* Books 1–3 were probably published around 93 CE, however, these lines may refer to some other fire after 80.

19. Suet. *Tit.* 11.1.; Dio 66.19.
20. On Domitian's taxation: Suet. *Dom.* 3.2 ("rapacious devices") and *Dom.* 12.2 (the "Jewish tax"). See Southern (1997), 114–15; Davies (2004), 221n64, with bibliography.
21. For the Flavian Capitoline restorations, see Wiseman (1978); Darwall-Smith (1996), 41–47; Wardle (1996). For Domitian's building program, see MacDonald (1982), 47–74; B. Jones (1992); Darwall-Smith (1996).
22. Darwall-Smith (1996), 97–99, 153–78; Hekster (2015), 101–2.
23. For Domitian's "innovative conservatism" in religious matters, see B. Jones (1992), 70–79. On Domitian and Minerva, see D'Ambra (1993), 44–47; Hekster (2015), 153–55.
24. Cf. Rüpke (2007), 162.
25. As defined in Berger (1953) s.v. *votum*. On *vota* and *leges sacrae* more generally, see Wissowa (1902), 319–23, and (1912), 380; Latte (1960), 46–47; Gargola (1995), 22–23. *Suscipere*, in contractual and obligatory relations, is to assume a unilateral obligation—again, one that would pass to one's heirs; see Berger (1953) s.v. *suscipere*.
26. See, e.g., Varner (2000), (2004); Davies (2000b). Flower (2006), 196–324, argues that Nero's name and image were not an official target for erasure. Nevertheless, the decision to inscribe it anew on an official monument is remarkable.
27. Cline (2009), 17.
28. Nero's alleged arson: see chapter 3 and below in this chapter.
29. On the Volcanalia, see W. Fowler (1899), 210–11; Closs (2016), 6, 10n26.
30. See Coleman (2006) *ad loc.* on this poem's probable dedication date and other features; for the poem's criticism of Nero see, e.g., Fitzgerald (2007), 40–42, Rimell (2008), 117–18, and Roman (2010), 94–96. See also Dewar (2008) 66–67; Walter (1998) 240–41; Cordes (2017) 67–79.
31. *Doctus Nero*: Mart. *Ep.* 8.70.8. Nero's purges of his enemies are remembered at *Ep.* 7.45, in which the poet celebrates a certain Quintus Ovidius for following Caesonius Maximus when the latter was exiled by Nero.
32. Trans. Shackleton Bailey (Loeb). Cf. Mart. 7.34.4–5: *Quid Nerone peius? Quid thermis melius Neronianis?* "What is worse than Nero? What is better than Nero's baths?" See also Gowers (1993), 138, and Balland (2010), 88; as König (2018), 238, points out, "the evocation of Nero [in *Ep.* 10.48] invites us to look for political allusions in the rest of the passage."
33. On the social practice of collecting donations after a fire, see Roller (2001), 202; cf. discussion of Juv. *Sat.* 3.212–22 in the next chapter.
34. In Mart. *Spect.* 2, the *princeps* in question was probably Titus; cf. Coleman (2006), lxxiv. There is little reason to believe that Golden House was a "private" residence in the modern sense of the term, as discussed above in chapter 3.
35. For Ovid's use in Martial as both cautionary tale and inspiration, see Hinds (2007); Rimell (2009), 14.
36. Cf. *Tr.* 2.261–62, 295–96, 377–78.

37. On *Tr.* 2.181–82, see Mader (1991), 147. The phrase *parce, pater* itself may well be a reprisal of Phoebus's advice to Phaethon (*parce, puer, stimulis*: "lay off the spurs, boy" *Met.* 2.127); cf. also *Aen.* 9.656; see Morgan (2003). According to the Elder Seneca (*Controv.* 2.9.5), Ovid's engagement with the phrase *parce, pater* even dates back to the poet's youthful rhetorical training. In a declamation that won him early praise, Ovid defended forbidden love, imagining an argument against a father who wishes to force his daughter to divorce a husband he deems unsuitable; see Claassen (2013), 39, 104.

38. On the execution under Domitian of dissident writers Arulenus Rusticus and Herennius Senecio (*Tac. Agr.* 2.1 and *Plin. Ep.* 7.19.6), see Howley (2017), 231–32. Yet Domitian painstakingly restored the collections of libraries destroyed by fire (*Suet. Dom.* 20); see Coleman (1986), 3096.

39. Ad hoc historical narratives: see Hinds (1998), 132.

40. On "safe criticism," "figured speech," and "doublespeak" and related issues in imperial literature, see introduction.

41. On Martial's flattering comparisons of Domitian to predecessors, see Cordes (2014), 294–95, and (2017), 253–54. Coleman *ad Stat. Silv.* 4.1.32 discusses the issue of unflattering portrayals of Augustus in Flavian poetry, with further passages and bibliography. For Martial's relationship with Domitian generally, see, e.g., Szelest (1986); Holzberg (1988) and (2002); Lorenz (2002); Nauta (2002); Leberl (2004); Cordes (2014), 308–15 and (2017), 88–91, 165–168, 295–302.

42. Rosati (2006), 48–50. On Martial's depiction of a Domitianic Golden Age, see also *Ep.* 8.55; cf. Cordes (2017), 253.

43. Rosati (2006), 48.

44. Cf. Cordes (2014), and (2017), 67–75. See also Roman (2014), 310–20.

45. Whether or not the *Octavia* is technically "Flavian" in date, it is broadly illustrative of some of the major ideological issues of the post-Neronian era. On the *Octavia* generally: in addition to the commentaries of Ferri (2003) and Boyle (2008), see Kragelund (1982) and (2016); J. Smith (2003); the chapters in Wilson (2003a); Flower (2006), 202–9; Ginsberg (2017).

46. See Flower (2006), 202–9, on the ways in which the *Octavia*'s genre informs its approach to Nero's theatrical tendencies.

47. The rhetorical power of the *Octavia*'s declamatory soliloquies and dialogic speeches reinforces its setting in a Rome recognizable to its audience, if not quite contemporary with it. See Boyle (2008), lxvii.

48. Although the play's characters, notably Octavia, express nostalgia for Claudius, his divinization appears to have failed. Instead, the late *princeps* haunts the underworld in a state of eternal conflict with his spouse and putative assassin, Agrippina.

49. The play's exact date matters little for the overall framework of my analysis here, since much of the text can be read without recourse to any specific performance and/or publication context. In brief, the reign of Galba is posited in several publications, starting with Barnes (1982) and Kragelund (1982), 38–52, and endorsed by, e.g., Habinek

(2000); Flower (2006), 202–9; and Wiseman (2008), 205–9; see Kragelund (2016), 297–350, with bibliography. An early Flavian date is posited by, e.g., Royo (1983), 189–200; Wiseman (1998), 10–23, and (2004), 262–72; J. Smith (2003), 427; Boyle (2006), 48, and (2008), xiii–xvi; Shotter (2008), 190. Several others suggest a window from Galba's reign into the early years of Vespasian's tenure, e.g., Ladek (1909); Chaumartin (1999), 95; Manuwald (2001), 337–39; Champlin (2003), 104. Ferri (2003), 1–30, argues for a date later in Domitian's reign. Even the latest of these dates puts the play only perhaps twenty-five years away from Nero's demise, well within living memory for at least some of the older segments of the population; beyond this, the specific date of the play has little bearing on the major interpretive issues of this study.

50. The inherent performativity of the *Octavia* informs every aspect of its construction, whether or not it was ever staged or intended to be; thus I use language of “stage,” “voice,” and “audience” in this discussion without necessarily insisting on an actual staging of the play. On the play's adherence to (and deviation from) traditional dramatic structures and theatrical conventions, see Goldberg (2003).

51. In terms of the text's relationship to Rome's cityscape, a Galban date would preclude the idea that not only Nero's fire but the burning of the Capitol in 69 would have held a salient place in the city's collective memory. Alternately, the Domitianic date proposed by Ferri would mean that the fire of 80 would have provided the city with a recent reminder of the emperor's role in addressing such catastrophes.

52. Boyle (2008), lx–lxi, remarks on the pronounced formal cyclicity of the play's images and motifs, which are also characteristic of Senecan drama. Kragelund's (1982) fundamental study highlights the issue of the *Octavia*'s “prophetic” imagery, bringing the ideological aspect of this strategy to the forefront.

53. Generic boundaries should not preclude us from finding connections between texts; cf. Behr's (2007) use of tragic evidence in studying Lucan. On affinities between poetry and theater, see also, e.g., Russell (1974); Fantham (1982), 19–34; Rosenmeyer (1989), 39–43.

54. I speak here in generalities that 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 J. Smith (2003) on the *Octavia*'s frequent referencing of images, statuary, and tombs at Rome; J. Smith (2003), 401, further comments that most of the characters on stage (Nero, Octavia, Poppaea, Agrippina) were themselves well known from imperial portraiture: “Nero's court, as *Octavia* would have it, is a cabinet of living *imagines*.” I would add to Smith's comments the possibility that a staged production might well have incorporated scenery that recognizably re-created the pre-64 appearance of sites in Rome that had in fact been lost in the fire.

55. J. Smith (2003), 417, calls the *Octavia* “a study in fear.”

56. Gar. Williams (1994a).

57. Ferri (2003), 36, lists the most common metaphors but does not remark on their potential for new meaning in the context of this play's historical trajectory.

58. On Phaethon and charioteering in Statius, see Vessey (1973), 211–18; Lovatt (2005), 23–40; Paván (2009); Rebeggiani (2013); Cordes (2017), 183–85. See Schrijvers (2006), 105n27, for echoes in Silius's *Punica* of the list of mountains set ablaze by Phaethon in the description of Hannibal crossing the Alps (*Pun.* 3.494–99); both characters are figured as attackers on the established order of the Roman *cosmos* (Chaudhuri [2014], 237n10).

59. Heslin (2007), 19, discussing the prizewinning poem included on Q. Sulpicius Maximus's funerary monument (*CIL* VI.33976; *IGUR* 3.1336, on which see Nauta [2002], 330–35). Nauta (2010), 263, objects to certain features of the allegory posited by Heslin, but the point stands that Phaethon was a theme that found favor with Domitian, who is also argued to have attempted to have corrected the meridian of the Augustan solar calendar (see chapter 3). See also Döpp (1996). Kathleen Coleman's research on Q. Sulpicius Maximus is in preparation.

60. On the ideological freight of Octavia's invocation of imperial virtues here, see Wilson (2003b).

61. On *igne vago* (Luc. *BC* 1.50) see chapter 3; for the possible allusion to this line in Statius 2.7.60–61, see above in this chapter.

62. As Boyle (2008), 96, *ad Octavia* 2–4 notes, “even her sun is an icon of Nero.” 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).

63. Messalina's death could be understood as the precipitating event that led to Claudius's marriage to Agrippina and Nero's subsequent succession of the principate (by way of the murders of Claudius and Britannicus).

64. As Bexley (2017), 172, astutely observes of the play overall: “The more desperately the *Octavia*'s characters cling to notions of biological legitimacy, the more the play's dramaturgy exposes those notions as impossible illusions.”

65. Flame imagery in the *Octavia* is ubiquitous: the title character describes Claudius's wrath as inspired by a torch-wielding fury that “inflamed the ruler's heart with fierce wrath for an unspeakable killing” (*incendit ira principis pectus truci / caedem in nefandam, Octavia.* 265–66; cf. also *Octavia* 262–64). The ghost of Agrippina herself appears to “realize” this metaphor when she appears “bearing in her bloody right hand a Stygian torch” (*Stygiam cruenta praeferens dextra facem*, 594) and “reappearing” in Poppaea's recollection of a dream in which the dead empress brandished a “blood-spattered torch” (*sparsam cruore . . . facem*, 722–23).

66. Octavia describes herself as *semper fratris extincti memor*, “always keeping [her] snuffed-out brother [Britannicus] in mind,” at 226. Britannicus is also called *extinctus* at *Octavia* 45 and 166. 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 614–15 again applies to the term to Claudius (*extinctus . . . coniunx*).

Altogether, forms of *extinguere* appear in the *Octavia* some fourteen times, roughly quadruple its incidence in any of Seneca's surviving dramas. Though Ferri (2003), 36, dismisses this as a "threadbare" metaphor, its repeated use in association with other fire metaphors contributes to the text's proleptic pairing of the Great Fire of Rome and the collapse of the Julio-Claudian dynasty.

67. Seneca: e.g., *QNat.* 3.29, *Ad Marciam* 26.6–7, *Ben.* 6.22.1. Lucan: *BC* 1.72–80, as well, e.g., 7.812–19 (Caesar as a "human *ekpyrosis*"). 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.

68. *Polluitur aether*: cf. also the contagion metaphor at *Octavia* 240, where Nero is described as a plague (*pestis*). Ferri (2003) *ad loc.* mentions only various parallels from Senecan drama; the most salient one is 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?* See Schmitz (1993), 172–73, 234, for parallel instances of leaders causing cosmic disturbance in Senecan drama.

69. Sen. *QNat.* 7.17.2, 7.21.3–4, 7.29.3; cf. also Plin. *HN* 2.92; Suet. *Ner.* 36; Tac. *Ann.* 14.22.1.

70. For comets signaling the end of a reign, especially in the Flavian literary tradition, Ferri (2003) *ad loc.* cites Val. Flac. *Argonautica* 6.608, Stat. *Theb.* 1.708; see also Sil. *Pun.* 8.636–37. As Ginsberg (2017), 41–42, further notes, Octavia's description of the comet here seems to borrow several features from Lucan's description of comets flashing across the sky as Caesar crosses the Rubicon (Luc. *BC* 1.524–32).

71. For parallels with civil war-themed lines from Horace and Vergil, see Ginsberg (2017), 37–43, with bibliography.

72. Tac. *Ann.* 15.22.2. See further discussion of this passage in chapter 3; see also chapter 5. Ironically, Nero himself will later echo Octavia's words when he issues her death warrant (861): [sc. *ira mea*] *caedem sororis poscit et dirum caput*, "my wrath demands my sister's slaughter and her dreadful head." Cf. the fratricidal wishes expressed by Atreus in Sen. *Thyestes* 243–44: *profare, dirum qua caput mactem uia*.

73. Cf. Ov. *Met.* 2.176–77: *te quoque turbatum memorant fugisse, Boote, / quamvis tardus eras et te tua plastra tenebant*. Ferri (2003) *ad loc.* mentions a possible allusion to Phaethon at *Octavia* 808–9 and clearly sees the intertexts with the Ovidian myth of ages at (*Octavia* 396–434) but does not elaborate on their potential significance.

74. Ferri (2003) *ad loc.*; cf. Bruckner (1976), 33.

75. Ferri (2003) *ad loc.* suggests allusions to Manilius here, but the lines also obviously reference the historical Seneca's interest in natural philosophy.

76. On the manuscript problems in this section, see Ferri (2003) *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 translation shows, this does not preclude reading a certain immediacy into the present tense of this condition.

77. As Ginsberg (2017), 87–88, notes, Seneca's character cannot grasp the full sig-

nificance of his prophetic language, which anticipates the post-Neronian *Roma Renascens* and *Roma Resurgens* coin series of 68–69 CE.

78. On *caeli ruina* in Vergil and Lucan, see Ferri (2003) *ad loc.*

79. On the expiration of the *aureum saeculum* in the *Octavia*, see Kragelund (2000), 503–4.

80. On the intertextuality of the *agon* between Seneca and Nero (*Octavia* 479–518), see Runchina (1964); Manuwald (2002) and (2003); Wilson (2003b); Boyle (2008) *ad loc.*; Ginsberg (2017), 62–66.

81. This line's specific identification with Lucan is generally undisputed. See discussion in Ginsberg (2017), 98–103, with bibliography. Tac. *Hist.* 1.16.3, *concussi orbis*, is similarly argued to quote Lucan in a context of civil strife: so Joseph (2012b), 45n51.

82. Cf. the suggestion above (162) that Nero's entrance (*Octavia* 435–36) is "timed" to coincide with Phaethon's appearance in Met. 1, the parallel text that Seneca's speech has been reprising.

83. So Ferri (2003) *ad loc.*

84. As Boyle (2008), lxvii, observes, at one level "*Octavia* is a political reading of Senecan tragedy," in which political themes apparent in Seneca only at the subtextual level are "unearthed and displayed."

85. Ginsberg (2017), 157–60, connects this phrase to the *Aeneid* narrator's own preface to the Italian conflicts of *Aeneid* 7–12 (*dicam horrida bella*, *Aen.* 7.41), as well as to the prophecy of the Sibyl in *Aeneid* 6.86–87 (*bella, horrida bella . . . cerno*). Ginsberg (2017), 158n50, identifies the description of Paris as a "Trojan shepherd" as an echo of Amata's fears that Aeneas has come as a second Paris (*Paris alter*, *Aen.* 7.321) to steal Lavinia, igniting a second Trojan war; cf. *Aen.* 7.363–64: *at non sic Phrygius penetrat Lacedaemona pastor, / Ledaeamque Helenam Troianas vexit ad urbes?*). The original "Trojan shepherd," however, was Paris himself. Thus the chorus of the *Octavia* simply returns these (arguably) Vergilian terms to their primary referent.

86. For the sinister implications of the chorus's Trojan allusions, see J. Smith (2003), 419–22; Kragelund (2005), 81; J. Sullivan (1985), 68.

87. Kragelund (2005), 85.

88. Champlin (2003), 83.

89. Kragelund (2005), 85.

90. Ginsberg (2017), 159–60, offers detailed analysis of these lines' allusions to the *Aeneid*.

91. On the Trojan echoes of Catullus 51: see, e.g., S. Harrison (2001).

92. As noted above, the term is pervasive in the text, and is applied specifically to murdered members of imperial family at, e.g., *Octavia* 45, 166, 226, 266, 268, and 614.

93. Ferri (2003) *ad loc.*

94. On the *urbs capta* motif in the play overall, see Ginsberg (2017), 19, 135–38, 153–54.

95. *Octavia* 780–85.

96. Ginsberg (2017), 135–36.
97. The trope of flames flooding homes (*tecta*, cf. *OLD* s.v. *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).
98. As Ginsberg (2017), 138, 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.
99. The verb the prefect uses (*temperare*) can also mean “cool off”; cf. Mart. *Ep.* 10.48.3: *temperat haec thermas*, “this [hour] cools the baths.” As Ginsberg (2017), 116–24 and 135n63, notes, there may also be a parallel here with Vergil's initial image of Aeolus as a powerful leader who subdues rage in his subjects with his scepters of authority (*sceptra tenens mollique animos et temperat iras*, *Aen.* 1.57).
100. As Buckley (2012), 147–48, suggests, Nero here appears to be “reading” Lucan, i.e., “enacting the lessons he has learned from Lucan's Caesar.” Thus Nero's alleged arson of Rome is in a certain sense the fulfillment of a destiny laid out for him by Caesar himself.
101. Ferri (2003) *ad loc.*; Boyle (2008) *ad loc.* Cf. also Propertius's condemnation of the shameful murder of Pompey (3.11.36: *tollet nulla dies hanc tibi, Roma, notam*).
102. Suetonius (*Ner.* 55) reports that Nero desired to be remembered after his death.
103. Wiseman (2008), 203, Kragelund (2016), 278–79, and Ginsberg (2017), 115n2, all agree that this line (cf. also *Octavia* 831–33, quoted above) suggests that the 64 fire was Nero's overdue revenge for the popular resistance depicted in the play.
104. On the false Neros (pretenders from the East claiming to be the emperor after his death; cf. Tac. *Hist.* 2.8–9; Dio 66.19.3; Suet. *Ner.* 57.2), see, e.g., Champlin (2003), 10–12; Flower (2006), 209–12.
105. Cf. Tac. *Ann.* 14.60–62. Suetonius says only that there was public disapproval of the divorce (*sed improbante 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.
106. Flower (2006), 206.
107. So M. Bernstein (1994), 1–3, quotation on 3; see also Morson (1998), esp. 117–72. Applications of the concept to classical texts include Newlands (2002); Pagán (2006), 197–99; Cowan (2010), 326–27. See Herington (1961), 29, for a reading of the play's conclusion as an elegy to the lost promise of the early imperial period. For an analogous reading of “alternative history” in Tacitus, see O'Gorman, (2006).
108. Tac. *Ann.* 14.61: *cui minor sapientia [et] ex mediocritate fortunae pauciora pericula sunt*.
109. Ginsberg (2017), 194.
110. For discussion of the relationship between the *Octavia* and the *Annals*, see Ferri (1998); Devillers (2000); Billot (2003).
111. Ginsberg (2017), 140n75.

Chapter 5

1. See Cowan (2009) on parallels drawn in *Satires* 8 between the poet-destroyer Nero and his mythological avatar, Paris.

2. Juvenal's *Satires* are usually taken as the product of the late first or early second century CE. See Geue (2017), 6n23, for an up-to-date evaluation of the earliest and latest suggested dates. Full consideration of the “persona” debate is beyond the scope of this very brief reading. For more detail, see the arguments of W. Anderson (1982), esp. 293–305, with further refinements by (e.g.) Braund (1988, 1996a, 1996b); Freudenburg (2001); Shumate (2006), esp. 19–54; Keane (2006), esp. 1–30, and (2015); Uden (2015); and Geue (2017). For opposition to the *persona* trend, see Green (1999); Nappa (1998). For the purposes of this discussion, the material from *Satires* 3 is discussed as “Juvenal’s” voice only in the sense that this name represents the text. On meter and wordplay in *Satires* 3, see Kenney (2012), 128–29. On the complexities of the tropes of escape, loss, and abandonment in *Satires* 3, see Geue (2015). See also Geue (2017), 76–77n19 (with references), on the various arguments for and against viewing Umbricius here as a “substitute satirist figure” for Juvenal.

3. See Courtney (1980) *ad loc.* on calls for “water!” as the ancient fire alarm signal. On the risks of tall buildings in the event of fire, see below, 177.

4. On *Aen.* 2.310–12, see further chapter 1, 52. On the allusion to *Aen.* 2.312 in Juv. 3.199, see Scott (1927), 55; Austin ([1964] 1980) *ad Aen.* 2.312; W. Anderson (1970), 15–16; Connors (2005); for possible puns on Ucalegon’s name (οὐκ ἀλέγων) see J. O’Sullivan (1978), 457; P. Miller (2005) *ad loc.*

5. Umbricius as a pseudo-Aeneas: W. Anderson (1970), 15–16, and (1982), 219–20; Staley (2000). See also Edwards (1996), 127; Estevez (1996); Freudenburg (2001), 267n2; Baines (2003); Connors (2005), 139. On epic features in Juvenal generally, see J. Henderson (1999), 247–73; Freudenburg (2001), 240.

6. This decline also implicates the breakdown of the Augustan literary patronage model; see Connors (2005), 140.

7. On Juvenal’s presumed debt to Martial here, see Colton (1966); W. Anderson (1970); Colton (1991), 127–29.

8. On the detailed epic texture of *Satires* 3, see Motto and Clark (1965); Staley (2000). On the poetic clustering of words suggesting fire, collapse, and terrified residents (i.e., the *urbs capta* topos) in these lines, see Fredericks (1973), 65. As Connors (2005), 139–40, points out, the line in which Vergil’s Ucalegon appears is immediately preceded by the phrase *Volcano superante domus*; cf. Horace’s *dilapso . . . Volcano* (*Sat.* 1.5.73) in his mock-epic account of the kitchen fire at Beneventum. As W. Anderson (1961), 10, suggests, Umbricius *Satires* 3 appears to “follow” Horace’s advice in *Epode* 16 to abandon Rome.

9. Attempts to prevent large-scale fires by limiting the height of buildings were still proving unsuccessful in Juvenal’s lifetime, as demonstrated by reiterations under Trajan

of height limitations (Aur. Vict. *Epit.* 13.13); similar limitations had previously been set by Nero (Tac. *Ann.* 15.43) and Augustus (Strabo 5.3.7). On limiting the thickness of partition walls to discourage tall buildings, see Vitr. *De arch.* 2.8, 17; Plin. *HN* 35.173. For more on Nero's building laws after the 64 fire, see chapter 3 above, 113–14.

10. Fire in the Circus Maximus: Suet. *Dom.* 5; Pausanias (5.12.6) lists the restored circus, along with Trajan's Forum and Baths, as one of his most notable building achievements. According to Dio (68.7), the inscription claimed “merely . . . that he had made it adequate for the Roman people.” Yet Ammianus Marcellinus, writing in the fourth century CE, reports that Trajan's name was on so many restored buildings that he was called “the wallflower” (*herbam parietinam*, Amm. Marc. 27.3.7).

11. Orosius (7.12.4) writing in the fifth century, suggests the fire was further punishment for Nero's persecution of the Christians, but this cannot be taken as evidence for attitudes in the early second century. On the Trajanic baths, see Ball (2003), 242–49.

12. Trajan's baths in relation to the Flavian-era buildings are well discussed in J. Anderson (1985).

13. See chapter 4, 146.

14. See Aur. Vict. *Caes.* 13.13.

15. The rebuilding of the Pantheon is now thought to have begun under Trajan, and the extent of the Domitianic restoration has been debated. The complexities of these arguments do not affect the overall picture of the fire's impact significantly, but they are well laid out in M. Jones (2013); see also Hetland (2007) and Haselberger (2009). La Rocca (2015) argues that the Domitianic works were limited in scope; Ziolkowski (2009), 34, argues for an extensive renovation.

16. See Sablayrolles (1996), 796.

17. See Beckmann (2015), 5296.

18. Davies (2000a), 250.

19. Hetland (2007), 104–11; see also Heilmeyer (1975).

20. The Pantheon's pronaos was part of the finishing stage, perhaps completed in 125/126 CE (Hetland [2007], 158; Boatwright [2014], 260–61). As Boatwright (2014), 261, argues, Hadrian's inscription on the Pantheon is likely to have reproduced the language of Agrippa's original one, but the enormous bronze letters picking the text out appear to be at least three times the size of any Agrippan inscription we can document.

21. Even if, as in Trajan's case, the official cremation took place outside of Rome, his ashes were deposited at the base of his column in his forum, transforming the meaning of the space. See Claridge (2013), 7–8; den Boer (1975), 206–10; Settis (1988), 78. See, e.g., P. Zanker (1970), Davies (2004), 32–40, and Stevenson (2008) for the view that Trajan intended from the outset to use the column as his tomb. Claridge (1993; 2013), 4–8, favors the view that it was Hadrian who designated the column as Trajan's tomb, and that Hadrian also added the spiral frieze on the column's exterior. Regardless of these considerations, ultimately the emperor's ashes were installed in the column, designated it as a cinerary structure; cf. Dio 69.2.3; *Epit. de Caes.* 13.11.

22. As Davies argues (2004), 27–34, on Trajan's column, the spiraling of the external frieze and internal staircase suggested the ascent of Trajan's divinized soul to the heavens. Similarly, Hadrian may have gained implied immortality in his mausoleum through association with the sun, symbolized by the circular corridor leading to the central cinerary chamber; Davies (2000a), 252.

23. The deifications of Trajan's sister Marciana (112 CE), the dowager empress Plotina (123 CE), Plotina's niece (and Hadrian's mother-in-law) Matidia (119 CE), and the empress Sabina (136–138 CE) were all represented on coin issues (e.g., *BM Coins, Rom. Emp.* 3.955, 3.963; *BM Coins, Rom. Emp.* 3.125, 3.651; *RIC* 299, 421, 743, 751, 752); these coins prominently featured images such as *ustrina* and eagles spreading their wings. See Bruun and Edmondson (2015), 187. A relief from the Arco di Portogallo also appears to depict the cremation and apotheosis of Sabina, although its connection to an actual cremation site is debated; see Boatwright (1985), 497; Davies (2004), 116–18. Boatwright (1987), 218–30, expresses skepticism as to the existence of a new Hadrianic *ustrinum*. Ultimately, the specific cremation site in question has little impact on my discussion here, which is more broadly concerned with the prominence of imperial cremations as a display of power.

24. Dio 69.2.1; trans. Cary (1914–27).

25. On the resistance to mystical forms of fire as a mark of leadership, see introduction, 18–20; chapter 1, 52–53, 61–62; chapter 2, 99–101.

26. *BM Coins, Rom. Emp.* 3.245 (49). For discussion see Birley (1997), 81; Claridge (2013), 5.

27. On the phoenix in imperial Rome generally, see introduction, 15–16.

28. *SHA Hadr.* 24.1; *M. Ant.* 4.5; Dio 69.2. See Davies (2004), 96n73, with bibliography. For a later Hadrianic phoenix coin issue, see *RIC* 2.136; J. Martin (1974); Birley (1997), 81–83; Davies (2004), 95–96, 210n66.

29. The iconographic association between the phoenix and Aeternitas continues to flourish under the later Antonine rulers. See Evans (2003), 290–91.

30. Note, however, the suggestion of Hermann (1976), 84, that this clause could be understood as indicating purpose: “[a phoenix] that no one would doubt was a fake,” i.e., one exhibited as a demonstration of religious fraud.

31. Syme (1958), 472. Absent definitive evidence that Tacitus composed *Annals* 6 after 117, I do not endorse Syme's hypothesis here. Sage (1990), 960–63, is unconvinced by Syme's posited allusions to Hadrian in *Annals* 1–6. It is generally accepted that the *Annals* were begun under Trajan but not completed until after the accession of Hadrian in 117 (Potter [1991]; Rutledge [1998], 141–43). They may have been published in part by 118; for this date, see Goodyear (1972–81), 393. The matter, however, is still a point of controversy; cf. Birley (2000), 242–47.

32. Keitel (1999) addresses the well-known discrepancy between Tacitus's account, which places the phoenix sighting in 34, and that of Dio (58.26.25), who places the event in 36; cf. also Sage (1990), 961–62. The objections of Woodman (2017), 205n92, not-

withstanding, Keitel's point stands that the well-known filial piety of the phoenix acts as an implicit condemnation of the multiple violations of familial *pietas* during the reigns of Tiberius and Caligula alike.

33. One imagines that in Trajanic Rome, the phoenix-like regeneration of the city promoted in Martial's *Epigram* 5.7 would read as a caution against employing the phoenix metaphor too freely, given its connection with a now-failed dynasty. On Mart. *Ep.* 5.7, see chapter 4 above, 151–55.

34. See Sailor (2008), 276–82, and Ker (2012), 315.

35. On *Ann.* 4.32–35 generally, see the important study of Moles (1998), with discussion of the fire puns at 153. See also Bauman (1974), 100–103; Martin and Woodman (1989), 176–86; Rutledge (2001), 96; McHugh (2004); Devillers (2010), 187–97; Rohmann (2013), 127–29; Howley (2017), 218. Sailor (2008), 250–313. Martin and Woodman (1989), 183, point out the possible disingenuousness of Cordus's arguments that his histories are incitements to civil uprising (this is clarified as the opinion of Woodman alone, however). See Whitton (2012) on commemoration of suppressed authors and political martyrs as “posthumous revenge” in the writing of both Pliny and Tacitus. See also Levene (2012); Pomeroy (2012), 140; for the “focalization” of the Cremutius narrative, see Wisse (2013), 299–361.

36. See Sailor (2008), 252, and Ash (2016), 16n8, for the implied failure of Tiberius as a leader here.

37. The Cremutius episode comes immediately after the famous historiographical digression at *Ann.* 4.32.1–33.4).

38. See Rutledge (1998), 143–44, on the “parallel-mania” that Tacitus appears to expect of readers at *Ann.* 4.34.4. The nature of the comparison we are to draw between Tacitus and Cremutius Cordus is contested. Ginsburg (1981), 48–50, and Sage (1991), 3387, argue that the episode illustrates in a concrete manner parallels between (the problems faced by) the two as writers of imperial history. See also the discussion of Sailor (2008), esp. 297, 312. R. Martin (1981), 137, reminds us that the lesson here is ambiguous: “the reader is left to apply the moral as he will: Cremutius' outspokenness had cost him his life.” McHugh (2004), 394, argues that Cordus actually “demonstrates how not to speak through . . . negative example” since his own attempt at figured speech fails; cf. Alston (2008), 152–53. See also Sailor (2008), 250–313; T. O'Sullivan (2010), 168; Whitton (2011), 194–96. On this passage's connection to Pliny's remarks on censorship (*Ep.* 9.27.2), see Ash (2003), 217–18.

39. On burning debt records, see Dio 69; Smallwood (1966), no. 64. For coins illustrating the event, *BM Coins, Rom. Emp.* 3.1207. For epigraphic evidence see *ILS* 309 = *CIL* VI.967, 2.3664; see Howley (2017), 220nn47–49.

40. The debt remission is apparently depicted on the so-called Anaglypha Traiani (*LTUR* s.v. *Plutei Traianei*), with the distribution of *congiaria* on one panel and a dramatic burning of large-format tabellae on the other; cf. also the so-called Chatsworth Relief, which shows tablets brought in by soldiers. See Torelli (1982), 89–118, and Speyer

(1981), 80–83, for further discussion about the possible dates, locations, and emperors depicted in these reliefs.

41. Pliny later expanded and revised this text (Plin. *Ep.* 3.18.2); for speculation on the extent and nature of these revisions, see Radice (1968), 166; Morford (1992); Braund (1998), 67–68. For the purposes of this discussion, Pliny’s text will be taken as reflective of the general context of the early Trajanic period rather than as evidence of any specific chronology.

42. Cf. also the references to *libertas restituta* (Pan. 78.3, 93.1–2). On the development of scholarly *communis opinio* on the various ideologies of Pliny’s *Panegyricus*—explicit and implied—see Rees (2012b), 35–36, with references. On the versions of “freedom” and “sincerity” retailed in the *Panegyricus*, see Morford (1992); Bartsch (1994), 148–87, esp. 149, 183; Bartsch (2012); Penwill (2015). On Pliny’s literary self-fashioning and allusive style, see Woolf (2003), 215–18. On the place of this oration in the genre of Latin panegyric, see Braund (1998) and Fantham (2012). For Pliny’s manipulation of the exemplary tradition in the *Panegyricus*, see J. Henderson (2011).

43. Trajan was voted *optimus princeps* (best of emperors) in 103 and the title was renewed in the summer of 114.

44. With specific reference to the burning/melting imagery at Plin. *Pan.* 589–90, Funari (1989) explores a wide range of precedents in epic and tragedy for images of mutilated and burned bodies in Tacitus, which seem equally applicable here. See also, however, Lavagnini (1947), who suggests—based on similar images at Diog. Laert. 5.77 and Plut. *Mor.* 820F—that there was a common source specifically in the diatribe tradition; cf. Uden’s (2015), 157n30, comments on Juv. 10.63–64.

45. Varner (2001), 49. Edwards (2003), 49, briefly discusses this passage as an example of the visceral response images at Rome could evoke; see also Gregory (1994); Stewart (2003), 261–99; Petersen (2011), 6–7. On the connection between corporeal sensation and imperial statuary, see further Vout (2007); Gladhill (2012). The significance of Pliny’s emphasis on the different materials used for these statues is ably brought out by Cordes (2017), 52–57. Domitian’s actual cremation was carried out in secret by his nurse, according to Suetonius (*Dom.* 17), thus denying his enemies the satisfaction of dishonoring his corpse; cf. the abuse of Sejanus’s corpse by the mob (Dio 63.11.5); cf. also Otho’s request that his body be burned and buried hastily to prevent such indignities (Tac. *Hist.* 2.49.1–3).

46. So Petersen (2011), 6.

47. At least one of the inscriptions associated with the Domitianic altars to Vulcan discussed in chapter 4 (see above, 146–50) bears evidence of the erasure of Domitian’s name and titulature, although the rest of the text was left intact; see Closs (2016), 6.

48. For further examples and discussion of memory sanctions against Domitian, see Varner (2001), 49–50; Flower (2001), and (2006), 234–70. On the reinvention of the potential meaning of large-scale architectural statements like Domitian’s palace, see Roche (2011), 46, 60–65.

49. Petersen (2011), 7.

50. On Domitian's penchant for using fire as punishment in twisted ways, cf. Suet. *Dom.* 10.5: *plerosque . . . novo quaestionis genere distorsit immisso per obscaena igne* ("he tortured many with a new form of interrogation, inserting fire into unseemly orifices"). On the thaumastic element of violent spectacle as a proof of divinity in Martial's poetry celebrating the games of Titus and Domitian, see Coleman (1990); Moretti (1992). A tyrant enjoying spectacles of violence as a form of *voluptas* seems to have been a popular topos of the period; cf. Tacitus's depictions of Vitellius (*Hist.* 2.67.2; 3.83.3) and Lucan's descriptions of Caesar (on which see Leigh [1997], 77–109 and 292–306). On Vitellius's similarly grim appetite for human suffering at *Hist.* 3.36–39, see Keitel (2007).

51. Cf. *Pan.* 6.5 and Pliny's reminder at *Pan.* 8.5 of the insurrection (*seditio*) that followed a "recently" (*nuper*) attempted adoption of an imperial heir; as Durry (1938) *ad loc.* notes, this appears to be a reference to Galba's adoption of Piso in 68.

52. Plin. *Pan.* 8.5: *inritamentum istud irarum et fax tumultus fuisset, nisi incidisset in te*.

53. As Edwards (2003), 49, notes, the people attacking Domitian's statues at *Pan.* 52.3 are implied to have included the author himself.

54. Vivid description (*enargeia*) is Juvenal's authorial hallmark; see Scott (1927), 20–24.

55. Keane (2003) offers ample discussion of the importance of spectacles—dramatic, gladiatorial, legal, and others—in Juvenalian satire.

56. P. Miller (2005), 306. Sejanus's statue was in itself a bid for immortality that equated him with a triumphing general, the emperor, or even a god; so Courtney (1980) *ad loc.*

57. See discussion in chapter 3 above, 99–100.

58. On Sejanus's role in accusing Cordus of *maiestas*, see Tac. *Ann.* 4.34.

59. Geue (2017), 137.

60. Many of the friends of Sejanus perished at the same time, and his son and daughter shared his fate (Tac. *Ann.* 4.41–59; 74; 5.6–9; Suet. *Tib.* 61, 65; Dio 58.14).

61. Cf. the arguments of Roper (1979), 356, concerning a similar parallel evident in Tacitus's *Annals*, in which "Sejanus . . . serves as the pattern for Tigellinus." On Catiline as a model for the Tacitean Sejanus, see Syme (1958), 402. See also Juv. 1.155–58, with the comments of Courtney (1980). With Kragelund (1988), 501n36, I find unconvincing the suggestion of Baldwin (1967) that Tigellinus is a pun on *Tigillus* ("Beam," an epithet of Jupiter) rather than a reference to Nero's prefect. On the identity of the speaker and interlocutor in this passage, as well as on the way that interlocutor here "collapses the temporal distance" between the satirist and the figure of Tigellinus/Tigellinus, see Roller (2012), 293–94. As Roller further comments, Tigellinus, "dead forty years or more by the time of Juvenal's writing, was either already a byword for cruelty or was being made into one by Juvenal's contemporaries Tacitus, Suetonius, and Plutarch." Cf. Tac. *Ann.* 14.60, 15.58, 15.61; *Hist.* 1.72; Suet. *Galb.* 15.2; Plut. *Otho* 2.2.

62. See Uden (2015), 35n25, on the probability of a missing line between Juv. 1.156 and 157.

63. On the method of torture implied in the phrase *fixo gutture*, see Ferguson (1979), 123. Freudenburg (2001), 245, observes: “Lucilius’ pen-sword in hand, Juvenal will end up impaling himself right through the throat.” The *tunica molesta*, a garment interwoven with inflammable materials that was then ignited during public spectacles, is discussed more extensively in chapter 3 above, 113 and 256n33.

64. Freudenburg (2017), 110.

65. So Freudenburg (2017), 110. See also Larmour (2010–11), 166–67; Uden (2015), 34–35. As Larmour (2010–11), 166, points out, Juvenal also specifically mentions fire (the *tunica molesta*) in Juv. 8.235 as the appropriate punishment for criminals who planned to set homes and temples on fire, such as Cethegus and Catiline. On Juvenal’s tendency to attack only dead enemies, see Nappa (2011).

66. For fire in *Satires* 1, see Bertman (1968).

67. Geue (2017), 220.

68. On the literary overtones of *deducere* in Juvenal (cf. Juv. 7.48–54), see Freudenburg (2001), 245; Larmour (2010–11), 163–64. *Sulci calami* (“furrows of the pen”) appears in Quint. *Inst.* 1.1.27 and frequently in later Latin; see Uden (2015), 36n28, citing Thraede (1965), 93–116.

69. The fire metaphor is common in Tacitus; Walker (1952), 62–63. Forms of *accendere* (twenty-seven metaphorical uses) are most favored in the *Annals*, followed by *ardere* / *ardescere*, especially *exardescere* (cf. Gerber and Greef [(1903) 1962], 411b–412), with sixteen nonliteral uses in the *Annals*. Forms of *flagrare* account for fifteen metaphorical uses, and *incendere* thirteen uses; forms of *urere* are used much more sparingly, while nouns such as *flamma* and *ignis* are used primarily in literal senses. From these sets (easily accessed in a concordance or word search) I have selected the instances most illustrative of my point, with an eye toward tracing a significant progression of meanings associated with a given term.

70. The seminal study for Vergilian citations in Tacitus is Schmaus (1887). See also Walker (1952), 11; Syme (1958), 357; Baxter (1971), (1972); Bews (1972–73); Goodyear (1972–81), 108–9; Putnam (1989); Tarrant (1997), 69–70; Ash (2002); Pagán (2002); Keitel (2008); Woodman (2009b); Joseph (2010), (2012a), (2012b). See Hardie (2010) for epic intertexts in Tacitus, and Leigh (2007) for the interaction of epic and historiography at Rome more generally. This chapter’s approach to intertextuality in historiography overall is informed by Ash (1998), O’Gorman (2000, 2009), Damon (2010b), and Pelling (2013). On Tacitean allusion in general, see Lauletta (1998); Ash (2016). For “substantive imitation” of other authors by Tacitus, Woodman (1979) remains fundamental; see now also Woodman (2012).

71. 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.” Similarly, Woodman (1988), 211, stresses the importance of these tropes in

ancient historiography; like realism in modern forms of mass media, such techniques aim at producing something that is “willingly believed.”

72. Draeger (1882) is the fundamental study of metaphor in Tacitus; see also Walker (1952), 11; (1991); Syme (1958), 357; Goodyear (1968) and (1972–81), 108–9; Baxter (1971) and (1972); Adams (1972); Putnam (1989); Tarrant (1997), 69–70. For discussion of sustained metaphors in Tacitus, see Woodman (1998), 190–217, (2006), (2010); see now also Devereaux (2016). For fire metaphors in Tacitus’s *Agricola*, see Woodman and Kraus (2014), 99, 118. On metaphor and poetics in Tacitus, see especially Santoro L’Hoir (2006), 77–100. For Tacitean self-imitation, see Woodman (1979), (1998).

73. Haynes (2003), 29.

74. On inclusion versus exclusion as significant tools for interpreting Tacitus, see Haynes (2014); cf. O’Gorman (2014). On Tacitus’s concern over potential imperial reactions, as well as those of his fellow senators, see Sailor (2008).

75. Numerous scholars, especially Keitel and Woodman, have offered plentiful evidence from throughout the *Annals* of Tacitus’s tendency to use figurative language, and especially the motif of the *urbs capta*, to suggest in various ways that the *princeps* is committing a virtual assault on the Roman state. See, e.g., Woodman (1972), (1992); Keitel (1984), (2010); Ash (1999), (2009); Strunk (2017), 62–67, 118–19. See also Christ (1978), 482; O’Gorman (2000), 23–45; Damon (2010b). See Joseph (2012a) on this phenomenon in Tacitus’s *Histories*. See Feldherr (2009b), 6–8, and Ash (2012b), 10–11, for more general overviews of the “rhetorical turn” in the study of Roman historiography advanced, above all, by Wiseman (1979) and Woodman (1988) (though Walker [1952] deserves more credit for her pioneering approach to the literary aspects of Tacitus than she often receives). The strenuous objections of Lendon (2009) notwithstanding, the “rhetorical” lens (with special attention to intertexts, imagery, exempla, and recurrent motifs) brought to Tacitean texts by numerous scholars in the last three decades has more than demonstrated the value of this approach; see references above at 280–81nn69–72. For further discussion of this debate, see Marincola (2010); Kraus, Marincola, and Pelling (2010), 2–4; and Ash (2017).

76. See Kraus (2014), 219–21, on Tacitus’s hints at the risks of creating parallels between literary characters and historical personages. See also Martin and Woodman (1989), 14.

77. On Nero in the *Histories*, see Haynes (2003), 34–70.

78. Champlin (2003), 185–86, 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 the accusation of arson rather than the opposite; this idea, however, has not gained much traction in subsequent scholarship.

79. 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; see Syme (1958), 711–45; Adams (1972), (1973); Oakley (2009), 195–96, citing Degel

(1907). For the development of vocabulary into Tacitus's final writings, Goodyear (1968) and Ash (2018) are especially useful.

80. See discussion in earlier chapters above, 54–58 and 136–37; see also discussion of Riggsby (2016) in introduction above, 8. On Tacitus's use of the topoi of the tyrant for the Julio-Claudians, see Walker (1952), 204–14; Dunkle (1971), 12–20; Keitel (1984), citing Jerome (1923), 360–80. See also Keitel (2007) on Vitellius as a stock tyrant in the *Histories*.

81. As Levene (2009), 226–27, 231, makes clear, Tacitus adjusts his style to reflect the character of the leader he describes; cf. also Ash (1999) on Tacitus's characterization of army leaders in literary terms in the *Histories*, esp. 77–125 on Galba, Otho, and Vitellius.

82. Kraus (2005), 187, elaborating on ideas advanced by Chaplin (2000), 198–202. On exemplarity in Roman historiography, see Miles (1995), Chaplin (2000), and Roller (2004) and (2009). For discussion of other Tacitean *exempla*, see Ash (2009), 93–95, Malloch (2009), 124–26, and Keitel (2009), 142.

83. Kraus (2005), 187.

84. In the extant *Annals*, *flagrare* is used almost exclusively in metaphorical senses, although three significant literal uses will be discussed below, 188–89. In addition to the other examples discussed in this section, see, e.g., *Ann.* 15.45.1 (*Otho . . . flagrantissimus in amicitia Neronis habebatur*); *Ann.* 2.41.3 (*flagrantibus plebis studiis*). Such language carries ethical associations over from its uses in the *Agricola*, in which Tacitus credits Agricola's mother with restraining Agricola's "inflamed and burning spirit" (*incensum ac flagrantem animum*, *Ann.* 4.3), i.e., his unseemly enthusiasm for the study of Greek philosophy.

85. On *flagrantissime cupiverat*, see Santoro L'Hoir (1994), 23, 193. In Book 1, the descriptions of the intrigues of Julia and Agrippa Postumus are also colored with fire imagery: at 1.4.9, popular opinion apparently once ran in favor of Agrippa as Augustus's successor, despite fact that he was "disagreeable and on fire with scandal" (*trucem . . . et ignominia accensum*); at 1.53.13, Tacitus recalls that after Julia's marriage to Tiberius, her lover "fired her up with defiance and hatred of her spouse" (*contumacia et odiis in maritum accendebat*). Cf. also *Ann.* 4.39: 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 overbearing letter to Tiberius that initiates his slide into ruin. Emotional instability is again coded as a failure of both leadership and masculinity at *Ann.* 11.35.2, when Claudius is described upon learning of Messalina's infidelities as *incensumque et ad minas erumpentem* ("inflamed and bursting with threats"). Yet as Tacitus has already stated, the moral outrage that ostensibly justifies Messalina's killing in fact only clears the way for Claudius to "burn directly afterwards (*ut deinde ardesceret*) for incestuous marriage" (11.25.8) to Agrippina the Younger.

86. Tacitus's portrayal of women and gender is too large a topic to address fully in this chapter, but important starting points are Christ (1978), 470–82; Santoro L'Hoir (1992), 120–43, and (1994); Ginsburg (1993) and (2006); Vidén (1993), 13–65; Joshel (1995); Mellor (2011), 115–44; Milnor (2012).

87. See Rutland (1978), 25–27, on the power struggle between Poppaea and Agrippina.

88. On Vergil's positive use of fire imagery in the *Aeneid*, see chapter 1 above, 52–54, 58; on Seneca's similar, if more ambiguous usage in *Ep.* 91, see chapter 3, 137–38.

89. The image of mutiny as a fire burning is echoed in the description of the soldiers rebelling in Germany at *Tac. Ann.* 1.32.3, but this time we see a slow, steady burn rather than an abrupt outbreak: “they burned equally, and equally kept silent” (*pariter ardescerent, pariter silerent*). As Woodman (2006), 303–29, has argued, the fire metaphors in these passages seem to evoke the medical language of disease and contamination. Yet this added layer of meaning does not diminish but rather enhances the overall impression that this crowd has become dominated by a fiery force that threatens to manifest itself as violence against a leader figure.

90. As Ash (2013), 445, has shown, in this letter we see a version of Tiberius that “embrace[s] the satirist's perspective and embed[s] tangible allusions to satire in his written word to highlight the absurdity and claustrophobia of his own position as *princeps*.”

91. Trans. Woodman (2004). Ash (2013) discusses the many complexities of Tiberius's position as (self-)satirist, comparing it with Tacitus's own role as narrator. Ash (2013), 439n17, also raises the possibility of a relationship between Juvenal's satires and this section of the *Annals*, but the chronology is admittedly elusive. For similarly hyperbolic rhetoric on moral decline from Seneca, see, e.g., Seneca's *De ira* (*Dial.* 4.7.12, 4.9.1–2).

92. Cf. Feeney (2007), 106. After Libby (2011), 218–19; Libby and Feeney discuss this phrase as a representation of Nero's own ambitions rather than as Tacitus's commentary on the public's interpretation of his actions.

93. To this, add Tacitus's professions of doubt as to the veracity of accounts of Nero's behavior at 15.39 (*pervaserat rumor*); see below, 199–200.

94. On the *urbs capta* motif generally, see discussion and references in introduction above, 12–13; for the *urbs capta* topos in Tacitus, see references above, 281n75. On the patterning of disaster in the *Annals* generally, see especially Keitel (2010).

95. On *Ann.* 1.61–62, see Pagán (1999), esp. 308–11, for Tacitus's manipulation of contrasting versions of appearance and memory. See also Pagán (2002).

96. On Fidenae (*Ann.* 4.62.), see Woodman (1972); Martin and Woodman (1989), 232–35; Santoro L'Hoir (1994), 21–23.

97. As Santoro L'Hoir (1994), 22–23, notes, the context of the Lake Fucinus episode creates the impression that Agrippina's aberrant behavior at the festivities in some sense invites the disaster.

98. Cf. earlier discussions of the tendency to equate *urbs* and *orbis* among a wide range of authors in chapters 1 (47–48), 2 (89, 96–97), and 3 (123–26).

99. Though beyond the scope of this chapter, 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 [2012], 97n10).

100. As Furneaux ([1886] 1907 *ad loc.*) notes, this phrase appears to rework Verg. *G.* 2.308: *involvit flammis nemus* (on which see chapter 2 above, 57 and 85). I would further observe that this image prefigures the idea of the Great Fire as a catastrophe of Rome’s own making, both in the phrasing (*igni suo*) and in the general context of the Romans’ provocation of the rebellion with their abusive treatment. See further discussion and references below, 194–202.

101. On the disputed date of the Pompeii/Campania earthquake(s), see above, chapter 3, 258n64. According to the *Octavia* author, around this time a mob of Octavia’s supporters surrounded Nero’s palace and threatened to burn it down in 62 (see chapter 4, 164–68), but Tacitus does not mention this detail in his account of the incident (*Ann.* 14.61).

102. See C. Williams (2009), 77, on Boudicca’s representation in Tacitus as a proxy for earlier figures from Roman history associated with revolts against Roman tyranny. On the amphitheater collapse in Naples, see chapter 3 above, 118; on the gymnasium and grain barge fires, see below, 191 and 285n16.

103. Tac. *Ann.* 4.64.1; see chapter 2 above, 73–75.

104. Owen and Gildenhard (2013), 117.

105. See above, 181–85.

106. *Effigies*: TLL vol. V 2, p. 180, l. 4. As Santoro L’Hoir (1994) has shown, in Tacitus’s account of the Boudiccan revolt (*Ann.* 14.32), *effigies* and a host of other stage-related terms color the episode in metaphorical terms that are both incendiary and theatrical. On the importance of Rumor in Tacitus, see Gibson (1998). See also Hardie (2012), 273–330.

107. As O’Gorman (2000), 168, has demonstrated, this portrayal is further reflected in the patterning of Tacitus’s larger narrative.

108. See chapter 3 above, 117. Suetonius (*Ner.* 6) specifies that the speech for Bonia, 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.

109. See discussions above in chapter 3 (107, 116–20, 137, 139), chapter 4 (163–67) and above, 174–75.

110. Tac. *Ann.* 15.37.1: *ut exemplum referam, ne saepius eadem prodigientia narranda sit.*

111. Santoro L’Hoir (2006), 248.

112. Cogitore (2002), 633. This behavior extends and develops patterns set in place as early as Augustus; see chapter 1 above, 34–44. The identification of areas destroyed in the second flare-up of the fire as *porticus amoenitati dicatae* (*Ann.* 15.40.1) may signal, albeit obscurely, that the fire has now consumed the pleasure and entertainment zone in

the Campus Martius where the revelries described at *Ann.* 15.37 took place, visiting the “consequences” of Nero’s perversity upon the setting in which it was displayed.

113. Cf. Waddell (2013), 484. Other discussions of Tacitus’s use of sudden transitions in the narrative to make rhetorical points: Syme (1958), 310; Koestermann, (1963–68) *ad Ann.* 4.234; Woodman and Martin (1996), 210; O’Gorman (2000), 171; Ash (2006), 93.

114. See Ryberg (1942). Tacitus notoriously weights the latter of two alternatives as the more plausible one; see also Reid (1921); Chapman (1947); Walker (1952); Syme (1958), 304–21; Yavetz (1975); Whitehead (1979); Pagán (1999), 303n7; Whitton (2011). The tactic recurs in the fire narrative at *Ann.* 15.38.7, where certain persons said to have prevented firefighting and even to have added more firebrands to the blaze are either “seeking to plunder more freely, or obeying orders” (*sive ut raptus licentius excercerent seu iussu*).

115. Cf. the similar *aporia* concerning responsible parties in setting the Capitol alight in 69 (Tac. *Hist.* 3.71.9).

116. Cf. Keitel (2010), 342. Furthermore, Nero’s guilt is implicitly suggested by comparison with the book’s own previous notices of fires in the city: the fire on the gymnasium is caused by lightning (*Ann.* 15.18.8), while the fire on the Tiber that destroys several grain barges happens accidentally (*fortuitus*, *Ann.* 15.22.2). These qualifications (especially the latter) become significant in retrospect when Tacitus claims *aporia* on assigning the cause of the Great Fire at *Ann.* 15.38.1.

117. Cf. Ryberg (1942), 399; Waddell (2013), 487.

118. See discussion of this popular accusation in chapter 3 above, 113–18.

119. O’Gorman (2000), 181.

120. On Rome as Troy in Latin historiography, see especially Kraus (1994), 270–78, on Livy; 285–87 on Tacitus’s reading of Livy. Ash (2018) argues that Tacitus is relatively sparing in his verbal reminiscences of Livy to avoid seeming hackneyed, further pointing out the possibility of other models, such as accounts of the Vesuvian destruction (covered in the lost book of the *Histories*; cf. Plin. *Ep.* 6.16, 20) and the hyperbolic imagery of school declamations (cf. Sen. *Controv.* 2.1.11). I focus here on the most substantive of these allusions, which is the extended series of references to *Aeneid* 2 in particular.

121. Woodman (2012), 389–90.

122. Cf. Woodman (2012), 392.

123. On Rome as a character in the *Histories*, see Ash (2007).

124. See Ash (2018) *ad* 38.3. The use noted by Ash in Seneca (*incendio pervagante*, *QNat.* 2.14.2) is suggestively close to Lucan’s *igne vago* (*BC* 1.50) describing Nero’s Phaethon-esque future as driver of the cosmic chariot (see chapter 3 above, 126–27) and to Statius’s *vagantes . . . ignes* (*Silv.* 2.7.60–61) describing the flames wandering Rome’s rooftops as Nero’s doing (see chapter 4 above, 143). See also the discussion of the Circus imagery of Phaethon’s flight in chapter 2, 81–82.

125. As Ash (2018 *ad* 38.3) notes, *antiit remedia* is a medical metaphor that extends the findings of Woodman (2010) into this episode. Later, when the fire rekindles after a brief reprieve, it is described as “back on the prowl” (*russum grassatus*, 40.1) and as having “burst out” (*proruperat*, 40.2) from the confines of Tigellinus’s property.

126. See Griffin (2009), 173, on the causal link implied here between Nero’s violent behavior and the general decline of society.

127. See Kraus (1994) generally on the Trojan resonances of the Livian account of the Gallic sack; on rebuilding Rome hastily after the sack, see Kraus (1994), 295–96, citing Livy 5.55.2–5; Cicero (*Leg. agr.* 2.96) also comments that Rome’s roads “are none of the best” and its side-streets “of the narrowest [sort].” After Owen and Gildenhard (2013).

128. Owen and Gildenhard (2013), 197.

129. Owen and Gildenhard (2013), 189.

130. *paventium feminarum*: the expression is also colored by previous use of the trope in Tacitus’s 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. 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.

131. Woodman (2012), 390n40, also acknowledges a number of Tacitean precedents for combinations of *fessus* and *aetas*.

132. On the variation of the *urbs capta* motif in which destruction is visited on a Trojan-esque population rendered vulnerable by drinking and celebration, see Rossi (2002), esp. 243n35.

133. Cf. also Livy 5.54: *si fraude . . . si casu Veii incendium ortum sit*.

134. Pushing back against a tradition in scholarship that objects to the detection of “slivers of verse” in historical prose, Woodman (2012), 387–92, offers an extended examination of poetic correspondences in *Ann.* 15.38.1–40.1; see also Edwards (2013), 552–53. The actual location Tacitus mentions here, apparently a monumental district lavishly endowed with temples, contains not just the *delubra deum* but colonnades for pleasure (*porticus amoenitati dicatae*), a phrase redolent of poetic performance and literary production.

135. Putnam (1989).

136. Tacitus’s substitution of *machinator* for *fabricator* perhaps also echoes Andromache’s description of Ulysses in Seneca’s *Troades* as a “designer of tricks and a craftsman of crimes” (*machinator fraudis et scelerum artifex*, *Troades* 750).

137. Cf. Vergil’s famous allegory of *Fama* (“rumor”) at *Aen.* 4.180–90. As Owen and Gildenhard (2013), 204, note, the rumor at *Ann.* 15.39 is “personified as a force of its own,” and “[t]he inversion of normal word order (verb + subject) adds emphasis to the power of this rumour and the extent of its spread.”

138. Keitel (2010) and Joseph (2012b), 113–52, have shown how Tacitus comments on the collapse of Roman leadership by embedding multiple allusions to the *Aeneid* into

key scenes from the *Histories* (respectively, the death of Galba in Book 1 and the battles of Cremona in Books 2 and 3).

139. Cf. Sen. *Ep.* 91.12: *ut* is conjectured here, which possibly alters the sense of *meminerint*. See Ash (2018), 192. See Gowers (2005), 172n7; Ash (2018), 190.

140. On the tendentious nature of the catalogue of destruction at *Ann.* 15.41, see Siwicki (2015), 273–82. On the focus on Nero as a religious failure in this passage, see Shannon (2012).

141. Shannon (2012), 752.

142. Ash (2018), 190–92, lists the following citations: for the temple of Luna (that is, the temple of Diana on the Aventine), Livy 40.2.2. and Ov. *Fast.* 3.884; for the Ara Maxima, Verg. *Aen.* 8.185–268, Livy 1.7.11, Prop. 4.9.68, Ov. *Fast.* 1.581; for the foundation of Jupiter Stator, Livy 1.12.4–6, 10.37.15; for Numa's Regia, Ov. *Fast.* 6.233–34; *Tr.* 3.1.30. For Augustan references to the Temple of Vesta, see chapter 1 above, 43–44. See also Shannon (2012), 752, on the Livian origins (pr. 6) of the phrases *condendae urbis novae* (*Ann.* 15.40.2) and *monumenta . . . incorrupta* (*Ann.* 15.41.1).

143. On the likelihood that this phrase refers to written material (cf. *Agr.* 2.1: *monumenta clarissimorum ingeniorum*, the same phrasing as in our *Annals* passage), see Shannon (2012), 752–53; Ash (2018), 191–92.

144. Murgatroyd (2005), 53.

145. See Keitel (1984), 308; Kraus (1994), 287; Ash (2018), 209–10. 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. The comment at *Ann.* 15.43.1 on "parts of the city that survived [Nero's] house" (*Ceterum urbis quae domui supererant*), echoes the personified remains of Rome described after the fire at *Ann.* 15.40: *septem reliquis pauca tectorum vestigia supererant, lacera et semusta*, "in seven (regions) a few traces of structures survived, shredded and half-burnt." On the personification of Rome here as a mutilated, semicremated corpse, see Owen and Gildenhard (2013), 209; Ash (2018), 189. On *sem(i)ustus* as a characteristic expression of failed cremation, see Noy (2000).

146. Although *perrumpere* does have technical applications for light and heat (this phrase in Tacitus is listed under *TLL* 10.1.1666.35: 3, b, β: *penetrat lux, visus, calor, sonus*), the more common usages describe attacks on living beings and defensive structures; *TLL* s.v. 10.1.1665.40, I.a.1: (*corpora animantium vel munimenta eos tegentia*); cf. *OLD* s.v. *perrumpo* 2.b.

147. Cf. Martial's comment on Nero's excessively hot baths (*Mart. Ep.* 10.48), discussed above in chapter 4, 150–51.

148. O'Gorman (2000), 174–75; cf. also Tacitus's comment about the more serious nature of unexpected calamity (*quo inprovisor graviorque pestis*) at *Ann.* 2.47.1.

149. See above, 177–78.

150. As Shannon (2012), 754n23, observes, “Tacitus would have been in Rome when the Forum of Trajan was dedicated in 112, and could have returned from his proconsulship in Asia in time to witness the dedication of Trajan’s Column, the two most famous examples of Trajanic *resurgens urbis pulchritudo*.” But even if *Ann.* 15 is assigned a Hadrianic date, the notion of *urbis resurgens* still applies. Hadrian was an architect in his own right, with architectural innovations such as the Temple of Venus and Rome, the renovated Pantheon, and the Mausoleum across the Tiber (on which see above, 177–78).

151. On Tacitus’s use of eyewitness testimony for the reign of Nero, see Syme (1958), 299–301.

152. Owen and Gildenhard (2013), 193.

Conclusion

1. I present these postclassical works without any pretensions to detailed analysis or comprehensive coverage of modern scholarship on each topic; rather I aim to present selected aspects of each topic in straightforward descriptive terms (with a few key citations), as well as to situate them in relation to the ideas discussed in the ancient material presented in this book’s previous chapters.

2. The spoliation of ancient buildings and monuments for use in churches and papal palaces around Rome and the Vatican is too vast a topic to discuss in any detail here. Kinney (2001), (2005), (2006), and Bosman (2004) offer good starting points.

3. For an overview of the history of the reception of this fresco, see Badt (1959). On the work’s greater setting in the Vatican stanze, see Rowland (2005). Recent reconsiderations of Raphael’s figurative style in the *Fire in the Borgo* have come from Reilly (2010) on the “vernacular” portrayal of human figures and Culotta (2015) on the relationship of the architectural elements in the scene to contemporary stage set design. On Raphael’s literary influences see Rijser (2012).

4. Raphael’s first works in the Vatican, the frescoes of the Stanza della Segnatura, were painted between 1508 and 1511 for Leo’s predecessor, Julius II.

5. The interpretation of this grouping as based on Aeneas and Anchises dates back at least as far as Raphael’s near-contemporary Giorgio Vasari (see Vasari [(1550/1568) 1966], 193–94).

6. Cf. also the *paveses feminae* of Quint. *Inst.* 8.3.67, as well as Tacitus’s account of the 64 fire (*Ann.* 15.38); see chapter 5 above, 196–197.

7. Culotta (2015), 267.

8. Badt (1959) argues that this theatrical presentation suggests Raphael’s engagement not only with Vitruvius but with Aristotle’s newly rediscovered *Poetics*; for an overview of objections to these findings, see Reilly (2010), 323n13. For detailed formal analysis of the Aeneas and Anchises figures, see Ettlinger and Ettlinger (1987), 176.

9. On Nero's revival of the *Incendium*, see chapter 3 above, 117.
10. On the *Octavia*, see chapter 4 above, 157–170.
11. Rowland (2005), 155, building on the ideas of Onians (1988), 258; see also Reilly (2010), 310.
12. Onians (1988), 258.
13. On the burning ships of *Aeneid* 5, see chapter 1 above, 59–62.
14. On ecclesiastical abbreviations, see Shahan (1907). On the checkered history of Roman emperors' performative refusals of the title *Pater Patriae*, see Taylor (1929); Bennett (1984); Jakobson and Cotton (1985); Stevenson (2007).
15. On *Stata Mater Augusta*, see chapter 1 above, 37–39. On the so-called *Arae Incendii Neroniani* and Martial *Epigrams* 5.7, see chapter 4 above, 145–155.
16. On Julius II's classicizing tendencies, see Temple (2011).
17. On the incomplete state of St. Peter's in these years, see Nesselrath (2004), 284.
18. The prophecy about the Colosseum's fall is attributed to the Venerable Bede (c. 673–735), the English Benedictine monk and ecclesiastical historian.
19. On the fetishization of ruins as a constitutive element of "imperial formations," see Stoler (2008).
20. In addition to the projects discussed here, the *Tevereterno* friezes on the Tiber embankments executed by Kristen Jones ("She Wolves," 2005; see Tevereterno [2009]) and William Kentridge ("Triumphs and Laments," 2016; see Zamponi [2016]) both included torchlit inaugural spectacles that evoked ancient rituals involving fire.
21. "Italy: The Colosseum Virtually Engulfed in Flames," Reuters, September 18, 2010, reuters.screenocean.com/record/586309
22. Online post by Jacob Fuglsang Mikkelsen, The Triangle Project, February 3, 2008, triangleproject.blogspot.com
23. "Coliseum on Fire," September 17, 2010, www.hildendiaz.dk/blog/files/c43036b1a3cab9e607219b002a9011aa-11.php
24. Thyra Hilden and Pio Diaz, "City on Fire: Burning the Roots of Western Culture," www.thyrahilden.dk/cityonfire.htm
25. The dedicatory inscription is reconstructed by Alföldy (1995) as *Imp. T. Caes. Vespasianus Aug. Amphitheatrum Novum Ex Manubis Fieri Iussit*.
26. Cf. Mart. *Spect.* 2.
27. 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.
28. Dio 79.25.2–3; translation adapted from Cary (1914–27).
29. See Lancaster (1998) for an account of attempts at reconstruction.
30. "City on Fire: Bruciando le radici della cultura occidentale," text and press kit, www.thyrahilden.dk/cityonfire.htm; my translation.

31. In addition to the 1992 Los Angeles riots, think of the riots of the 1960s in Detroit, Watts, and Newark; the Moody Park Riots in Houston in 1977; Cincinnati in 2001 and Ferguson in 2014.

32. "Surrounded by Fire, California Politicians Question Links to Climate Change," *The Guardian*, July 31, 2018, www.theguardian.com

33. "California Wildfire: Should Inmates Be Fighting the State's Worst Ever Blaze?," *The Independent*, August 8, 2018, www.independent.co.uk; "Opinion: Wildfires Like the Wine Country's Affect Rich and Poor Differently," *Mercury News* (San Jose, CA), October 22, 2017, www.mercurynews.com; "How Smoke from California's Fires Is Harming the Most Vulnerable," *PBS NewsHour*, December 9, 2017, www.pbs.org/newshour

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BM Coins, Rom. Emp. = *British Museum Catalogue of Coins of the Roman Empire*. 1923-. London.

CAH = *The Cambridge Ancient History*. 2nd ed. 1961-. Cambridge.

CIL = *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*.

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Index Locorum

Aeschylus

Phoen. 1121–22: 16

Sept. 432–34: 16

Augustus

Res Gestae 5: 31

Catullus

51.15–16: 166

Cicero

Cat. 3.1: 19

Verr. 2.5: 18

Consolatio ad Liviam

111–12: 70

227–20, 230–38: 70

Dio (Cassius Dio)

58.23.4: 77

62.16.4–7: 11

Euripides

Phaethon, fr. 52.: 13

Homer

Il. 6.448–49: 27

Horace

Carm.

2.1.1–8: 42

3.29.12: 174

Juvenal

1.45: 184

1.155–57: 184

3.7–9: 174

3.197–98: 174

3.198–202: 175

10.61–67: 183

10.81–82: 184

Livy

6.13: 41

Lucan

BC

1.5: 162

1.47–50: 126, 143, 162

1.72–80: 124, 162

1.81: 131, 136

1.204: 128

1.220: 128

1.153–55: 128

1.653: 127

1.657: 127

2.408–15: 127, 130

9.406–9: 130

Iliakon fr. 6: 128

Lucretius

DRN

5.92–96: 15

5.396: 82

5.407–10: 14

Manilius

- Astr.* 1.1–2: 94
 1.13: 94
 1.736–38: 95–96
 1.822: 95
 1.907–8: 95–96
 1.910: 96
 1.920–21: 96
 5.734–45: 96–97

Martial

- Ep.* 3.52: 151
 5.7: 151–53
 10.48: 151

Spect. 2.3–4: 150–51

Octavia

- 1–2: 158
 18: 158
 23–34: 158
 221–26: 159
 227–37: 159–60
 391–96: 161
 518: 162
 773–77: 163–64
 801: 164
 806–19: 164–65
 816–17: 165
 831: 166
 832–33: 167
 842–43: 167
 857: 167
 858: 166

Ovid

- Fast.* 1.523–26: 39–40
 6.437–42: 43–44

- Met.* 1.256–58: 80
 1.777: 83
 2.1–5: 81–82
 2.31: 81
 2.104: 83
 2.169–70: 85–86
 2.214–38: 83–86
 2.270–71: 86
 2.283–84: 86
 2.299–300: 86–87, 126

- 2.300: 126
 2.315: 300
 2.319–21: 90
 2.327: 87, 95
 2.329–30: 87
 15.391–94: 88–89
 15.392: 90
 15.402–3: 89
 15.434–35: 89
 15.594: 89
 15.749–51: 90
 15.847–49: 90
 15.871–79: 91–92

- Tr.* 1.1.79–82: 91–92, 153
 4.10.63–64: 91

Petronius

- Sat.* 78: 106–8

Philodemus (*Anth. Pal.* 5.124): 56–57

Plato

- Tim.* 22b–c: 14

Pliny (Elder)

- HN* 10.2.5: 178–79
 10.4: 15

Pliny (Younger)

- Pan.* 8.6: 178
 33.3: 182
 52.4–6: 181–83

Polybius

- 38.22: 27

Porcius Licinius (Gell. *NA*, 19.9.12–13): 67

Propertius

- 2.31.11: 82
 4.1.87: 40

Seneca (Elder)

- Controv.* 2.4.13: 6
 10.5.22: 98
 10.7: 98

Seneca (Younger)

Ad Marc. 1.2-3: 99
22.4-5: 99-100
26.4: 100
26.6-7: 100-101

Ben. 6.32.3: 138

Ep. ad Luc. 91.1-2: 131-34

1.6.1: 134
6.3: 135
13.1: 136
13.3: 138
14: 135
16: 133-34
20: 137

Prov. 5.10: 18

VB 20.5: 102

Statius

Silv. 2.7.60-61: 143-44, 158

Suetonius

Calig. 11: 78
31: 76-77

Ner. 16.1: 114
20: 118

Tib. 50.3: 74
75.3: 72-73

Tit. 3.4: 146

Tacitus

Ann. 1.3.2: 188
1.10.2: 198-99
1.22.1: 188
3.54.1: 189
4.35: 180
4.64.1: 73-74
4.64: 75.6
6.28: 179
6.45: 73
12.58: 117
13.2.2: 188
13.25.1: 196

14.1.1-2: 188
15.37.1-4: 192-93
15.38.1: 110, 193, 198, 200, 203
15.38.2-3: 195-96
15.38.4-5: 196-97
15.39.3: 115, 194
15.40: 112, 189, 198, 200
15.41.1-3: 200-203
15.43.2: 114
15.43.5: 203
15.67.2: 187

Vergil

Aen.

1.1-7: 26, 95
1.12-22: 26
1.51: 52, 86
1.145-56: 45-50, 57, 85, 166
1.364: 55
1.673: 54
1.679: 55
2.12: 165
2.34: 198
2.35-41: 50-51
2.105: 51
2.210: 51
2.221: 53
2.248-49: 198
2.264-67: 107, 197, 199
2.304-8: 52
2.312: 52, 175
2.479-80: 107
2.682-84: 53-54
2.792-93: 86
2.290: 107
2.296-97: 51
4.23: 55
4.39-44: 57
4.54-55: 57
4.66-73: 56-59, 61
4.196-97: 59
4.298: 58
4.360: 58
4.519-20: 94
4.666-71: 27-28, 61
5.105: 59
5.602: 59
5.635-42: 59-60
5.662: 61

Vergil (*continued*)

5.671-73: 60-61
5.680-83: 61
5.687-91: 61-62
6.888-89: 58-59
7.456-57: 62
8.198-99: 63
8.861-62: 63
9.59-66: 63
9.69-76: 63-65
9.77-79: 64

9.120-22: 65
9.447: 167
12.946-50: 65

G.

1.84-86: 40
1.87-88: 40, 85
1.466-68: 48, 129, 158
1.481-83: 48-49, 52
1.509-14: 47-48, 85
2.303-9: 57, 61, 85

General Index

- abduction, 43–44
- Achilles, 119, 228n87
- adoptive emperors, 173, 176–78, 209. *See also*
Hadrian; Nerva; Trajan
- Aebutius Liberalis, 136–37
- Aedes Vestae*, 35–36
- Aeneas: and exemplary tradition, 20, 61–62;
limits of understanding, 50, 58; shield of,
63, 82; as survivor of fire, 54–55, 61–62
- Aeneid* (Vergil): in *Annals*, 176, 194; in *Astro-*
nomica, 93, 94; and *Bellum Civile*, 125–26,
130; Dido in, 8, 26–27, 46, 54–59, 61, 62, 65,
67, 85, 186, 187, 210; in *Epistulae Morales* 91,
134–35; fall of Troy in, 25, 26, 45, 51, 52, 54,
55, 119, 197; fire imagery in, 8, 25–28, 45–47,
49–66, 186–87, 188, 210; leadership con-
cerns, 45–46, 49–54; in *Octavia*, 162–63,
164–67; in Ovid, 80, 85–86, 87; renewal in,
64–65, 66, 162; in *Satyricon*, 107; ship burn-
ing in, 59–65; Trojan Games in, 116
- Aeolus, 273n99
- Aeolus's Cave, 238n124
- Aeschylus, 16
- aether*, 27, 83
- Afranius, 117
- Agamemnon, 107
- Agricola* (Tacitus), 282n84
- Agrippa Postumus, 282n85
- Agrippina, 158, 188, 254n13, 268n48
- Agrippina (colony), 190
- Agrippina the Younger, 282n85
- Ajax, 240n139
- Alba Longa, 26, 53
- Alexander the Great, 27, 265n157
- Allecto, 62
- Amata, 26
- Anaglypha Traiani, 277n40
- Anchises, 53, 54, 58, 197
- Annals* (Tacitus): authorship of, 276n31; de-
struction in, 9, 170–71, 174, 176, 186, 187–88,
189, 190–202; fire imagery, 185–89, 190–91,
193, 195–96; on Great Fire of 64 CE, 180–81,
186, 192–205; phoenix in, 179–80; publica-
tion dates, 11; on Sejanus, 279n61
- Aphrodite, 153, 159. *See also* Venus
- apocalypse. *See* destruction
- Apollo, 34, 36, 72, 122. *See also* Phoebus
- Apollo Soranus, Festival of, 42
- Arae Incendii Neroniani, 113, 142, 144–45,
147–50, 215, 278n47
- Ara Fortunae Reducis, 235n81
- Aratus, 93, 94
- Arch of Titus, 218
- Ardea, 134
- Ares. *See* Mars
- Aristotle, 288n8
- arson: benefits from, 175; by Nero, 110, 112, 114,
115–16, 194; as political act, 1, 16–17; punish-
ment for, 227n65; in *Satires* (Juvenal), 175
- artifacts: mutilation of, 182, 183–84; relocation
by Augustus, 35–36, 38–39, 41; survival of,
20, 75

- Ascanius, 26, 53–54, 59, 60–61
 Asinius Pollio, 32, 42–43
 Assyria, 89
 astrology, 77
Astronomica (Manilius), 92, 93–97
 Augustus: in *Annals*, 198–99, 200; in *Astronomica*, 95; censorship by, 21, 39, 41–43; death, cremation, and funeral, 71–72, 77; deaths of heirs, 69–70, 87; divinization of, 29–31, 34–39, 44, 48, 95; in *Epigrams*, 155; as fiery, 188; fire control by, 28–29, 32–39; fires at residences, 34–35, 36–37, 77, 247n64; in *Octavia*, 155, 162–63; in Ovid, 79, 81–82, 153–54; political use of fire, 28–29, 33–34, 37–39, 208; quality of sources on, 10; reconstruction by, 29–31, 32, 72, 112, 121, 137; Seneca on, 134–35, 137–38; solar calendar, 30, 123; solar imagery of, 30, 72, 81–82; succession from Caesar, 90–91
 authority: of Aeneas, 61–62; authorship vs. authorization, 194; and fire prevention, 31–34; of Pythagoras, 88; and use of fire, 2–3
 authorship vs. authorization, 194

 Bacchanalian conspiracy, 233n49
 backfiring, 112
 baths, 146, 176
 Bede, 289n18
Bellum Civile (Lucan), 123–30, 136, 155–56, 158, 159, 162–63, 285n124
 Bononia, 117, 192
 book burning: by authors, 21–22, 41–42, 91, 97–98; in Great Fire of 64 CE, 201; by imperial command, 20–22, 71, 98–101, 180
 Boudiccan revolt, 190
 Britannicus, 270n66
 Brutus, 98
 buildings: in *Annals*, 200–201; height limits on, 177; as metaphor, 32. *See also* reconstruction and construction

 Cacus, 63, 234n71, 241n156
 Caecilius Metellus, 20, 35, 257n46
 Caelian fire of 27 CE, 73–74, 75, 190
 Caesar: in *Bellum Civile*, 128–29, 130; construction and reconstruction by, 29, 73; death, cremation, and funeral, 17, 31, 49, 54, 71, 129, 160, 250n110; deification of, 90; as fiery, 128–29; in *Georgics*, 47, 48–49; succession by Augustus, 90–91
 Caesonius Maximus, 267n31
 Caligula, 75–77, 78, 98, 101
 Calliope, 153
 Camillus, 134
 Campus Martius: in *Annals*, 285n112; and Augustus, 30, 81–82, 121, 123; fire of 80 CE, 146; as funeral complex, 71–73, 87; reorganization of, 177, 203
 Capaneus, 16
 Capitoline Temple, 147
 Carthage, fall of, 25, 26–28, 45, 54–55, 57, 94
 Cassius, 98
 catastersim: of Augustus, 95; of Caesar, 90, 91; of Nero, 126, 127. *See also* divinity
 catastrophes. *See* destruction, cycle of; disasters; earthquakes; *ekpyrosis*; floods
 Catilinarian conspiracy, 233n49
 Catiline, 8–9, 16
 Cato the Younger, 129–30
Cena Trimalchionis in *Satyricon* (Petronius), 106–8, 156
 censorship: by Augustus, 39, 41–43; of Cremutius Cordus, 98–101, 180; by Nero, 150; in overview, 6–7; in post-Augustus era, 78, 98; in *Satires*, 184–85; by Trajan, 181. *See also* book burning
 Ceres, 113
 charioteer imagery: in *Annals*, 285n124; in *Astronomica*, 95; at Augustus's funeral, 72; in *Georgics*, 47–50, 95; on sarcophagi, 243n2. *See also* Phaethon myth
 Chatsworth Relief, 277n40
 Christians, persecution of, 113, 116, 184–85, 202, 275n11
 Cicero, 16–17, 18, 19–20, 65
 Circus Maximus, 29–30, 81, 110, 176
 city: as metaphor, 32; as text, 9. *See also* Rome; *urbs capta* motif
 “City on Fire” (Hilden and Diaz), 217–18
 civil conflict: in *Astronomica*, 93, 94, 95–97; censorship of texts on civil war, 42–43; as conflagration, 163; in *Metamorphoses*, 80–81, 85; principate as form of in *Annals*, 186, 187–88
 Claudia Quinta, 20, 75
 Claudius, 76, 101, 146, 158, 224n42, 268n48, 282n85

- Clodius, 16, 17, 21, 31, 65, 71
 Clymene, 70
 coinage, 13, 177, 178, 179, 181, 205, 232n25, 264n145
 Colosseum, 216–18
 Colossus of Nero, 122, 150, 158
 comets: in *Aeneid*, 54, 61; association with Phaethon, 15, 160, 238n115; in *Astronomica*, 95; and Caesar's death, 49, 54, 71, 90, 128, 160, 250n110; in *Octavia*, 159–60
 compital shrines, 235n78
Consolatio ad Liviam, 70, 72
Consolatio ad Marciam (Seneca), 98–101, 180, 184
 consolations: in *Bellum Civile* (Lucan), 124; *Consolatio ad Liviam*, 70, 72; *Consolatio ad Marciam* (Seneca), 98–101, 180, 184
 Cornelius Gallus, 240n143
 cosmos: in *Astronomica*, 93–97; dissolution of, 2; in *Metamorphoses*, 81–82; in Seneca, 100. *See also* destruction, cycle of; *ekpyrosis*
 Crassus, 19, 32
 cremations: in *Aeneid*, 65; of Augustus, 71; of Caesar, 17; and deification, 177–78; of Domitian, 278n45; of Hadrian, 173; performativity of, 69–70, 73, 87, 177–78; of Phaethon, 85; of Tiberius, 72–73; of Trajan, 173
 Cremutius Cordus, 98–101, 180, 184, 204
 cultural memory, 5–9
 cultural trauma, 222n16
cura annonae, 31, 76. *See also* grain supply
 Curia, 17, 30–31
 Daedalus, 254n8
De beneficiis (Seneca), 136–37
De clementia (Seneca), 134
 deer imagery in *Aeneid*, 56, 57, 85
De incendio urbis (Lucan), 130, 143, 194
 Demosthenes, 228n85
De rerum natura (Lucretius), 14–15, 17, 80, 83, 95
 destruction, cycle of: in *Aeneid*, 26, 45–47; in *Annals*, 9, 170–71, 174, 176, 186, 187–88, 189, 190–202; in *Astronomica*, 94; in *Bellum Civile*, 124–26, 136; day of doom, 136; as general theme, 2, 208–10; in *Metamorphoses*, 82–92, 162; post-Augustan era, 69, 77–78; by principate, 174, 176, 186, 187–88, 190–202; in *Satires*, 175–76, 184; in Seneca, 100–101, 109–10, 125, 130, 131–36, 138, 175. *See also ekpyrosis*; renewal after destruction
De vita beata (Seneca), 102
 Diaz, Pio, 217–18
 Dido: in *Aeneid*, 8, 26–27, 46, 54–59, 61, 62, 65, 67, 85, 186, 187, 210; in *Astronomica*, 94, 95; deer imagery, 56, 57, 85; fire imagery, 8, 26–27, 54–59, 186, 187, 210; as leader, 55–56; Phaethon as, 83
 disasters: in *Annals*, 186, 189–92; earthquakes, 100, 117–18, 132, 190; and Nero, 117–18; societal responses to, 6; Vesuvius, 146. *See also ekpyrosis*; floods
 disease, 17–18, 95, 100, 147, 190
 divinity: of Augustus, 29–31, 34–39, 44, 48, 95; of Caesar, 90, 91; fire as aspect of, 3; of Hadrian, 177; of Nero, 122–23, 126, 127; of Trajan, 177. *See also* catasterism
 Dolabella, 35
 Domitian: altars to Vulcan, 113, 142, 144–45, 147–50, 215, 278n47; death of, 181–83; in *Epigrams*, 152, 154–55; as patron of Statius, 266n5; and Phaethon theme, 157; reconstruction and construction by, 147–50, 152, 177, 203; succession of Titus, 209
 Domus Aurea. *See* Golden House (Domus Aurea)
 Domus Transitoria, 111
 Drusus, 70, 249n93
 eagles, 71, 177
 earthquakes, 100, 117–18, 132, 190
 eclipses, 48, 77, 87, 129
effigies, 191
 Egnatius Rufus, 31–32
 Egyptian imagery, 30
ekpyrosis: in *Aeneid*, 27, 162; in *Astronomica*, 96–97; in *Bellum Civile*, 124–26, 129, 130; in *Epistulae Morales* 91, 135–36; as general theme, 3, 14–15, 69, 109; in *Iliad*, 128; in *Metamorphoses*, 80–81, 86, 162; in *Octavia*, 159, 161–63, 168; in Seneca, 100–101, 125. *See also* renewal after destruction
 empire. *See* leadership; principate as destructive; succession
 Encolpius, 107
 Epaphus, 81
 Epicurus, 14

- Epigrams* (Martial), 142, 144–45, 150–55, 175, 215–16
- Epistulae Morales* 91 (Seneca the Younger), 109–10, 130, 131–38
- Eridanus. *See* Po River
- eroticism, fire as, 55–57
- Euripides, 13, 16, 77
- exemplary tradition: and Aeneas, 20, 61–62; of Augustus, 154–55; leaders as survivors of fires, 20; of Nero, 105, 119, 123; of Rome, 12, 89; in Seneca, 101; in Tacitus, 187
- exiles, 91, 98, 134, 138, 153, 236n101, 267n31
- Fama*, 27, 58, 199
- famine, 31, 166, 168
- Fasti* (Ovid), 35, 39–40, 43–44
- fatal charades, 107, 113
- female eroticism, 55
- figured speech, 2
- fire: eroticism as, 55–57; at public events, 147; records of, 221n6, 231n18; as ubiquitous danger, 1–2, 3, 5; wildfires, 219. *See also* arson; book burning; Caelian fire of 27 CE; destruction, cycle of; fire control and prevention; fire imagery; Fire of 80 CE; Great Fire of 64 CE; Nero and Great Fire of 64 CE; reconstruction and construction
- fire control and prevention: by Augustus, 28–29, 32–39; and authority, 31–34; backfiring, 112; and bulding height, 177; by Caligula, 76; by Crassus, 19, 32; by Egnatius Rufus, 31–32; fire brigades, 19, 32–33; by Nero, 113–14, 177, 203; and nymphs, 65; and Stata Mater, 37–39; *vigiles*, 33–34, 106–7, 110–11
- fire imagery: in *Aeneid*, 8, 25–28, 45–47, 49–66, 186–87, 188, 210; in *Annals*, 185–89, 190–91, 193, 195–96; in *Astronomica*, 94–95; in *Bellum Civile*, 124–26; for civil wars, 42–43; as creative, 1; as destructive, 1, 50; general use of, 1–3, 5, 7–9, 207; in *Iliad*, 228n87; in *Metamorphoses*, 80, 81, 82–85, 86–88, 186, 187; in *Octavia*, 155, 156–57, 162; in Seneca, 8, 188; in Tacitus, 9, 173, 174, 176, 185–89, 190–91, 193, 195–96. *See also* Phaethon myth; phoenix
- Fire in the Borgo* (Raphael), 211–16
- Fire of 64 CE. *See* Great Fire of 64 CE
- Fire of 80 CE, 146, 147, 154
- fire-walkers, 42
- Flavian Amphitheater, 146, 150, 265n2
- Flavian Capitol, 146
- Flavian dynasty: reconstruction and construction by, 142, 145–50, 152; Titus, 146–47, 209; Vespasian, 145–46, 209, 229n100. *See also* Domitian
- floods: in *Aeneid*, 52; in *Bellum Civile*, 127, 128; in *Consolatio ad Liviam*, 70; in *Georgics*, 262n115; in *Metamorphoses*, 80–81, 82, 86, 162; as metaphor for failing society, 17–18; in Phaethon tale, 14; in Seneca, 100
- forgetting, 6
- Forum, Roman, 13, 21, 33, 35–36, 37, 217
- Forum of Trajan, 203, 275n10
- Forum Transitorium, 147
- freedmen, 29, 33, 34
- Fucinus, 190
- funerals, 17, 31, 71–73, 87. *See also* cremations
- Furies, 158, 190
- furor*, 45, 51, 207
- Gaius, 188, 249n93
- Galba, 145, 279n51
- Gallus, 240n143
- Gauls, 12–13, 134, 196
- genius*, 75
- Georgics* (Vergil): charioteer imagery in, 47–50, 95; eclipses in, 48, 129; in *Octavia*, 158, 166; in Ovid, 85, 87, 246n53; Po River in, 48–49, 262n115; renewal in, 246n53; shepherd imagery in, 57
- Germanicus, 70, 190
- ghosts, 51, 86, 270nn65–66
- Golden Age, 13, 25, 30, 88, 105, 122, 135, 154, 162–63
- Golden House (Domus Aurea): building of, 109, 114, 120–23, 193, 202, 255n18; use of by successors, 140, 146, 176, 218
- grain supply, 30, 31, 76, 190, 285n116
- Great Fire of 64 CE: aftermath, 202–5; in *Annals*, 180–81, 186, 192–205; blame on Christians, 113, 116, 184–85, 202, 275n11; described, 110–12; and *Epistulae Morales* 91, 130, 131–38; principate as cause of, 192–202; and public resistance, 167–69; as watershed moment, 105, 139, 141. *See also* Nero and Great Fire of 64
- Hadrian: accession of, 178–79; as architect, 288n150; coinage, 177, 205; mausoleum of,

- 177; reconstruction and construction by, 176, 177, 203; record burning by, 181, 229n100
- Hannibal, 8–9, 235n84
- Hector, 12, 27, 51, 60
- Hecuba, 119
- Helen, 163–64
- Hephaestus, 153
- Hercules, 62–63
- hero, synecdochic, 20
- Hilden, Thyra, 217–18
- Hirtius, 198, 199
- Horace, 17, 42–43, 44, 174, 235n84
- Hut of Romulus, 36
- Iarbas, 58
- Iliacon* (Lucan), 127–28
- Iliad* (Homer), 12, 27, 60, 119, 165, 228n87
- Ilium, 117
- Incendium* (Afranius), 117
- incest, 188, 257n48
- intermediality, 7
- intertextuality, 7, 9
- Iris, 59–60
- Iulus. *See* Ascanius
- Jones, Kristen, 289n20
- Julia, 282n85
- Julio-Claudian dynasty. *See* Augustus; Caesar; Caligula; Claudius; Nero; Tiberius
- Julius Caesar. *See* Caesar
- Julius II, 212, 216
- Juno, 45, 46, 59, 60, 113, 125
- Jupiter: in *Aeneid*, 62; in *Bellum Civile*, 128; Domitian as, 157; in *Epigrams*, 153–54; Jupiter Stator, 37; in *Metamorphoses*, 80, 83, 86–87, 91, 92; in *Octavia*, 160, 165, 166
- Jupiter Stator, 37
- Juvenal, 11, 173, 174–76, 183–85, 204–5
- Kentridge, William, 289n20
- Laocoön, 50, 53
- Latinus, 26
- Lavinia, 62
- leadership: in *Aeneid*, 45–46, 49–56; creativity of, 9; of Dido, 55–56; as general theme, 1–2, 39–44, 207–9; in *Georgics*, 47–50; leaders as fiery, 18, 50–54, 63, 95, 128–29; leaders as survivors/protectors, 18–20, 22, 28, 48, 51–52, 54–55, 178, 207–9, 215–16; modern lessons for, 219–20; principate as destructive, 174, 176, 186, 187–88, 190–202, 205; shepherd imagery, 52. *See also* fire control; Nero and Great Fire of 64; Phaethon myth; reconstruction and construction; succession
- Leo IV, 212, 215
- Leo X, 212, 216
- Liberalis, 132, 136–37
- Liber spectaculorum* (Martial), 150, 152
- libraries, 32, 201
- Libya in Phaethon myth, 85, 129–30
- lightning strikes: on Colosseum, 218; on grain barges, 285n116; on imperial sites, 34, 117, 122, 191; by Jupiter, 80, 83, 87, 128, 153, 160, 165, 166; in *Octavia*, 160, 166; oratory as, 228n85; on Pantheon, 177
- Livia, 70, 74–75, 251n113
- Livy, 8, 21, 40–41, 44, 194, 196, 201
- Lua Mater, 37
- Lucan: *De incendio urbis*, 130, 143, 194; *Iliacon*, 127–28; overview of, 109; and *Silvae* (Statius), 143–44, 158. *See also* *Bellum Civile* (Lucan)
- Lucilius, 137, 185
- Lucius Caesar, 188, 249nn93–94
- Lucretius, 14–15, 17, 80, 83, 95
- Ludi Maximi* (Nero), 117
- Ludus Magnus, 146
- Lugdunum fire, 109–10, 130, 131–36, 138, 175
- Lusus Troiae. *See* Trojan Games
- Lycaon, 80
- magistri vicorum* and fire service, 33
- Magna Mater, 20, 75
- Maia Volcani, 37
- maiestas*, 98
- Manilius, 92, 93–97
- Marcellus, 249n93
- Marcia, 98–101
- Marciana, 276n23
- Mark Antony, 13, 16, 31, 117
- Mars, 151, 152, 154, 159
- Martial: *Epigrams*, 142, 144–45, 150–55, 175, 215–16; *Liber spectaculorum*, 150, 152
- Matidia, 276n23
- memory: cultural memory, 5–9; manipulation by Augustus, 29; memory culture, 5; role of literature in, 7–9; sanctions, 182

- Messalina, 158, 282n85
- Metamorphoses* (Ovid): in *Astronomica*, 93, 95; in *Bellum Civile*, 125–26; civil conflict in, 80–81, 85; *ekpyrosis* in, 80–81, 86, 162; in *Epigrams*, 152–53; fire imagery in, 80, 81, 82–85, 86–88, 186, 187; myth of ages, 162; in *Octavia*, 166; Phaethon in, 79–92, 126, 166, 186, 187; Pythagoras, 88–91, 100
- metaphor, as term, 222n10
- methodology and sources, 10–11
- metonym, as term, 222n10
- Milky Way, 95
- Minerva, 35, 147
- miracles, 64, 67, 191
- mob: in *Aeneid*, 45–50, 59–61, 64, 166; control by Augustus, 30–31; *Fama* as, 27; in *Octavia*, 157, 162; threat of, 16, 17, 65, 96, 188, 189; threats to burn Nero's palace, 168, 284n101
- monuments and tombs: by Augustus, 25, 29–30, 32, 35, 38, 77, 79, 81–82, 109, 121; at Campus Martius, 71–72, 81–82; and "City on Fire," 217–18; by Hadrian and Trajan, 177–78, 203; in *Octavia*, 156; in Tacitus, 202; uses of, 6, 20, 28, 73, 75, 87, 145–46, 173. *See also* Arae Incendii Neroniani
- myths: myth of ages, 162; use by emperors, 78, 107, 114, 115, 116, 118, 139, 145, 168; use in literature, 2, 4, 6, 66–67, 120, 131, 154, 197
- Naiads, 87
- Neoptolemus, 51, 238n124
- Neptune: in *Aeneid*, 45–46, 47, 48, 49, 59–60, 61, 62; in *Bellum Civile*, 125; in *Metamorphoses*, 85–86
- Nero: in *Annals*, 111–12, 115–16, 170–71, 174, 186–87, 188, 189–202, 205; and authors, 105–6, 139, 150; blinding of, 257n46; cartoons of, 219; coinage, 264n145; Colossus of Nero, 122, 150, 158; divinization, 122–23, 126, 127; early career, 116–17; in *Epigrams*, 150–51, 154–55; "false" Neros, 167; as fiery, 186, 187, 188, 193, 195; fire control by, 113–14, 177, 203; gymnasium destruction, 117, 160, 190, 191; killings by, 131, 257n48; *Ludi Maximi*, 117; in *Octavia*, 142, 145, 155–70, 187; performativity of, 115–20, 121, 126, 155, 192, 254n13; persona of, 102–3, 105–8, 142–45; public support of, 167; quality of sources on, 11; reconstruction and construction by, 109, 113–14, 119–23, 202–3, 255n18; record burning by, 229n100; residential fires, 122, 284n101; in *Satyricon*, 107–8; and Seneca, 102, 134, 136–37; in *Silvae*, 143–44; *Troica*, 119, 164, 194. *See also* Golden House; Nero and Great Fire of 64
- Nero and Great Fire of 64 CE: in *Annals*, 111–12, 115–16, 174, 187, 192–202; effect on image, 105–8, 139–40, 208–9; general blame for, 110, 111–12, 114, 139–40, 141–45, 208–9; by Martial, 151; in *Octavia*, 142, 145, 155, 156, 163–69; relief efforts, 112; religious efforts, 112, 113, 148–50; in Seneca, 137; singing of Troy's destruction, 1, 108–9, 115, 116, 118–20, 139, 164, 189–90, 191–92, 194
- Nerva, 183
- night watches, 34
- Nigidius Figulus, 127, 162
- Nile River, 262n118
- Nonnus, 245n44
- Numa, 21, 88, 89
- nymphs, 64–65
- obelisks, 30
- Octavia, 117, 145, 158–60
- Octavia* (drama), 142, 145, 155–70, 187
- Oedipus, 17
- Oedipus Tyrannus* (Sophocles), 17
- oracles, 36, 77
- oratory, 18, 228n85
- Otho, 145, 278n45
- Ovid: in *Bellum Civile*, 125–26; burning of poetry by, 41, 91, 97–98; in *Epigrams*, 144, 152–54; exile of, 91, 98, 153, 236n101; *Fasti*, 35, 39–40, 43–44; myth of ages, 162; in *Octavia*, 166; as Phaethon, 92; as phoenix, 100; on renewal, 39–40, 43–44, 87–88; *Tristia*, 91–92, 153–54. *See also* *Metamorphoses* (Ovid)
- palingenesis*, 15, 261n104. *See also* renewal after destruction
- Palladium, 20, 35–36
- Pallas, 65–66
- Panegyricus* (Pliny), 174, 181–83
- Pansa, 198, 199
- Pantheon, 177, 217
- Paris, 119, 164
- pax Romana*, 171

- performativity: of cremations, 69–70, 73, 87, 177–78; of Nero, 115–20, 121, 126, 155, 192, 254n13; in overview, 9, 18
- Persicus, 175
- St. Peter's Basilica, 212, 215, 216
- Petronius, 106–8, 156
- Phaenomena* (Aratus), 93, 94
- Phaethon myth: in *Astronomica*, 94–95, 96–97; in *Bellum Civile*, 126–27, 285n124; Caligula as, 78; in *Consolatio ad Liviam*, 70; cremation of, 85; description of, 83; in *Epigrams*, 153–54; as general theme, 3, 13–16, 15, 70, 92, 101–3, 157; mourning in, 129, 249n92; Nero as, 122–23, 126–27, 144, 157, 160–61, 162, 285n124; in *Octavia*, 145, 155, 157–61, 168; in Ovid, 79–92, 126, 153–54, 166, 186, 187; Ovid as, 92; in post-Augustan era, 69–71; in Seneca, 100–101, 102, 285, 285n124; in Vergil, 48–49, 59
- Philippi, battle of, 95–96
- Phoebus, 81, 83, 268n37
- Phoenissae* (Euripides), 16
- phoenix: in *Aeneid*, 55; in *Annals*, 179–80; on coins, 178, 179; Cremutius Cordus as, 99–100; in *Epigrams*, 151, 152–53; as general theme, 3, 15–16, 69, 101–3, 178–80; Hadrian as, 178, 179; and imperial cremations, 71, 177; origins of, 88–89; in Ovid, 88–91, 152–53; Ovid as, 100; Rome as, 89–90, 151, 152–53; Tiberius as, 77–78
- pietas*, 45, 51–52, 273n98
- pignora imperii*, 35–36
- plague, 17–18, 95, 100, 147
- Plato, 14
- Pliny the Elder, 15, 122, 142, 178–79
- Pliny the Younger, 173–74, 178, 181–83
- Plotina, 276n23
- pneuma*, 27
- Poetics* (Aristotle), 288n8
- Polites, 51, 53
- Polynices, 157
- Pompey (Gnaeus), 99, 128, 129, 130
- Pompey (Sextus), 96, 97
- Pontifex Maximus, 20, 35–36, 43, 257n46
- Poppaea, 145, 158, 163–64, 188
- Po River, 48–49, 70, 127, 128, 225n53, 262n115
- portents and omens: in *Aeneid*, 50, 52–54; in *Annals*, 191; in *Astronomica*, 95; and death of Caesar, 49, 54, 160, 250n110; of fire of 27 CE, 73–74; in *Octavia*, 159–60; of succession, 77. *See also* comets
- praemeditatio malorum*, 136, 264n155
- Priam, 51, 78, 116
- principate as destructive, 174, 176, 186, 187–88, 190–202, 205
- prolepsis: in *Aeneid*, 26, 51, 55, 210; in *Annals*, 174, 185, 186, 187, 192; in *Astronomica*, 95; general use of, 18, 173–74; in *Metamorphoses*, 82; in *Octavia*, 145, 168; in *Panegyric*, 182
- prophecy. *See* oracles; portents and omens
- Proserpina, 113
- public: complicity in own destruction, 198; as fiery in Tacitus, 188–89; public resistance and Great Fire of 64 CE, 167–69, 170
- pudicitia*, 248n72
- pyres, 26–27, 54, 55
- Pyrrhus, 51, 238n124
- Pythagoras, 88–91, 100
- Q. Sulpicius Maximus, 157
- quadriga*, 72. *See also* charioteer imagery
- Quintilian, 12, 196, 253n145
- Quintus Sulpicius Maximus, 245n44
- Raphael, 211–16
- reconstruction and construction: by adoptive emperors, 176–78; in *Annals*, 202–3; by Augustus, 29–31, 32, 72, 112, 121, 137; by Caesar, 29, 73; by Domitian, 147–50, 152, 177, 203; by Flavians, 142, 145–50, 152; general use, 207–8; by Hadrian, 176, 177, 203; by Nero, 109, 113–14, 119–23, 202–3, 255n18; post-Augustan, 73–77; in Seneca, 134, 137–38; by Tiberius, 244n21; by Trajan, 176–77, 203; by Vespasian, 145–46
- records, burning of, 21–22, 71, 181, 229n100
- reference to the past, 5
- religion: and Great Fire of 64 CE, 112–13, 201; use of fire in, 147–49
- renewal after destruction: by Augustus, 208; as general theme, 15, 208; in *Georgics*, 246n53; in Livy, 40–41; in Martial, 175; in *Metamorphoses*, 87–88; in *Octavia*, 161–62; in Ovid, 39–40, 43–44, 87–88; in *Satires* (Juvenal), 175; in Seneca, 125, 175; in Vergil, 40, 64–65, 66, 162, 246n53. *See also* reconstruction and construction
- Rhodes, 117, 192, 284n108

- riots, modern, 290n31. *See also* mob
- Robigo, 37
- Rome: in "City on Fire," 217–18; exemplary tradition of, 12, 89; Lugdunum as proxy for, 109–10, 131–35, 138; as phoenix, 89–90, 151, 152–53; reading city as text, 9; sack of, 12–13, 134, 196. *See also* destruction, cycle of; reconstruction and construction
- rumor. *See Fama*
- Sabina, 276n23
- sack of Rome, 12–13, 134, 196
- saecula, 15, 30, 89, 102, 135–36
- saeculum aureum. *See* Golden Age
- Sallust, 8, 26
- sarcophagi, 243n2
- Satires (Juvenal), 11, 174–76, 183–85, 204–5
- Saturn, 162
- Satyricon (Petronius), 106–8
- Scipio Aemilianus, 12, 27
- Sejanus, 183–84, 253n141, 282n85
- self-censorship, 7, 39, 41
- Seneca the Elder, 6, 41, 98
- Seneca the Younger: *Consolatio ad Marciam*, 98–101, 180, 184; death of, 102; *De beneficiis*, 136–37; *De clementia*, 134; *De vita beata*, 102; *Epistulae Morales* 91, 109–10, 130, 131–38; as exile, 134, 138; on fire as a test, 18; fire imagery in, 8, 188; in *Octavia*, 156, 161–63; renewal in, 125, 175; *Troades*, 286n136
- Septem (Aeschylus), 16
- serpent imagery, 50, 51, 53, 60
- Servius Tullius, 20, 53
- shepherd imagery, 52, 57–58, 65
- ships: burning of, 59–65, 60; collapsing boat, 254n13
- shrines, 35, 38, 41, 43, 44
- Sibylline texts, 20–21, 36, 38–39, 41, 113
- sideshadowing, 168
- Silvae (Statius), 143–44, 158, 285n124
- Sinon, 51, 52
- solar calendar, 30, 123
- solar imagery: of Augustus, 30, 72, 81–82; of Campus Martius, 30; of Hadrian, 276n22; of Nero, 122–23, 126, 158; in Ovid, 81–82, 87. *See also* eclipses
- Sophocles, 17
- soul, as fiery, 18
- sources and methodology, 10–11
- spatial turn, 224n33
- speech, restrictions on. *See* censorship
- Stanza della Segnatura frescoes, 288n4
- Stata Mater, 37–39, 62, 215
- Statius, 142, 143–44, 157, 158
- statues: destruction of, 182, 183–84, 191; in *Octavia*, 156; survival of, 20, 75
- Stoicism: and Cato, 129; exemplary tradition, 101; and Lucan, 125; nature of soul, 18. *See also* ekpyrosis; Seneca the Younger
- Subrius Flavus, 186–87, 255n18
- succession: in *Astronomica*, 94–97; and Augustus, 90–91; and cremations, 69–70, 87; of Hadrian, 178–79; in *Metamorphoses*, 79–92; in *Octavia*, 157–63; portents and omens of, 77. *See also* Phaethon myth
- Suetonius: on Augustus, 36; on Caesar, 48; on Caligula, 76, 78; on Nero, 112, 114, 115, 117, 118, 144; publication dates, 11; on Tiberius, 74–75
- Sulla, 16
- Sun. *See* solar imagery
- synecdoche, as term, 222n10
- synecdochic hero, 20
- Tacitus: *Agricola*, 282n84; on Great Fire of 64 CE, 110, 111–12, 170–71, 180–81, 189, 202–5; on Sejanus, 279n61. *See also* *Annals* (Tacitus)
- Tarquinius Superbus, 20
- Tellus, 86–87, 126
- Temple of Claudius, 146
- Temple of Divus Julius, 31
- Temple of Nymphs, 65
- Temple of Peace, 266n14
- Temple of the Nymphs, 17
- Tevereterno friezes, 289n20
- texts: city as, 9; and translations, 230n106. *See also* book burning
- Theater of Marcellus, 249n93
- Thebaid (Statius), 157
- Tiberius, 72–75, 77–78, 90–91, 180, 189
- Tiber River, 70, 190, 285n116
- Tigellinus, 110, 112, 184–85, 192
- Timaeus (Plato), 14
- Timagenes of Alexandria, 41–42, 97, 137–38
- time, measurement of, 30, 123
- Titus, 146–47, 209
- Titus Labienus, 6, 98

- Tongilianus, 151, 175
 torches: and Allecto, 62; in dramas, 117, 159,
 162, 166, 168; and Hecuba, 119; human, 113,
 184; and mobs, 16, 17, 44, 47, 59–60, 63–64,
 125, 157, 162, 166, 168
 Trajan, 173, 176–77, 178, 181–83, 203, 205
 Trajan's column, 177, 217
 tree imagery, fallen, 41, 128, 235n84; groves,
 57–61
Tristia (Ovid), 91–92, 153–54
Troades (Seneca), 286n136
Troica (Nero), 119, 164, 194
 Trojan Games, 59, 61, 116, 192
 Trojan Horse, 50–51, 52, 198–99, 254n8
 Troy: in *Aeneid*, 25, 26, 45, 51, 52, 54, 55, 119,
 197; in *Annals*, 176, 197–202, 205; in *Fire in*
 the Borgo, 212, 215; in *Iliad*, 27, 228n87; Ne-
 ro's singing of, 1, 108–9, 115, 116, 118–20,
 139, 164, 189–90, 191–92, 194; in *Octavia*,
 145, 155, 157, 163–67, 168; oracles and scared
 texts, 36; in Ovid, 44, 82; as popular
 theme, 3, 12–13, 118–19, 208; in *Satires*,
 174–75; in *Satyricon*, 107, 108. *See also urbs*
 capta motif
 Tullus Hostilius, 34
tunica molesta, 184
 Turnus, 62–64, 65–66, 67
 Tydeus, 16
 Tyre, destruction of, 27
 Ubii, 283–84n99
 Ucalegon, 175
 Ulysses, 286n136
 Umbricius, 174
urbs capta motif: in *Annals*, 186, 190–202, 203;
 in Dio, 111; as general theme, 12–13; in *Octa-*
 via, 145, 155, 158, 166–67, 168. *See also Troy*
 ustrina, 72, 147, 243n15, 276n23
 Vatican, 212, 216
 Venus, 151, 152, 153, 154, 159, 197
 Vergil: in *Annals*, 176, 192, 194, 197–202, 204–
 5; and *Astronomica*, 93–97; in *Epistulae Mo-*
 rales 91, 134–35; fire as spark of conscious-
 ness, 18; in *Fire in the Borgo* (Raphael), 212,
 215; general themes, 44; in *Octavia*, 158,
 162–63, 164–67; renewal in, 40, 64–65, 66,
 162, 246n53; request to burn manuscript, 21;
 in *Satires*, 174–75, 204–5. *See also Aeneid*
 (Vergil); *Georgics* (Vergil)
 Vespasian, 145–46, 209, 229n100
 Vesta, 38, 43–44
 Vesuvius, 146
 Vibulenus, 189
vici, reorganization of, 33
vigiles, 33–34, 106–7, 110–11
 Volcanalia, 149, 218
 Volcanus Quietus, 38
 vow and Domitian's altars, 113, 147–48, 215
 Vulcan: in *Aeneid*, 63; Domitian's altars to, 113,
 142, 144–45, 147–50, 215, 278n47; in *Epi-*
 grams, 152, 153, 154; in *Metamorphoses*, 82;
 and Stata Mater, 37
 wildfires, 219
 world, end of. *See ekpyrosis*
 Year of Four Emperors, 209

