

Faculty of Arts
Master Eternal Rome

No one is forced to wish to die

Suicide narratives in Augustan and Neronian literature

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The title of this thesis is derived from the *Civil War* by Lucan: Lucan, *Civil War*, trans. Susan H. Braund (Oxford, 1992), 4.484-485.

Introduction

On December 17 2010, Tunisian Mohammed Bouazizi attempted to commit suicide by setting himself on fire. He allegedly did so to protest against the harsh economic situation in Tunisia at that time. Since 1987, the country has been led by a dictatorial regime under president Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali. Public protests were usually violently struck down by the government, but the desperate act by Bouazizi set off public outcry too loud to be ignored. The street protests that followed eventually led to the deposition of the country's autocrat.¹

Mohammed Bouazizi's suicide as a desperate means of protest reminded the world of other cases from (recent) history, such as the Buddhist monk Thich Quang Duc, who burned himself to death to protest against the Buddhist persecution by the Vietnamese government in 1963, and Jan Palach, a young Czech who set fire to himself in 1969 as a protest against the invasion of the Soviets. In 1994, Iranian paediatrician Homo Darabi set herself ablaze to protest against the repression of women in Iran, shouting '*Death to tyranny! Long live freedom. Long live Iran*'.

These suicides have gained worldwide attention. Yet, not only recent suicides, or even non-fictional suicides, inspired the world around them. In 1974, researcher David Philips coined the term 'the Werther effect' for copycat suicides inspired by literature.² The term is based on Goethe's novel *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* (*The Sorrows of young Werther*), written in 1774. The protagonist of the story, Werther, commits suicide in a dramatic way, which sparked the first known series of what was called copycat suicides.

What the suicides listed above have in common, is that they were committed as a means of political protest and that they triggered a series of similar, almost copycat-like suicides. Moreover, these protest-suicides gained widespread attention and caused public outcry, and in the case of Mohammed Bouazizi even toppled a dictatorship. Therefore, it is relevant to research the historical dimension of suicide as a protest-move. Already in antiquity, a man called Cato was venerated for his committing of self-murder, which was framed as a protest move against the tyrant Julius Caesar. In the decades after it, suicide narratives would increasingly appear in literature and even some copycat suicides seem to have been committed to express discontent about the political climate.

¹ Robert F. Worth, 'How a single match can ignite a revolution', *New York Times* (Jan. 21, 2011) <<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/23/weekinreview/23worth.html?rref=collection%2Ftimestopic%2FBouazizi%2C%20Mohamed>> [consulted on Oct. 29, 2017]; NOS, 'Waarom Mohammed zichzelf in brand stak' (Jan. 6, 2011) <<https://nos.nl/artikel/209553-waarom-mohammed-zichzelf-in-brand-stak.html>> [consulted on Oct. 29, 2017].

² David P. Philips, 'The Influence of Suggestion on Suicide: Substantive and Theoretical Implications of the Werther Effect', *American Sociological Review* Vol. 39, No. 3 (Jun., 1974), 340-354.

On the subject of suicide, sociologist Émile Durkheim is considered a pioneer. His monograph *Le Suicide*, which appeared in 1897, sparked decades worth of debate among sociologists.³ He studied suicide numbers within religious groups in his contemporary society. Suicide in antiquity, however, has rarely been touched upon until the second half of the 20th century, and in many cases it is only mentioned within a broader research on death in general. Valerie Hope, for instance, investigated death in Roman antiquity, and the mechanisms Roman society employed to explain death and cope with it. Death was closer and more personal to people, therefore dying was seen as an active process. Suicide is mentioned as a way to die, but not further explored. Focusing her research on the representation of death in Roman society, Catherine Edwards points to the existence of a genre she calls 'death literature', which contains philosophical texts about dying and death, but also accounts of people dying, often exaggerated and spectacular.⁴ She tries to establish to what extent the Romans 'aestheticized' death and how the death of an individual could be invested with a political or philosophical message, especially in the case of execution or suicide.

Paul Plass has elaborately written about suicide and politics in his monograph, using the term *political suicide*. He claims that suicide as an alternative for execution was meant to regulate bloodshed and violence. However, the difference between enforced suicide and execution was ambiguous, as was the relationship between the Julio-Claudian emperors and the Roman elite. Every aristocratic suicide was politically motivated, according to Plass, as was the choice of enforcing suicide by the emperor.⁵ One of the most recent contributions to the subject is *Ambitiosa Mors: Suicide and Self in Roman Thought and Literature* (2004) by Timothy D. Hill.⁶ The subject of this study is not so much the act of suicide itself, but the discrepancy in attitudes towards suicide that Hill notices. Death by suicide in modern view is seen as pathological, isolated, and despairing, while in Roman sources the act of suicide is presented as rational, social, and possibly even amusing.

All of the aforementioned studies of suicide and representation of suicide in antiquity use source material categorized by Anton van Hooff. In the appendix of his book *Self-killing in the ancient world* he gives a list of recorded suicides, with information, where possible, about name, gender, ethnicity, method, motif and source.⁷ Based on this database, he tries to examine

³ Émile Durkheim, *Le Suicide* (1897); For an overview of post-Durkheimian sociological scholarship and debate on suicide, see: Jack D. Douglas, *Social Meanings of Suicide* (Princeton, 2015).

⁴ Catherine Edwards, *Death in Ancient Rome* (New Haven/London, 2007).

⁵ Paul Plass, *The Game of Death in Ancient Rome: Arena Sport and Political Suicide* (1995).

⁶ Timothy D. Hill, *Ambitiosa Mors: Suicide and Self in Roman Thought and Literature* (New York/London, 2004).

⁷ Anton van Hooff, *Zelfdoding in de antieke wereld: van autothanasia tot suicide* (Nijmegen, 1990).

the reality of these statistics, but also the representation and evaluation of suicide in antiquity. He partly based this list on the work of Yolande Gris , who made a similar database, but only containing Roman suicides.⁸

If we consider suicide as a protest move against certain political issues, how can we regard the (re)presentation of Cato's suicide, and suicide in general, in antiquity? The genre of so-called death literature flourished during the first century AD, the same period which saw the establishment of a new political system in Rome based on autocratic power. To see if suicide cases could have been used to convey an anti-autocratic message, such as the recent examples of politically motivated suicides mentioned, it is interesting to see how these were (re)presented during the Augustan and Neronian principates, the first and the last principates ruled by an emperor of the Julio-Claudian dynasty.

The source material regarding suicide for this period is rich, but also provides several limitations. First of all, the sources are mostly literary, which must be handled with caution, since they are largely written by elite men, and often only speak about this same group.⁹ The content of these sources represents the worldview of their authors, and must be read within their context, while being aware of over-interpretation. Since this thesis deals with the *representation* of suicide and the political implications this representation could have, however, it is not always relevant whether or not the sources reflect a true situation. Moreover, myths and legends provide much information about the morals and values of a society, especially within the higher classes.¹⁰

The first chapter of this thesis will provide a short, general overview of the attitudes towards suicide in Roman antiquity, the methods used and motivations given. In the second chapter, the story of Lucretia, as told by Livy, will be analysed to see whether or not the narrative of her suicide is used to convey a political message at the beginning of the Augustan principate.¹¹ Lastly, in the third chapter several texts by Seneca and Lucan will be analysed to

⁸ Yolande Gris , *Le suicide dans la Rome antique* (Paris, 1982).

⁹ The sources used by Van Hooff en Gris , and consequently by many scholars after them researching death and suicide, contain tombstone inscriptions, notes from medical literature, and descriptions in letters, annals, poems, epics and other literary genres. For this research, I focused on the descriptions of suicide in epics, annals, poems and letters.

¹⁰ Myths and legends, especially the ones that deal with the establishment and development of a society, their culture and/or their religion are thought to give a 'blueprint' of that society, and particularly give an insight in its hierarchy and the values of the higher classes. This theory, coined first by Bronislaw Malinowski in *Myth in Primitive Psychology* (1926), became very influential in linguistics, classics, and anthropology.

¹¹ For Livy's text I will use the translation from the Loeb Classical Library. Since the translation is rather old fashioned, I revised it to modern English at certain points.

see whether the attitudes towards suicide as a politically coloured move have changed at the time of Nero's principate.¹²

¹² For Lucan's *Pharsalia* I have used the modern English translation by Susan H. Braud, *Lucan: Civil War* (Oxford, 1992); For the texts by Seneca I have used the following translations: Seneca, *Natural Questions*, trans. Harry M. Hine (Chicago/London, 2010); Seneca, *On Benefits*, trans. Miriam Griffin and Brad Inwood (Chicago/London, 2011); Seneca, *De Otio*, trans. G. D. Williams (Cambridge, 2003); Seneca, *De Clementia*, trans. J. W. Basore, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge MA, 1928); Seneca, *Apokolokyntosis*, trans. Gerhard Binder (Darmstadt, 1999) (this work translates Latin into German, so the citations I used in this thesis are my own translations from German into English); Seneca, *XXV Brieven aan Lucilius*, trans. Eddy de Laet (Antwerpen/Amsterdam, 1979) and *Leren sterven: brieven aan Lucilius*, trans. Vincent Hunink (Amsterdam, 2004) (these works translate Latin into Dutch, so the citations I used in this thesis are my own translations from Dutch into English).

Chapter one: suicide in Roman antiquity

In order to understand the significance of suicide narratives as a way of expressing concern or discontent about an autocrat, one must first get an insight in the general attitudes towards suicide. What motives and methods are mentioned and how were they valued?

First of all, the Romans had no word for suicide in Latin, but there were equivalent terms, such as *voluntaria mors* ('a voluntary death') and the Greek term *autothanasia* ('to put oneself to death').¹³ When hearing these terms in the modern-day world, they could sound euphemistic. In the Dutch and German language, for instance, the word for suicide is 'zelfmoord' and 'Selbstmord', literally translated as 'self-murder'. The 'murder' part of the word gives suicide a darker meaning than the words used in Roman antiquity. Other ancient terms to describe suicide express surprise, admiration and respect, while the only negative expression concerning suicide would have been fear.

Motives and methods

The sources that recorded suicide cases sometimes also mention the methods used. From these accounts one can ascertain that not all methods were valued the same. Suicide by hanging was seen as a dishonourable way to take one's own life, a mark of the poor and the women.¹⁴ This method was not praised in literature, but was material for black humour or curses. One inscription which mentions hanging is found on a tombstone of a girl. Apparently, someone else had been responsible for her death and her father cursed that person wishing he would 'find himself a nail to put a rope on and hang himself'.¹⁵ The condemnation of hanging was also visible in Roman law, for those who had hanged themselves were excluded from the right to be buried and could not receive honours.¹⁶ The only positive comment about suicide by hanging can be found in Suetonius. After the scandal of the adultery of Julia the Elder, the daughter of Augustus, her maid-servant Phoebe hanged herself out of shame, according to Suetonius. In response to this news Augustus supposedly said 'I would rather have been Phoebe's father'.¹⁷ This remarkable statement could be explained in comparison to the shame Augustus had to bear for his daughter. Augustus' family was supposed to be morally exemplary to the Roman people,

¹³ Catherine Edwards, *Death in Ancient Rome* (New Haven/London, 2007), 116; Timothy D. Hill, *Ambitiosa Mors: Suicide and the Self in Roman Thought and Literature* (New York/London, 2004), 6-7; Miriam Griffin, 'Philosophy, Cato, and Roman Suicide: I', *Greece & Rome*, 33:2 (Oct. 1986), 64-77, 68-70; Anton van Hooff, *Zelfmoord in de antieke wereld: van autothanasia tot suicide* (Nijmegen, 1990), 168-171.

¹⁴ Van Hooff, *Zelfmoord in de antieke wereld*, 62.

¹⁵ Ibidem, 20.

¹⁶ Digest 3.2.11.3.

¹⁷ Suetonius, *Life of Augustus* 65.2.

but instead his own daughter had broken his moral rules. The shame of this would be so great, that suicide by hanging was considered virtuous compared to Julia's crime.

Besides hanging there was another method of suicide to be excluded from the category of honourable methods: jumping from a height.¹⁸ One reason behind the condemnation of these two methods could have been the Roman fear of dishonour. These methods would literally damage the body, with the loss of dignity as a result. It was of the utmost importance to the Roman culture that one's death matched one's way of living. Moreover, jumping or hanging was considered as an act resulting from a rash decision, deriving from a situation of distress, misery and despair. To commit suicide, however, was supposed to be a rational decision. To take one's life out of *furor*, or insanity, rage, was considered a punishment of the gods; since it was not rationally thought out by the victim, it had to be managed by an outward power.¹⁹

The use of weapons, however, was considered the best way to leave the world of the living. These could be swords and daggers, but also razor-blades or similar sharp objects to stab oneself to death or cut one's wrists. Swords and daggers were the instruments of men, for these were symbols of soldiers and heroes; women and slaves would not often have weapons available to them.²⁰ However, there are several cases known of women who committed suicide with the weapons of their husbands, sometimes after they had used them on themselves just moments before.²¹ These suicides committed out of marital loyalty were much praised for women, but not for men. The most famous example of this rare scenario is of the death of Marc Anthony. He took his own life after receiving the message that Cleopatra, his lover, had committed suicide. This suicide out of loyalty *to a woman* was not considered a virtuous reason to die.²²

If these were the dishonourable reasons and methods to leave the world of the living, what then were considered virtuous reasons to commit suicide? The main reason to kill oneself as an aristocrat in Rome would be to avoid dishonour. For soldiers and army leaders, suicide after a military defeat would be almost evident. In their case, this reason could be mixed with patriotism. Closely related to this was the motive of *devotio*, to commit suicide for the sake of the state.²³ This type of sacrifice would be less selfish than for reasons of dishonour, because it was a form of self-sacrifice. This could also happen in religious contexts, though examples are

¹⁸ Van Hooff, *Zelfmoord in de antieke wereld*, 96.

¹⁹ Griffin, 'Philosophy, Cato, and Roman Suicide: I', 70; Van Hooff, *Zelfmoord in de antieke wereld*, 126.

²⁰ Van Hooff, *Zelfmoord in de antieke wereld*, 69.

²¹ Ibidem, 70.

²² Robert Garland, 'Death without dishonour: Suicide in the ancient world', *History Today* 33:1 (Jan. 1, 1983), 33-37, 36.

²³ Griffin, 'Philosophy, Cato, and Roman Suicide: II', *Greece & Rome* 33:2 (Oct., 1986), 192-202, 193.

scarce.²⁴ The first recorded cases of suicide have been of army leaders committing suicide upon defeat and of accused criminals before their conviction. Both of these categories are ambiguous, because there were certain conditions that influenced the ‘value’ of the suicide. Soldiers who committed suicide before a battle, would not be granted burial rights. If they were caught attempting to kill themselves, they would either be dishonourably discharged or executed.²⁵ People who were to be tried for treason were not permitted to commit suicide. If they did, they were not to be granted burial rights and their possessions would not be inherited by their family, but confiscated by the state.²⁶

Other motives that were considered virtuous would be committing suicide in order to end excruciating pain, unendurable grief or ‘tiredness of living.’²⁷ Yet again, in these cases the victims had given their suicide careful thought and had planned it out. These suicides were then not carried out by hanging or jumping, but by abstaining from food or cutting one’s veins, methods that were indeed considered virtuous, because they were slow and permitted the victim to stay sane and active in the process of dying.

For women it was considered virtuous to commit suicide to protect or avenge (the loss of) their chastity. Committing suicide out of marital loyalty, as a response to the execution or suicide of their husbands, would also be praised. Velleius praises a woman who did so: ‘May Calpurnia, the daughter of Bestia and wife of Antistius, never lose the glory of a noble deed; for, when her husband was put to death, as I have just said, she pierced her own breast with the sword. What increment has his glory and fame received through this brave act of a woman!’²⁸ What is interesting to notice about the cases of women committing suicide out of marital loyalty, is that they often seem to have used the unlikely method of weapons to do it. This could have several reasons: a practical reason would be for them to use the same weapons their husbands used. Another reason is that by committing suicide, the women would exceed their sex and become more masculine, and therefore use the masculine means of a weapon.²⁹

Slaves were never permitted to commit suicide.³⁰ If they tried, they were to be executed. Moreover, it was also considered a crime not to prevent a slave from committing suicide.³¹ A slave who would commit such brutality could not be trusted around his master or other slaves

²⁴ Van Hooff, Gris .

²⁵ Digest 48.19.38.12.

²⁶ Digest 3.2.11.3.

²⁷ Digest 3.2.11.3, 48.19.38.12.

²⁸ Velleius, *Res gestae divi Augusti* 2.26.3.

²⁹ Van Hooff, *Zelfmoord in de antieke wereld*, 69, Ian Donaldson, *The rapes of Lucretia: a myth and its transformations* (Oxford, 1982), 68.

³⁰ Digest 21.1.23.3.

³¹ Digest 29.5.1.22.

and was therefore considered too dangerous to keep alive. Another reason for the prohibition on suicide for slaves, was economic in nature. The slave would deprive his master of his possession over him, therefore he was a thief. This was also one of the reasons behind the prohibition for soldiers and criminals of capital offences to kill themselves: soldiers would not only diminish their exemplary function, but also deprive the state of a product meant for defence. Criminals of capital offences were sentenced to die anyway, but to kill themselves they not only robbed the state of the opportunity to carry out the sentence themselves, but also to grant the victim clemency, which in the time of Julius Caesar and the Julio-Claudian principates had become an important political concept.³²

Stoicism and suicide

The ‘value’ of suicide was apparently determined by several conditions. What determined these conditions? Evidently, a suicide had to be carried out consciously and for honourable reasons. The high regard of rationality behind the decision, could be attributed to the popularity of Stoic thought during this period of time.³³

Stoic thought circulated widely in the Roman society between the 2nd century BC and the 2nd century AD.³⁴ It was particularly popular among the elite. The philosophy of Stoicism was founded by the Greek Zeno in the third century BC.³⁵ It was founded on the idea that human’s basic desire is self-preservation. Men’s reason compels them to seek their true happiness. To be truly happy is to accept one’s fate. To do this, the mind must learn to deal with negative emotions, such as anger and fear. The freedom resulting from this was not materialistic in sense, but rather it resulted in freedom of the mind.³⁶ The Stoics believed that to reach the ideal of happiness, not only the body, but also the soul had to be preserved. To do this, a person needed more than the basic needs of food and shelter: humans are social beings and to preserve the soul, they need company. The Stoics called this ‘social *oikeiôsis*’, or the natural impulse of humans to identify with other humans.³⁷ Therefore, it is necessary and inevitable for humans to

³² Garland, *Death without dishonour*, 33; Hill, *Ambitiosa mors*, 208; Van Hooff, *Zelfmoord in de antieke wereld*, 143; Edwards, *Death in ancient Rome*, 115; Miriam Griffin, *Seneca: a philosopher in politics* (Oxford, 1976), 61.

³³ Griffin, *Seneca*, 67.

³⁴ Peter Brunt, Miriam Griffin, and Alison Samuels (eds.), *Studies in Stoicism* (Oxford, 2013), 275; Edwards, *Death in ancient Rome*, 67.

³⁵ John Sellars, *Stoicism* (Chesham, 2006); Brunt, Griffin, and Samuels, *Studies in Stoicism*; Christopher Gill, ‘Stoic writers of the imperial era’, in: Christopher Rowe and Malcolm Schofield (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Political Thought* (Cambridge, 2000), 597-615; Malcolm Schofield, ‘Epicurean and Stoic political thought’, in: Christopher Rowe and Malcolm Schofield (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Political Thought* (Cambridge, 2000), 435-456, 443.

³⁶ Edwards, *Death in ancient Rome*, 74.

³⁷ Gill, ‘Stoic writers’, 599.

participate in society, as long as they do not have to compromise on their ‘personal *oikeiôsis*’, the ethical development of humans to desire only virtue.³⁸ Virtue, and virtuous actions, are the only true good things that benefit the self, according to the Stoics.³⁹

Even though the Stoics did encourage active participation in social life, there were several opinions on participation in political life. Some Stoics recommended a life of isolation and abstinence from politics, while the Stoic notion that human altruistic nature is corrupted by their social and political environment called for Stoic supervision in the Senate of the Republic and the imperial court of the principate in order to encourage virtue and suppress vice.⁴⁰ The Stoics were famous for their saying ‘only the wise are kings’: only the wise man, the Stoic ideal, could know the difference between good and bad and, therefore, be ruler. If it was not possible to rule, to advise the ruler was the best alternative. Many famous Stoics were important political players: Augustus and Nero both had influential Stoics employed at their court, such as Athenodorus of Tarsus and Seneca. Athenodorus has been believed to have been influential in Augustus’ governmental reforms that established the dynastic autocracy of the principate, and Seneca would have said that ‘Rome enjoyed the happiest form of constitution, in which nothing is lacking to our complete freedom’.⁴¹

This political activity was not without conditions: the most important aspect of Stoic political philosophy was that the personal *oikeiôsis* should not be compromised. Stoicism does not condemn any form of constitution, although positive, as well as negative sentiments are visible during certain political periods.⁴² Seneca, for example, wrote both positive and negative treaties on autocratic power. However, Cato the Elder, generally presented as the perfect Stoic, had killed himself in defending the Republic.

Cato’s suicide was justified by his motive: in order to live, Cato would have had to give up his virtues. He could not pursue his political career under the tyrant Julius Caesar, so he chose to save his soul from vice and committed suicide. This example makes clear that the right choices, according to Stoic principles, do not always lead up to the physical preservation of the body. Epictetus defends suicide by saying that ‘a man is not saved by shameful means, he is saved by dying, not by running away’.⁴³ The fact that suicide enabled a man to *choose* the way

³⁸ Sellars, *Stoicism*, 129.

³⁹ Gill, ‘Stoic writers’, 608; Schofield, ‘Epicurean and Stoic political thought’, 445; Sellars, *Stoicism*, 110.

⁴⁰ Schofield, ‘Epicurean and Stoic political thought’, 448.

⁴¹ Seneca, *Clem.* I.1.8. cf. 4.

⁴² Gill, ‘Stoic writers’, 600; Brunt, Griffin, and Samuels, *Studies in Stoicism*, 287-288

⁴³ Epictetus, *Diss.* 4.1.165.

he died, made it a favourable death for Stoics. Suddenly, dying became an active and conscious choice, something that a person *did*, instead of *endured*.

Suicide as alternative for execution

A form of suicide actually *ordered* in Rome, that we know of, is the use of it as a form of capital punishment: it is attested as early as 121 BC when Quintus Fulvius Flaccus, one of the followers of the revolutionary Gaius Gracchus, was offered the right to kill himself instead of suffering execution.⁴⁴ This use of suicide as an alternative for execution was reserved for the highest members of society. It was initially seen as a very generous gesture, because the victim would retain the possibility to die with dignity. What is interesting about the fact that this is the first credible documented ordered suicide, is that it happened at a crucial point of the Roman Republic, when political opponents struggled for the power. The Republic was of course governed by multiple people instead of one autocrat. Enforced suicide was, therefore, not a political measure like capital punishment was. However, since the Late Republic saw civil wars and political struggle in which all parties were Roman, the meaning of political suicide began to take shape as a critical stand on politics. By the time the Tiberian Principate had been established, the ambiguous distinction between enforced suicide and execution had become apparent to several writers, as the ambiguity of the term '*voluntaria mors*' became evident by using the word '*necessitas*' to describe the motive.⁴⁵ A frequently debated topic by for instance Tacitus was whether or not a victim of suicide did it voluntarily and if not, if he was actually just executed.⁴⁶ 'Permitting' suicide could still be a tactical choice for the emperor, since suicide reduces his responsibility, but by the time of Tiberius, it could also be used as an argument against him, by replacing the term 'enforced suicide' by 'execution'.⁴⁷ Lucius Silanus has become famous for defying Nero's order to commit suicide, saying that enforced suicide was actually just an alternative for execution. After this, he was killed by one of Nero's officials, who was there to make sure the suicide was actually carried out. This act of violence confirmed the true meaning of enforced suicide.⁴⁸

When looking at the representation of the enforced suicides of Quintus Fulvius Flaccus in the second century BC and Lucius Silanus refusing to commit suicide on demand halfway

⁴⁴ Appian, *Civil Wars* 1.26.

⁴⁵ Tacitus, *Annals* 6.23.1, 4.19.4, 2.31.3, 11.2; Suetonius, *Life of Tiberius* 54.2; Lucan 4.484; Paul Plass, *The game of death in ancient Rome: arena sport and political suicide* (Madison, 1995), 102.

⁴⁶ Tacitus, *Annals* 3.16.1, 6.23.1; Paul Plass, 93.

⁴⁷ Plass, *The game of death*, 103.

⁴⁸ Edwards, *Death in ancient Rome*, 123; Tacitus, *Annals* 16.9.1.

the first century AD, we see that there is a development visible in sentiment about enforced suicide. Initially, suicide as alternative for execution was seen as the best way to die with dignity, but from Tiberius' reign onwards, its representation became more and more a disguised critical statement about the political climate. Enforced suicide is no longer seen as voluntary and merciful, but as an abuse of power by the emperor. What is striking, is that the suicide of Cato became widely popular again during the first century AD and that Cato's decision to kill himself was presented as an act of defiance against the Caesar, the tyrant.

The Stoics influenced the attitude towards suicide in such a way that it became acceptable and virtuous, yet Stoic philosophy was already popular in the second century BC and still was in the first century AD, the period during which the attitudes towards *enforced* suicide developed in a negative way. The political climate, however, did change over time and it is, therefore, plausible to suppose that the shift from a republican government to an autocratic one influenced the representation of (enforced) suicide, as well.

Chapter two: the pivotal role of Lucretia

The principate of Augustus was a significant political period, because it laid the foundations for the dynastic Roman Empire. In 27 BC, Octavian, from then on known as Augustus, gained sole power of the government by becoming the *first citizen*, or *princeps*. The Romans had not tolerated autocrats since the monarchy, which was abolished in 509 BC, and which became evident again after Julius Caesar was murdered in 44 BC. Caesar had taken power over the city in 49 BC, after a civil war against Pompeius. In 48 BC, the Senate officially gave him sole power for 10 years as *dictator*, in order to restore the Republic. However, not everyone in the Senate agreed with the new autocratic government and out of fear that Caesar would become a tyrant, he was murdered. A new civil war broke out, this time between Octavian, Caesar's adoptive son, and Marc Antony. After Octavian defeated Marc Antony in 31 BC, he was appointed *dictator*, also with the public agenda to restore the Republic. Not surprisingly people again had their doubts about this arrangement. Nevertheless, Augustus' hold of power lasted longer than Caesar's: Augustus reigned until his death in 14 AD and left the realm to his dynasty: the Julio-Claudians.

Under Augustus' government, the Roman Empire flourished. There was (relative) peace throughout the Roman realm, the economy revived and the arts developed to great heights. Augustus had many relations with poets and writers, such as Ovid, Virgil and Livy. Rome also became the place of residence for non-Roman writers, such as Dionysius of Halicarnassus. Even though the literary arts were of exceptionally good quality⁴⁹, thanks to the patronage of for instance Maecenas⁵⁰, complaints about limited freedom of speech is found in some sources. Asinius Pollio, for instance, waited with the publication of his work until Augustus had died⁵¹ and Ovid was banished in 8 AD, ascribed to the publication of the *Ars Amatoria*, the content of which did not suit Augustus' moral policies.⁵²

⁴⁹ The reign of Augustus is part of the literary 'Golden Age', which modern classicists and historians have placed between 83 BC and 14 AD. See: Wilhelm Siegmund Teuffel, *Geschichte der römischen Literatur* (Leipzig, 1870) for a classification based on historical chronology and Charles Thomas Cruttwell, *A History of Roman Literature* (London and Edinburgh, 1877) for a classification based on style analyses. Even though these works are both old and thoroughly reviewed, the classification suggested by Teuffel and Cruttwell is still in use today, however nuanced.

⁵⁰ For information about Maecenas, see e.g.: Matthew D. H. Clark, *Augustus, first Roman emperor: power, propaganda and the politics of survival* (Exeter, 2010); Michèle Lowrie, *Horace – Odes and Epodes* (Oxford, 2009); Vincent Hunnink, 'Het andere gezicht van Maecenas', *Hermeneus* 86:2 (2014), 93-98.

⁵¹ Andreas Mehl and Hans-Friedrich Mueller, *Roman historiography: an introduction to its basic aspects and development* (Malden, 2011), 103.

⁵² Ovid himself writes in his work *Tristia* that there were two reasons for his exile: 'Though two crimes, a poem¹ and a blunder have brought me ruin', 2.207. These reasons have been discussed elaborately, with three views in chronological order: at first there was consensus that Ovid's own immoral sexual character was what banished him, then a political or sexual relationship with Augustus' granddaughter, Julia the Younger, was suggested, since

As an autocrat who led a people with a far from ideal relationship with autocrats in the past, Augustus was trying to place himself within a line of continuity.⁵³ He did so by claiming his heritage in several ways: he claimed to be a descendant of Venus, through Aeneas, and called himself, or at least permitted to be called, the 'second Romulus'. The epic history of Rome's foundation by Aeneas, written by Virgil at the emperor's request, strengthened this representation. Virgil was, however, not the only one writing on Rome's past: Livy, an author who enjoyed great attention throughout history and still today, also wrote a historical work about the history of Rome. This work, the *Ab Urbe Condita*, covers the history of Rome from its foundation by Romulus and Remus until the death of Drusus in 9 BC. It thus contains a lot of events, but one event in particular stands out when doing research on Roman attitudes towards suicide: the rape and suicide of Lucretia, told in book I.

Livy is not the only one at that time who was retelling the story of Lucretia. Ovid (43 BC-17/18 AD) and Dionysius of Halicarnassus (60 BC-7 BC or later), Livy's contemporaries, also discussed it. Every account differs from another, at least to some extent, but the general story goes as follows: Lucretia, a virtuous Roman matron, is violently raped by Sextus Tarquinius, the son of the king of Rome. After this terrible event, Lucretia goes to her father and husband to tell them what happened. Declaring that she cannot live with the shame of what happened to her, Lucretia grabs a dagger from under her dress and stabs herself. Her husband and father cry out in despair, while Brutus, a kinsman of Lucretia who saw the tragedy happen, storms off to the people. He shows the blood-stained dagger to the mob outside and cries for justice. The Roman people have been oppressed by the kings for too long and it is time to stand up, he exclaims. Eventually, the kings are chased out of the city and the monarchy is abolished. Lucius Tarquinius Collatinus, Lucretia's husband, and Brutus, the mob leader, are appointed consul, which marks the birth of the Roman Republic.

Lucretia's suicide thus leads to the abolishment of the monarchy and the birth of the Republic. With this in mind, it is striking that the story regains popularity in the late first century BC and the early first century AD, the time when Augustus consolidated his power and formed a government with several autocratic characteristics. As mentioned before, the story of Lucretia has been retold by many authors over time. What is interesting about the accounts of Livy, Ovid,

she was banished in the same year for sexual misbehavior. The most recent opinion is political of nature. See: 'Brief overview of the facts of Ovid's exile', in: Jo-Marie Claassen, *Ovid Revisited: the Poet in Exile* (London, 2008), 2-5.

⁵³ Augustus had to take power without seeming to usurp it, by respecting at least some forms of the Republic, see e.g.: Pat Southern, *Augustus* (London, 1998), 101 and Joseph Farrell, 'The Augustan Period: 40 BC-AD 14', in: Harrison, S. (ed.), *A Companion to Latin Literature* (Malden/Oxford, 2007), 44-57, 48; For the presentation of Augustus in imperial iconography, see: Paul Zanker, *The power of images in the age of Augustus* (Ann Arbor, 1988).

and Dionysius of Halicarnassus, is that each is written within a different context: Livy's account is written within the genre of history⁵⁴, while Ovid's account is part of a poem.⁵⁵ Dionysius of Halicarnassus was a Greek who wrote his story for a different audience, namely Greeks wanting to know about the history of Rome.⁵⁶ In this chapter I will analyse the story as told by Livy and compare it to the accounts by Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Ovid, to see how Livy treats the suicide story with regard to Augustus', or any autocratic, regime.

Livy: the context of writing Rome's history

When reading Livy, the question about his relationship with Augustus cannot be avoided. For decades, the trend has been to indicate Livy as a propagandist for the new Augustan regime⁵⁷, but later historians have called him a Republican.⁵⁸ Nowadays, a more nuanced position seems to be accepted: Livy appears to be attached to certain Republican values, but is also positively attuned to the Principate.⁵⁹ It would be impossible to say anything with certainty about Livy's political ideology, let alone because the details about his life are scarce and unclear. Livy's precise date of birth is unknown. He was probably born around 60 BC, but most researchers put the date on the year 59 AD.⁶⁰ We know that Livy was born in Patavium, a wealthy commercial town. As far as we know, he filled no significant political or military functions, however, he must have been at the Roman imperial court at some point, since sources tell us that Augustus knew him.⁶¹ It is also still uncertain when Livy died. Some suggest 12 AD, others 17 AD.⁶² What we do know, is that he survived the year 9 BC, since the last event covered by him is the death of Drusus, which happened in that year.⁶³

⁵⁴ Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita* 1.57-1.60.

⁵⁵ Ovid, *Fasti* 2.685.

⁵⁶ Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities* 4.64-4.85.

⁵⁷ Ronald Syme, *The Roman Revolution* (Oxford, 1939);

⁵⁸ Ronald Syme made a 180 degree turn in the debate and called Livy 'the last Republican historian' in 'Livy and Augustus', *HSCP* lxiv (1959); Hans Petersen, 'Livy and Augustus', *TAPA* xcii (1961); P.G. Walsh, *Livy* (1980), 7.

⁵⁹ Paul-Marius Martin, 'Livy's Narrative of the Regal Period: Structure and Ideology', in: Bernard Mineo (ed.), *A Companion to Livy* (Hoboken, 2015), 259-273; Mehl and Mueller, *Roman historiography*, 107. For a recent complete study on Livy, his background, works, religious beliefs, etc., see: Bernard Mineo (ed.), *A Companion to Livy* (Hoboken, 2015), Daniel J. Kapust, *Republicanism, rhetoric, and Roman political thought: Sallust, Livy, and Tacitus* (Cambridge, 2011).

⁶⁰ The precise date of his birth is unknown, however St. Jerome dated Livy's birth to 59 BC in his *Chronicle* 180.2, trans. Malcolm Drew Donalson (Lewiston, 1996); P. G. Walsh, *Livy: his historical aims and methods* (Cambridge, 1961), 1; Syme, 'Livy and Augustus', 28.

⁶¹ Suetonius, *Life of Claudius* 41.1; Tacitus, *Annals* 4.34; Walsh, *Livy*, 5; Richard Rutherford, *Classical Literature: A Concise History* (Malden/Oxford, 2005).

⁶² The conventional dates of Livy's life and death are 59 BC-17 AD: Barbara Levick, 'Historical Context', in: Bernard Mineo (ed.), *A Companion to Livy* (Hoboken, 2015), 24-36, 25.

⁶³ Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita*, periochae, Walsh, Levick, Syme.

There are some serious concerns about the dating of the books of the *Ab Urbe Condita* as well.⁶⁴ The first books were probably written just after the Battle of Actium (31 BC). The last event covered by Livy is the death of Drusus in 9 BC. Why he stopped there is a much debated question. A widespread opinion is that death or illness made Livy unable to ‘finish’ his work. Since the *Ab Urbe Condita* is made up of sections of five, ten, and fifteen books each, it would be expected that it was meant to consist of 145 or 150 books. However, 142 books have been written, which makes the option of the *Ab Urbe Condita* just not being finished, because of illness or death, more plausible. Another argument is that it was a conscious decision of Livy not to continue writing.⁶⁵ By the time of his last written book, the future of the Roman state had yet again become unstable and unclear. Tiberius had already gone into voluntary exile and with the death of Drusus, Augustus’ latest chosen option as heir, had died. Among this political tumult it would have been tricky to write about the latest developments, because one would not want to offend the possible future mightiest man in the realm. Livy had been in this situation before, during the first years after the Battle of Actium and at that time he had waited publishing his work until Augustus had consolidated his power.⁶⁶ There are elements in Livy’s text that suggest that the emperor was watching him while writing, for instance the emphasis on the promotions Drusus received before his death. If Augustus did meddle in Livy’s writing affairs, it seems very plausible that he would stop publishing altogether after 9 BC, since Drusus’ death would mark a period of disasters for the emperor.⁶⁷ Livy’s contemporary writer, Asinius Pollio, did the same and waited for the publication of his work until Augustus had died.⁶⁸ Another hypothesis is that Livy did, in fact, publish 150 books, but that the last 8 are lost. The *periochae* do not mention these hypothetical last books, however, so this does not seem very likely. Either way, it is impossible to say what exactly would have been in those books, since the content has not survived to this day.

Even though the precise dating of the *Ab Urbe Condita* is difficult, the period of time during which Livy wrote is clear enough: the time of Rome’s transition from a republic to a principate. Livy’s first books were published between 27 and 25 BC, just after Octavian had defeated his last rival Marcus Antonius in the Battle of Actium (30 BC) and was already laying the foundations of the Principate, disguised as a start to the restauration of the Republic.⁶⁹

⁶⁴ Levick, ‘Historical Context’, 25-26.

⁶⁵ Syme, ‘Livy and Augustus’, 27-87.

⁶⁶ Mehl and Mueller, *Roman historiography*, 103.

⁶⁷ Levick, ‘Historical Context’, 30.

⁶⁸ Mehl and Mueller, *Roman historiography*, 103.

⁶⁹ Levick, ‘Historical Context’, 27.

However, the first signs of Augustus' dynastic plans became visible when he married his only daughter, Julia the Elder, to his nephew Marcellus, in the years 25-23 BC.

As mentioned before, there is no way to say anything with certainty about Livy's political ideals, but certain ideas about the world and history are slightly visible in Livy's text. After the destruction of Carthage in the second century BC, Rome had experienced a decline in its superiority. Livy was one of many writers who noticed this development. In his preface, for instance, he speaks about his own time as being so corrupt 'it can endure neither its illness nor their cure'.⁷⁰ The illness he mentioned is the decline in morality, the cure could be Augustus' establishment of power. Livy pinpoints the turning point of the declining moral development on the year 187 BC. During this year, Manlius Vulso had brought back treasures of war from Asia⁷¹, which caused the Romans to get attached to *luxuria*, something that Livy calls a vice.⁷² To stop this moral decline, the Romans, and above all the Roman leaders, should go back to live according to the *mos maiorum*, the values of the Roman ancestors.⁷³ In the time Livy was writing, this past would be the Republic. However, to represent the past in an idealized way is hardly unique or iconic for Livy. Moreover, apart from disapproval of decadence, there are also signs of progress in Livy's work.

Even though nothing can be said about Livy's specific political ideals, something can be said about his broader ideas about politics and society. Livy uses a political model which emphasizes the importance of a central authority-figure, which would mean that the principle of one sole ruler is not immediately dismissed by Livy. However, he does imply that he would not accept a tyranny.⁷⁴ He mentions several virtues a ruler, in his eyes, should possess to be worthy, such as *moderatio*, *iustus*, *fides*, *pietas*, *dignitas*, and *gravitas*.⁷⁵ In this, too, he is not alone: these values have also been mentioned by Cicero in the *De Republica* and *De Officiis*.⁷⁶ What is interesting, is that these two works have been considered as fitting the Stoic political discourse.⁷⁷ P.G. Walsh argues that Livy was, in fact, influenced by Stoic ideals⁷⁸, but since

⁷⁰ Joseph Farrel, 'The Augustan Period: 40 BC – AD 14', 44-57; Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita*, praef.

⁷¹ Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita* 39.6.7.

⁷² Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita* praef.11.

⁷³ Stephen Harrison, 'Decline and Nostalgia', in: Stephen Harrison (ed.), *A Companion to Latin Literature* (Malden/Oxford, 2007), 285-299, 287.

⁷⁴ Bernard Mineo, 'Livy's Political and Moral Values and the Principate', in: Bernard Mineo (ed.), *A Companion to Livy* (Hoboken, 2015), 130.

⁷⁵ Mineo, 'Livy's Political and Moral Values', 131-132.

⁷⁶ In the *De Republica* Cicero says the following about rulership: 'I consider the best constitution for a State to be that which is a balanced combination of the three forms mentioned, kingship, aristocracy, and democracy, and does not irritate by punishment a rude and savage heart.' 2.23.

⁷⁷ Mineo, 'Livy's Political and Moral Values', 133; Walsh (1961; 1974).

⁷⁸ Walsh, *Livy*, 51-52, 81.

Stoic philosophy has been widespread in Rome from the second century BC onwards, it seems that was near impossible not to think about politics and morality within this framework.⁷⁹

Livy had some ideals about the role of history, as well. History should offer the people in the present an example of the ideal society and the ideal individual.⁸⁰ This idea becomes visible through multiple stories, for instance the story about the foundation of Rome by Romulus and Remus.⁸¹ Not just Romulus' deeds and character are being explored elaborately by Livy to make an example for his readers; the story of the rape and suicide of Lucretia can be read in the same way, as providing a moral lesson. Livy discusses the story in the first book of the *Ab Urbe Condita*. What is striking, is that it takes up much space compared to other events described in the first book. This is also a reason for much scholarly interest in the event, which has been discussed by many scholars.⁸²

Livy describes events that had happened centuries before he lived, so the historicity of his work is debatable. He does mention to have used some sources, for instance the historical work by Fabius Pictor. This work was written in the second century BC, so it was still a long time before Livy, plus Pictor wrote in Greek. This is important, because it indicates that Pictor may have meant to write not for a Roman audience, like Livy, but for a Greek audience. Therefore, his narrative and selection of accounts to note, should be considered in this context. However, for the analysis of Livy's account of Lucretia's suicide, the historicity of his work is less important. According to the charter myth theory by Malinowski, the truth of myths does not matter, because the message the author wants to convey is told in his narrative, whether this narrative is true and objective or manipulated.⁸³ Myths are a 'blueprint' of society: the characters and relationships relate to existing structures. The myth of Lucretia could be considered as an archetypal story that deals with an oppressed people avenging the injustice done to them.⁸⁴

⁷⁹ M.I. Henderson, 'Review: Livy: His Historical Aims and Methods by P. G. Walsh', *The Journal of Roman Studies* Vol. 52 (1961), 277-278, 277.

⁸⁰ Bernard Mineo, 'Introduction: Livy', in: Bernard Mineo (ed.), *A Companion to Livy* (Hoboken, 2015), xxxi-xxxix.

⁸¹ For the exemplary role of Romulus in the *Ab Urbe Condita*, see: Rex Stem, 'The Exemplary Lessons of Livy's Romulus', *Transactions of the American Philological Association* (1974-) 137:2 (Autumn, 2007), 435-471.

⁸² Ian Donalson, *The Rapes of Lucretia: a myth and its transformations* (Oxford, 1982); Judith De Luce, 'Roman Myth', *The Classical World* 98:2 (Winter, 2005), 202-205; Eleanor Glendinning, 'Reinventing Lucretia: Rape, Suicide and Redemption from Classical Antiquity to the Medieval Era', *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 20:1 (June, 2013), 61-82.

⁸³ Bronislaw Malinowski, *Myth in Primitive Psychology* (1926).

⁸⁴ De Luce, 'Roman Myth', 202-205.

The analysis of the story of Lucretia

Lucretia's rape and suicide receives relatively much attention from Livy in his *Ab Urbe Condita*. It is written down in the first book, written between 27 and 25 BC. A comparative analysis will be made to understand the way Livy used Lucretia's suicide as a narrative element in the context of his own political and social situation.

As said before, Livy is not the only writer from the first centuries BC-AD who accounted the story of Lucretia. Ovid and Dionysius of Halicarnassus did so, as well. The general lay out of the story is the same, although there are significant differences between the accounts. At the beginning of the story the first difference is encountered: Livy writes that the son of the king, Tarquinius Sextus, Lucretia's husband, Collatinus, and other soldiers are making a bet around the campfire in Collatia, a small town near Rome, on whose spouse is the most virtuous. Collatinus cries out that there is no need to speculate, because they can just ride to Rome to see for themselves.

*Every man fell to praising his own wife with enthusiasm, and, as their rivalry grew hot, Collatinus said that there was no need to talk about it, for it was in their power to know, in a few hours' time, how far the rest were excelled by his own Lucretia. "Come! If the vigour of youth is in us let us mount our horses and see for ourselves the disposition of our wives. Let every man regard as the surest test what meets his eyes when the women's husband enters unexpected."*⁸⁵

What is interesting here, is that Dionysius of Halicarnassus does not mention this bet at all. In his account, written down in his work *Roman Antiquities*, Tarquinius Sextus is already staying at the house of Collatinus, Lucretia's husband, in Collatia. Lucretia was there alone, while her husband was away at the camp. She entertained Sextus Tarquinius, because he was a kinsman of her husband. Here we find another difference with Livy: in the *Ab Urbe Condita*, the family ties between Sextus Tarquinius and Lucretia are mentioned nowhere. This could be, because Livy wanted to portray Lucretia as very different from the royal family members and emphasize her moral superiority over them, as to create an 'us vs. them'-narrative. This narrative is also visible in the geographical description of Livy: Lucretia's house is situated in Collatia, while the royal palace is in Rome. Not only is Lucretia morally far removed from the royals, in a

⁸⁵ Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita* 1.57.6-7.

geographical way she is, too. Her virtuous superiority becomes clear when the men visit her house in Collatia:

*Arriving there (in Rome) at early dusk, they thence proceeded to Collatia, where Lucretia was discovered very differently employed from the daughters-in-law of the king. These they had seen at a luxurious banquet, whiling away the time with their young friends; but Lucretia, though it was late at night, was busily engaged upon her wool [...]. The prize in womanly virtues fell to Lucretia.*⁸⁶

While the royal women were surrounded by luxury, Lucretia was working her wool, an activity well-known as a symbol for chastity and modesty at the time that Livy wrote. It was considered part of the *mos maiorum*, the ancestors. Augustus himself is said to have demanded his daughter, Julia the Elder, to learn how to work wool, to make her into a perfect example for his moral policies.⁸⁷

Not only was Lucretia's virtuous behaviour mentioned to clarify the difference with the royal women, it was, according to Livy, also the reason why Sextus Tarquinius felt desire for her.

*It was there (at the sight of Lucretia working wool) that Sextus Tarquinius was seized with a wicked desire to debauch Lucretia by force; not only her beauty, but her proved chastity as well, provoked him.*⁸⁸

This notion of the reason of Tarquinius' attraction to Lucretia differs from the account written by Ovid. Ovid writes about Lucretia's rape and suicide in his *Fasti*.⁸⁹ The *Fasti*, or *Fastorum Libri Sex*, 'Six books of the Calendar', were written in 8 AD, about 30 years after Livy's account. It is an elaborate treatment of the Roman calendar. The story of Lucretia is written in book II, which is about the month of February. In his account, Ovid also mentions the bet between the men, although it is specifically about marital loyalty.

⁸⁶ Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita* 1.57.8-10.

⁸⁷ Beth Severy, *Augustus and the Family at the Birth of the Roman Empire* (New York, 2003), 138; Suetonius, *Life of Augustus* 64.

⁸⁸ Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita* 1.57.10.

⁸⁹ Ovid, *Fasti* 2.711-852.

*Young Tarquin entertained his comrades with feast and wine: among them the king's son spoke: "While Ardea keeps us here on tenterhooks with sluggish war, and suffers us not to carry back our arms to the gods of our fathers, what of the loyalty of the marriage-bed? And are we as dear to our wives as they to us?"*⁹⁰

Upon Collatinus' suggestion, the men ride to the royal palace in Rome, where they find the women in the following situation:

*The royal palace first they seek: no sentinel was at the door. Lo, they find the king's daughters-in-law, their necks draped with garlands, keeping their vigils over the wine.*⁹¹

Also, when the men ride to Rome to find out whose wife will win the bet, they find the royal maidens wearing jewellery, drinking wine, without a guard, while they find Lucretia at home with no one but her maidens, spinning wool. While Livy emphasizes the wool-making, especially in the motive for Tarquinius to desire for Lucretia, in Ovid's account it is just one aspect in a list of good qualities:

*Meantime the royal youth became filled with love and desire and exclaimed how her figure pleased him, and her fair complexion, her yellow hair, and artless grace; as well as her words and voice and incorruptible virtue.*⁹²

*In his mind she grew more and more beautiful. "The way she sat and spun the yarn, how she dressed and the way her curls fell on her neck; that was her look, these were her words, that was her colour, that her form, and that her lovely face."*⁹³

Ovid emphasizes Lucretia's physical aspects and her sexuality.⁹⁴ The rape is also represented in this way, with emphasis on the physical and erotic aspects of the story. For instance, Tarquin is described as a 'lover foe', holding Lucretia down by pressing his hand 'heavy on her breast, the breast that till then had never known the touch of stranger hand.'⁹⁵ The fact that Livy puts

⁹⁰ Ovid, *Fasti* 2.725-730.

⁹¹ Ovid, *Fasti* 2.737-740.

⁹² Ovid, *Fasti* 2.761-764.

⁹³ Ovid, *Fasti* 2.770-774.

⁹⁴ Glendinning, 'Reinventing Lucretia', 67; Ian Donalson, *The Rapes of Lucretia*, 4.

⁹⁵ Ovid, *Fasti* 2.803-04.

more emphasis on the virtuous nature of Lucretia, could make it politically coloured. It has been suggested before that Livy wrote this account in accordance with Augustus' moral policy. It seems that Ovid was banished before he finished his *Fasti*, for being too straightforward about the female sexuality in his descriptions⁹⁶, while Livy kept his representation of Lucretia's figure and rape fairly modest. However, Livy wrote this account long before the official laws resulting from the moral policy, so another reason for his modesty on the sexual events in the story, could be that he meant the account to be a political one, instead of a romantic or erotic story.

As mentioned before, Livy makes it clear that Lucretia differs from the royal women, same as Ovid, but for a different reason: Ovid wants to argue with this that the royal women are not loyal to their husbands, while Lucretia is. Livy, on the other hand, portrays Lucretia not only as the perfect wife, but as the perfect *Roman* wife. Although the royal women live in Rome, it is Lucretia who is perfectly Roman, because she is working her wool, *the* symbol of Roman virtue.

Women had a passive role during the Republic, however, for a moment Livy seems to deviate from this narrative. Even though Lucretia is presented with all symbols female, her suicide makes her figure ambiguous. She commits suicide using a dagger. As discussed in the first chapter, weapons were the tools of men, not women. The only women committing suicide with a weapon, were those who committed suicide alongside their husbands, thus using *their* weapon, or mythological women. Livy writes history, not mythology, and Lucretia uses her own weapon, so how then, should we regard her? She is unmistakably portrayed as a woman, but with manly features. Livy might have done this to show the moral superiority of Lucretia not only over the royal women, but over the Roman men, as well. For they, too, are subjected to the vice of *luxuria*. During the time of Livy's life, the corruption of Rome by this vice was a hot topic. Rome's moral superiority was believed to have been in decline since the end of the Punic Wars⁹⁷, and Livy himself mentions the exact date this decline started, namely in 187 BC, when Manlius Vulso had brought back luxurious war treasures from Asia. By presenting Lucretia as morally superior over every other character in the story, Livy might have implicitly meant for her to represent here a Roman citizen from the time of the *mos maiorum*, the only one not corrupted by the monarchy.

If the character of Lucretia can be seen as a metaphor for the old Roman virtues, her rape could be read within a metaphorical framework as well. Lucretia is raped by Tarquin, who

⁹⁶ Claassen, *Ovid Revisited*, 2-4.

⁹⁷ Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita* 39.6.7.

took her body with force.⁹⁸ Tarquin belonged to the King's family. Could it be that Livy here implicitly compares Tarquin to Caesar, who took Rome by force when he crossed the Rubicon in 49 BC?⁹⁹ This would not be the only implicit reference to the regime of Caesar in this account. When Lucretia calls for her husband and father, she asks them both to bring a trusted friend.¹⁰⁰ Her husband brought Lucius Junius Brutus.¹⁰¹ Lucretia asks the men to be witness of her suicide and to avenge her rape. Livy makes it quite clear that it is Brutus who answers Lucretia's call, while her husband and father mourn her death:

*Brutus, while the others were absorbed in¹ grief, drew out the knife from Lucretia's wound.*¹⁰²

Brutus takes over the narrative from here. In Ovid, the story ends with one sentence about the abolishment of the monarchy, but in Livy's account, this part of the story is about the same length as the description of the rape and suicide of Lucretia. Brutus took the dagger from Lucretia's body and swore to avenge her rape, but not only that.

*"By this blood, most chaste until a prince wronged it, I swear, and I take you, gods, to witness, that I will pursue Lucius Tarquinius Superbus and his wicked wife and all his children, with sword, with fire, aye with whatsoever violence I may; and that I will suffer neither them nor any other to be king in Rome!"*¹⁰³

The oath Brutus takes here is more than just to avenge Lucretia, but to avenge all wicked deeds the monarchs had done to Rome. With this oath, Brutus starts the riots that would lead up to the fall of the monarchy. What is striking, is that Collatinus, Lucretius and Valerius, the friend Lucretia's father brought, are surprised by Brutus' courageous behaviour. He was thought to be a dumb brute, but turned out to be a role Brutus played in order to seem like a less significant threat to the monarchs. However, in the town square he was the one calling to 'make war [...] on the power of the king'.¹⁰⁴ The men who joined him were not only moved by the grief of

⁹⁸ Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita* 1.58.2: 'Holding the woman down with his left hand on her breast, he said, "Be still, Lucretia! I am Sextus Tarquinius. My sword is in my hand. Utter a sound, and you die!"'

⁹⁹ Miriam Griffin (ed.), *A Companion to Julius Caesar* (Malden, 2009).

¹⁰⁰ Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita* 1.58.5; Ovid does not mention this: Lucretia has called only for her father and husband, Brutus comes on his own initiative later: Ovid, *Fasti* 2.815-816, 837.

¹⁰¹ Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita* 1.58.6.

¹⁰² Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita* 1.59.1.

¹⁰³ Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita* 1.59.1.

¹⁰⁴ Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita* 1.59.2.

Lucretius, but also by Brutus fierce character, Livy emphasizes.¹⁰⁵ When the men from Collatia arrive at the Forum in Rome, Brutus gives another speech, in which he says two important things:

He spoke [...] of the bereavement of Tricipitinus (Lucretius), in whose eyes the death of his daughter was not so outrageous and deplorable as was the cause of her death.

Here Livy says something that perfectly describes a sentiment about suicide that had gained popularity due to Stoic ideals: dying was sometimes less bad than living a life without honour. Lucretia had been dishonoured in a horrible way, ultimately causing her death. Her father did not mourn her death as much as the reason she had to kill herself: her dishonour was worse than her death, because she died honourable. She used an honourable weapon, a dagger, and killed herself for an honourable reason, to preserve her honour.

*He (Brutus) reminded them, besides, of the pride of the king himself and the wretched state of the commons, who were plunged into ditches and sewers and made to clear them out. The men of Rome, he said, the conquerors of all the nations round about, had been transformed from warriors into artisans and stone-cutters.*¹⁰⁶

This is an example of Livy's sentiment of decline. Brutus addresses this same problem in this fragment. The women of the royal family have been portrayed as being spoiled by luxury, and in this fragment, too, the royal family were to blame for the laziness of the Roman people. The Roman people, the superior conquerors of the world, have become spoiled and addicted to nice objects, hence their transgression into artisans.

Lucius Junius Brutus, along with Collatinus, became the first consul of Rome and swore to the people that he would never again tolerate a king in Rome. However, by the time Livy wrote this account, the memory of the tyrant Caesar was still fresh. Coincidentally, Caesar's most unpredicted murderer was also called Brutus. By portraying Lucius Junius Brutus as a man who surprised everyone with his feisty character and strength, Livy could have meant to refer to Marcus Junius Brutus, who was viewed by Caesar as his favourite friend, some sources even

¹⁰⁵ Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita* 1.59.4: 'They were moved, not only by the father's sorrow, but by the fact that it was Brutus who chid their tears and idle lamentations and urged them to take up the sword, as befitted men and Romans, against those who had dared to treat them as enemies.'

¹⁰⁶ Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita* 1.59.9.

say son. Even though Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Ovid also name Brutus as the avenger of Lucretia, Livy emphasizes the role of dim-witted brute he played to disguise his hatred of the kings. Therefore one could speculate that Livy did this to remind Augustus of his predecessor Caesar, who was murdered not only because of his tyrannical behaviour, but also by someone he did not expect. He would have uttered this surprise in the famous sentence: 'Et tu, Brute?'¹⁰⁷

The story of Lucretia would say a lot about the Roman values in her time, but the way Livy tells this story in the way he does, also says a lot about the Roman values in *his* time. The female values have been discussed, as well as the values about the Roman identity. But, the fact that Lucretia chooses life over death also says a lot about the attitudes about suicide. Livy says that it was the fear of dishonour that pushed Lucretia over the edge and made living impossible. This could mean that a woman's life would be viewed as worthless after it had been violated. This idea in itself is not new.¹⁰⁸ However, the fact that Lucretia commits suicide in the requested presence of others, is also of importance. Lucretia commits suicide because she has an agenda, besides proving her innocence. She wants to have an audience to stir things up with her suicide. She specifically asks the people present to avenge her death on the king. Livy tells this story in a specific way, a way that is not seen in the narratives by Ovid or Dionysius of Halicarnassus. Livy lets Lucretia commit suicide in a dramatic way, because he wants it to serve as the cause for the abolishment of the monarchy. Lucretia's suicide thus becomes the ultimate form of protest against oppression and a warning to Augustus.

¹⁰⁷ This is a Latin translation of the Greek sentence 'καὶ σὺ τέκνον', 'You too, child?', originally from Suetonius' *Life of Caesar*, from Shakespeare's play *Julius Caesar* (1599).

¹⁰⁸ Donaldson, *Rapes of Lucretia*, 25; Glendinning, 'Reinventing Lucretia', 63-68.

Chapter three: Cato's veneration as a martyr for freedom

During the Julio-Claudian principates, suicide numbers seemed to have increased. Whether or not this was truly the case, is impossible to say, due to several reasons elaborately explained by modern scholars.¹⁰⁹ The voluntariness of these suicides has also been debated in secondary literature as well as in several sources which mention 'ordered' or 'allowed' suicides.¹¹⁰ The first account of suicide as an alternative for execution happened in 121 BC. It is described by Appian in his work *The Civil Wars* how Quintus Flaccus was allowed to commit suicide.

*Opimius then arrested their fellow-conspirators, cast them into prison, and ordered that they should be strangled; but he allowed Quintus, the son of Flaccus, to choose his own mode of death.*¹¹¹

There is no mention of the reason why Quintus was allowed to commit suicide. He was a follower of the revolutionary Gaius Gracchus, who claimed the senate had become corrupt and demanded more power to the people.¹¹²

During the principate of Nero, several people were offered the option of suicide as an alternative to execution upon the discovery of the Pisonian conspiracy. In these cases, too, the reason why some of them were ordered to commit suicide is unclear. What is striking about this case, though, is that at least two of the members ordered to commit suicide were known Stoics. This is significant not only because of the Stoic ideals that are behind suicide¹¹³, but also because this 'opposition' against an autocrat in the form of suicide was still fresh in the Roman memory. Indeed, approximately a century earlier the symbol of Republicanism and most important opponent of Julius Caesar, Cato the Younger, had chosen to kill himself rather than live under the rule of a dictator.

¹⁰⁹ See the Introduction of this thesis for an overview of secondary literature concerning suicide numbers in the first centuries BC and AD.

¹¹⁰ For a list of documented suicides in antiquity, see: Anton van Hooff, *Zelfmoord in de antieke wereld: van autothanasia tot suicide* (Nijmegen, 1990) and Yolande Gris , *Le suicide dans la Rome antique* (Paris, 1982).

¹¹¹ Appian, *The Civil Wars* 1.3.26; Miriam Griffin, 'Philosophy, Cato and Roman Suicide: II', *Greece & Rome* 33:2 (Oct., 1986), 192-202, 192-193; Paul Plass, *The game of death in ancient Rome: arena sport and political suicide* (Madison, 1995), 84; Catherine Edwards, 'Modelling Roman suicide? The afterlife of Cato', *Economy and Society* 34:2 (2005), 200-222, 205.

¹¹² For more about Gaius Gracchus, and his brother Tiberius, see e.g.: David Stockton, *The Gracchi* (Oxford, 1979), Gregory K. Golden, *Crisis Management During the Roman Republic: The Role of Political Institutions in Emergencies* (Cambridge, 2013) and Henriette van der Blom, *Oratory and political career in the late Roman republic* (Cambridge, 2016).

¹¹³ See chapter one of this thesis for a general explication of Stoic thought on suicide and how Stoic thought may have increased the significance and popular attraction to suicide, as well as for suggested literature on this topic.

Julius Caesar and the Roman forms of autocracy

Though dictatorship and tyranny are used almost synonymously nowadays, in Roman antiquity these were two different things.¹¹⁴ In the Roman Republic, a dictatorship was a constitutional form, used as a political method to solve a military, political, or social crisis.¹¹⁵ One man received sole power for a pre-determined number of years in order to make swift decisions. A tyrant, on the other hand, was an informal title for an autocrat who abused his power. It was corruption which had turned the kings of Rome into tyrants, so a dictator had to be constitutionally restricted, hence the time limit given to each dictator. During the early centuries of the Republic, these crises were mostly external, while at the end it had become a response to internal crises, as well.¹¹⁶ The dictatorship was frequently used until the Second Punic War (218-201 BC). In the early first century BC, it was revived by Sulla, who was dictator during the years 82-81 BC. Even though no time limit had been set to his term as dictator, he resigned after approximately one year.¹¹⁷ However, the way he took the power and extended it during his time in function, exposed the risk of a dictatorship to turn into tyranny.¹¹⁸

The dictatorship of Sulla had not made an end to the politico-military conflict between the *optimates* and the *populares*. In fact, when Julius Caesar crossed the Rubicon in 49 BC, he became *dictator* by force, just as Sulla had, in order to make an end to the conflict. The constitutional changes made by Sulla to the function of *dictator* had provided Caesar with more opportunities within that function. He was harsh against his most significant political opponent, Pompey, and had him executed, but forgave others by granting them *clementia*.¹¹⁹ Cato, however, escaped both these fates, by committing suicide before Caesar could imprison him.¹²⁰

¹¹⁴ Andreas Kalyvas, 'The Tyranny of Dictatorship: When the Greek Tyrant met the Roman Dictator', *Political Theory*, Vol. 35, No. 4 (Aug., 2007), 412-442, 412.

¹¹⁵ Golden, *Crisis Management*.

¹¹⁶ Golden, *Crisis Management*, 11-40.

¹¹⁷ Sulla, *the last Republican*, 161.

¹¹⁸ Sulla had taken the position of *dictator* by force after marching on Rome in 83/82 BC in order to make an end to the political strife between two factions within the senate: the *optimates*, the conservative party that wanted to limit the power of the Roman plebs, and the *populares*, who wanted to extend their power. For more information about Sulla, see e.g.: Keaveney, *Sulla, the last Republican* (London, 1982) and Golden, *Crisis Management*.

¹¹⁹ *Clementia* (in the context of Julius Caesar's use of it): to grant someone pardon from execution, see: Mark Toher, 'Augustan and Tiberian Literature', in: Miriam Griffin (ed.), *A companion to Julius Caesar* (Malden, 2009), 224-239, 237.

¹²⁰ Plutarch, *Cato Minor* 67.1-70.6, 72.2; Plutarch, *Caes.* 54.2; Dio 43.12.1; App. B. C. II 99; Rudolf Fehrle, *Cato Uticensis* (Darmstadt, 1983), 279; Plass, *The Game of Death*, 90.

Clemency was considered a safe way of reducing a rigid image, since the execution of an enemy would be avoided.¹²¹ At the same time, the offering of clemency humiliated the opponent, because it would injure his honour. The shameful effect of clemency is rooted in the ancient Roman values of virtue and pride. For military leaders, it was shameful to be conquered, hence the acceptance of suicide in their situation: being captured by the victor would destroy their dignity. However, it was even more shameful to be pardoned, for this would imply that the vanquished opponent posed no significant threat to the victor and could be kept alive. Moreover, it would be ground for dilemma among the political opponents of Caesar: one could hardly criticize a tyrant who spared his opponents, but to praise Caesar for his mercy would be a sign of acceptance of his rule.¹²² Cicero deals with this problem by pointing out the problems caused by the abuse of clemency. Cicero seems to consider tyranny a corrupted form of monarchy. He recognized the aspects of monarchy surviving in dictatorship, but had, initially, no problems with that, for he believed that a *temporary* retreat to monarchical, and autocratic, powers was indeed advantageous for the state in cases of emergency.¹²³

Because of these useful aspects, clemency became a prominent feature of Caesar's rule¹²⁴, but it did not change the minds of his opponents, for in 44 BC, he was murdered.¹²⁵ During the principate of Nero, Caesar's opponents would regain popularity.¹²⁶ Apart from Pompey, the most famous opponent must have been Marcus Porcius Cato Uticensis, from here onward called Cato the Younger.

Cato the Younger: the perfect Stoic even in death

Cato the Younger was born in 95 BC in Rome and had an active political and military career under the dictatorships of Sulla and Caesar. He became a military tribune in 67 BC and returned to Rome in 65 to become a quaestor and later, in 63 BC, a tribune of the plebs.¹²⁷

¹²¹ During his dictatorship, Sulla had planned to execute many people that were considered 'enemies of the state'. Even though Sulla voluntarily resigned from his function, his rigid attitude towards his enemies had provided him with a legacy as one of the factors in the fall of the Roman Republic: Jane F. Gardner, 'The Dictator', in: Miriam Griffin, *A Companion to Julius Caesar* (Malden, 2009), 57-71, 65.

¹²² Timothy Hill, *Ambitiosa Mors: Suicide and Self in Roman Thought and Literature* (New York/London, 2004), 224.

¹²³ Andreas Kalyvas, 'The Tyranny of Dictatorship: When the Greek Tyrant met the Roman Dictator', *Political Theory*, Vol. 35, No. 4 (Aug., 2007), 412-442, 417; Cicero, *De Re Publica* 1.30, 1.40-43, 2.26-30, 32.

¹²⁴ Plass, *The game of death*, 126.

¹²⁵ Need to look up where I read that.

¹²⁶ Miriam Griffin, 'Introduction', in: Miriam Griffin (ed.), *A Companion to Julius Caesar* (Malden, 2009), 1-8, 6.

¹²⁷ For more biographical information about Cato, see e.g.: Van der Blom, *Oratory and political career*, 204-247; Rudolf Fehrle, *Cato Uticensis* (Darmstadt, 1983).

Cato has been venerated by contemporaries as well as later ancient authors. He was widely esteemed for his political justice and principles, for using his oratory and political skills to prevent Caesar and the other *triumvirs* to establish a power monopoly.¹²⁸ It is known that he studied and practiced the teachings of the Stoics throughout his life and this could have been a significant reason for the fact that he was reserved about Sulla's dictatorship, the triumvirate and Julius Caesar's dictatorships. When the civil war between Pompey and Caesar broke out, Cato initially chose neither side, but later paired up with Pompey to fight against Caesar's armies after they crossed the Rubicon in 49 BC. The armies of Pompey and Caesar were not strong enough to hold against Caesar, though, and Cato pulled back to Africa with his legions. Admitting defeat, Cato committed suicide in 46 BC.

This has been one for the books. Not only did it gain a lot of attention from both Cato's contemporaries and later Roman authors, it also became an idealized way of committing suicide which would be taken up as an example for aristocratic Romans during the principates of the Julio-Claudians. Cato would have committed his suicide very consciously, spending his last night reading Plato's *Phaedra*, in which Plato describes how Socrates coped with his death, and stabbed himself with a sharp weapon the next morning. His blow had been awkwardly placed, though, and his wounds were stitched up by a doctor before they could kill him. After this, Cato dramatically tore open his wounds and died.¹²⁹

Cato's suicide was neither swift nor smooth, unlike Socrates' death by drinking poison. Still, his death was exalted as the perfect Stoic death by, among others, Seneca and Lucan, who will be discussed later in this chapter. What, then, was so impressive about his suicide? The motive Cato gives before he kills himself testifies of Stoic political thought. Cato supposedly said that he did not want to live under the reign of a tyrant. It was his own choice to make: be free in death or give up his political virtue, thus be oppressed, in life. Cato chose the latter. Cato's fate after his defeat by Caesar would evidently have been execution, but it could well have been that Caesar had not intended to actually carry out the execution, but to grant him clemency instead. By committing suicide instead of waiting for the verdict, Cato took the merits of clemency away from Caesar in advance. During the reign of Nero, the last Julio-Claudian princeps, Cato's suicide has been framed as a way of protest against autocratic abuse of power.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Henriette van der Blom, *Oratory and political career in the late Roman republic* (Cambridge, 2016), 241-242; The first *triumvirate* was an informal alliance between Julius Caesar, Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus and Marcus Licinius Crassus. It lasted from 59 BC until the death of Crassus in 53 BC. For more information, see: ...

¹²⁹ Plutarch, *Cato Minor* 67.1-70.6.

¹³⁰ J. P. Sullivan, *Literature and politics in the age of Nero* (Ithaca/New York, 1985), 118.

Suicide to protest against tyranny during the reign of Nero

Nero Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus, henceforward called Nero, was the last of the Julio-Claudians. He was adopted by Claudius, his great-uncle, to become his successor as princeps in 54 AD. He was related to Augustus through his mother, Agrippina the Younger, who was Augustus' great-granddaughter. In the early years of Nero's reign, he was much advised by Agrippina and Seneca, Nero's tutor, but he became more independent as he grew older, limiting the power of the senate and his advisors, and behaving more and more like an autocratic ruler.¹³¹

Lucius Annaeus Seneca (ca. 4 BC-65 AD) was Nero's tutor and advisor during his early reign. He was born in Spain into an elite family (Seneca the Elder, the eminent rhetorician¹³², was his father). He received an education in rhetoric in Rome, but did not, or at least not for long, pursue a political career until he came to work at Nero's court.¹³³ He was exiled by Claudius on charges of adultery with a member of the Julio-Claudian family.¹³⁴ He was allowed to come back around 48/49 AD, thanks to Agrippina the Younger, to become Nero's tutor, until he retreated from court again after 62 AD. In 65 AD, Seneca was forced to commit suicide by Nero, who believed, or claimed to believe, that Seneca participated in the Pisonian plot to dispose of Nero.¹³⁵

Seneca was a Stoic, but that did not necessarily mean that he was opposed to the political form of the principate.¹³⁶ As stated before, the Stoics did not oppose autocracy per se, but

¹³¹ For biographical information about Nero, see e.g.: Miriam Griffin, *Nero: the end of a dynasty* (London, 1984); J. P. Sullivan, *Literature and politics in the age of Nero* (Ithaca/New York, 1985); Villy Sørensen, *Seneca, the humanist at the court of Nero* (Chicago, 1984); Jürgen Malitz, *Nero* (Malden, 2005).

¹³² For biographical information about Seneca the Elder, see e.g.: Janet Fairweather, *Seneca the Elder* (Cambridge, 1981);

¹³³ The reason for this is not quite clear. It is argued that Seneca's poor health (he was believed to have asthma) got in the way, while others, such as Miriam Griffin and Brad Inwood believed it to have been a conscious choice: Seneca would probably have wanted to spend his life on philosophy instead of politics. For more information in this topic, see: Miriam Griffin, *Seneca: a philosopher in Politics*; Elizabeth Asmis, Shadi Bartsch, and Martha C. Nussbaum, 'Seneca and his world', in: Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *On Benefits*, trans. Miriam Griffin and Brad Inwood (Chicago, 2011), vii-ix; Brad Inwood, 'Seneca in his Philosophical Milieu', in: Brad Inwood, *Reading Seneca: Stoic Philosophy at Rome* (Oxford, 2005), 7-22.

¹³⁴ Seneca was charged on adultery with Caligula's sister Julia Livilla: Dio 60.8; Miriam Griffin, *Seneca, a philosopher in politics* (Oxford, 1976), 59.

¹³⁵ The Pisonian conspiracy was a plot led by Gaius Calpurnius Piso to overthrow Nero as emperor and replace him by someone, possibly Piso himself, through acclamation by the Praetorian Guard. The plot was, however, discovered and many members, and innocent high-class Romans, were condemned to death, by execution or suicide, or exiled by Nero. Prominent members (or believed-to-be members) of the Pisonian conspiracy were Seneca, the poet Lucan, and the satirist Petronius. See: Tacitus, *Annales* 15.48-55; Elizabeth Asmis, Shadi Bartsch, and Martha C. Nussbaum, 'Seneca and his world', in: Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *On Benefits*, trans. Miriam Griffin and Brad Inwood (Chicago, 2011), vii-ix; Miriam Griffin, 'Philosophy, Cato and Roman Suicide', 65.

¹³⁶ Sullivan, *Literature and politics*, 119; Miriam Griffin, *Nero: the end of a dynasty* (London, 1984), 104; Seneca, *De Clementia* 149-150; Griffin, M., 'Seneca and Pliny', in: Rowe, C., Schofield, M., Harrison, S., and

autocracy in a corrupted form.¹³⁷ This also becomes clear also in Seneca's satirical account of Claudius' apotheosis, the *Apocolocyntosis*, in which he condemns not the absolute nature of Claudius' regime per se, but rather the negative consequences this had.¹³⁸ It was in Seneca's interest, therefore, not only as Nero's advisor, but also as a Stoic, to try to mould Nero into the shape of a Stoic ruler.¹³⁹ In 55 or 56 AD, Seneca wrote a treatise intended for Nero about what Seneca considered the most important virtue for a princeps: clemency.¹⁴⁰ Virtues of justice and modesty were also important, but clemency was what distinguished a virtuous ruler from a tyrant:

*Now clemency becomes no one more than a king or a prince; for great power is glorious and admirable only when it is beneficent; since to be powerful only for mischief is the power of a pestilence.*¹⁴¹

*What is the difference between the tyrant and the king - for their outward symbols of authority and their powers are the same - except it be that tyrants take delight in cruelty, whereas kings are only cruel for good reasons and because they cannot help it.*¹⁴²

Later in his work, Seneca defines clemency as "the moderation of the soul when taking vengeance or the gentleness of the stronger towards the weaker in meting out punishments".¹⁴³ He describes how Augustus no longer saw execution as a desired method of punishments, to which Livia suggests to grant his opponents clemency:

[...] after an interval of silence, he [Augustus] would say to himself in a far louder, angrier tone than he had used to Cinna, "Why do you live, if it be to so many men's advantage that you should die? Is there no end to these executions? To this bloodshed? I am a figure set

Lane, M. (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Political Thought* (Cambridge, 2008), 532-558, 533.

¹³⁷ 'Seneca and Pliny', 537.

¹³⁸ The authorship of the *Apokolokyntosis* is debated, but there is consensus on the idea that Seneca is in all probability the author, see e.g.: Wilhelm Schöne, *Apokolokyntosis: Die Verkürbissung des Kaisers Claudius* (Berlin, 2014), 38-51; Gerard Binder, *Apokolokyntosis: Lateinisch-Deutsch* (Düsseldorf, 1999), 91-100; P. T. Eden, *Apocolocyntosis* (Cambridge, 1984), 6-8; Allen A. Lund, *L. Annaeus Seneca, Apocolocyntosis divi Claudii* (Heidelberg, 1994), 11.

¹³⁹ Griffin, Seneca, 9, 65; Seneca, *De Clementia* 2.5.2.

¹⁴⁰ Griffin, Seneca, 1.

¹⁴¹ Seneca, *De Clementia* 1.3.3.

¹⁴² Seneca, *De Clementia* 1.11.8.

¹⁴³ Seneca, *De Clementia*. 2.3.1.

up for nobly-born youths to sharpen their swords on. Is life worth having, if so many must perish to prevent my losing it?" At last his wife Livia interrupted him, saying: "Will you take a woman's advice? Do as the physicians do, who, when the usual remedies fail, try their opposites. Hitherto you have gained nothing by harsh measures: Salvidienus has been followed by Lepidus, Lepidus by Muraena, Muraena by Caepio, and Caepio by Egnatius, not to mention others of whom one feels ashamed of their having dared to attempt so great a deed. Now try what effect clemency will have: pardon Lucius Cinna. He has been detected, he cannot now do you any harm, and he can do your reputation much good." ¹⁴⁴

It is not surprising that Seneca chose to use Augustus as an example on using clemency, even though Julius Caesar also granted this to his opponents. Augustus was widely considered a good emperor, so it would be beneficial for Nero that he would be linked to Augustus' reign.¹⁴⁵ Seneca seems to agree with Livia's remark that execution will not diminish the problems of an emperor, but merely delays them or even makes them worse. Showing mercy towards political opponents would not only make Nero look just and virtuous, his safety depended on it:

The safety of kings on the other hand is more surely founded on kindness, because frequent punishment may crush the hatred of a few, but excites that of all. A king ought to wish to pardon while he has still grounds for being severe; if he acts otherwise, just as lopped trees sprout forth again with numberless boughs, and many kinds of crops are cut down in order that they may grow more thickly, so a cruel king increases the number of his enemies by destroying them; for the parents and children of those who are put to death, and their relatives and friends, step into the place of each victim. ¹⁴⁶

Despite the effort Seneca put into educating Nero on mercy, anger-management, and virtue, Nero's reign eventually turned grim after all.¹⁴⁷ Seneca was allowed to retire upon his second request, in 64 AD.¹⁴⁸ Upon his retirement, Seneca writes his work *De Otio*, to elaborate on the reasons for his withdrawal. About this, he says:

¹⁴⁴ Seneca, *Clem.* 1.9.6.

¹⁴⁵ This would be done by emphasizing his family ties to Augustus and by mirroring Augustus' imperial imagery, see: Michael Grant, *Nero* (London, 1970), 19, 206-207.

¹⁴⁶ Seneca, *Clem.* 1.8.

¹⁴⁷ Griffin, *The end of a dynasty*, 48.

¹⁴⁸ Griffin, *Nero: the end of a dynasty*, 83-99.

*If the state is so rotten as to be past helping, if evil has entire dominion over it, the wise man will not labour in vain or waste his strength in unprofitable efforts. Should he be deficient in influence or bodily strength, if the state refuse to submit to his guidance, if his health stand in the way, then he will not attempt a journey for which he is unfit, just as he would not put to sea in a worn-out ship, or enlist in the army if he were an invalid?*¹⁴⁹

Seneca seems to imply that Nero is past helping. This harsh criticism cannot have gone unnoticed by the emperor and might have been one of the reasons why Seneca was condemned to death in 65 AD. As said before, the crime on which Seneca was charged, was participation in the Pisonian conspiracy. Seneca was spared from execution and forced to commit suicide. Seneca did so by severing his veins.

In his letters to his friend Lucilius, Seneca expresses his feelings about death multiple times. As a Stoic, he firmly believed that death was not to be feared. Indeed, in Epistle LXI, he says: “[...] dying well means dying gladly”.¹⁵⁰ He describes the death of Cato elaborately and with respect:

*Drawing the sword, - which he had kept unstained from all bloodshed against the final day, he cried: "Fortune, you have accomplished nothing by resisting all my endeavours. I have fought, till now, for my country's freedom, and not for my own, I did not strive so doggedly to be free, but only to live among the free. Now, since the affairs of mankind are beyond hope, let Cato be withdrawn to safety." So saying, he inflicted a mortal wound upon his body. After the physicians had bound it up, Cato had less blood and less strength, but no less courage; angered now not only at Caesar but also at himself, he rallied his unarmed hands against his wound, and expelled, rather than dismissed, that noble soul which had been so defiant of all worldly power.*¹⁵¹

According to Seneca, Cato committed suicide not meant for his own freedom, but for the Roman republic. However, by committing suicide, Cato also saves himself, for the Stoic notion of death is that it is the only way to freedom if your mind cannot be protected from corruption

¹⁴⁹ Seneca, *De Otio* 1.3; Schofield, ‘Epicurean and Stoic thought’, 436.

¹⁵⁰ Seneca, *Epistles* LXI.2, trans. Vincent Hunink.

¹⁵¹ Seneca, *Epistles* XXIV.7-8.

during life.¹⁵² Socrates, too, is being venerated in Seneca's letters, because his suicide, by drinking hemlock, demonstrated his steadfastness on his political ideals.¹⁵³

When reading Tacitus' and Plutarch's accounts on Seneca's death, Seneca's suicide is framed as though he had modelled it to that of Socrates, by surrounding himself with friends and criticizing Nero's reign. It could be considered that Seneca might have done this in order to make his suicide seem more like a form of protest than it actually was. It might not have been a coincidence that Cato, too, had referred to Socrates' death before he committed suicide. Nevertheless, in all three cases, it was not a matter of them *wanting* to die for their political beliefs and activities, but *being forced* to die for them.

Seneca seemed to have accepted the principate as a fact, focusing on the only aspect of this form of government that could be influenced: the emperor's character. Bad emperors could be replaced by good ones, which was probably also the aim of the members of the Pisonian conspiracy, which failed and caused Seneca's death.¹⁵⁴ Seneca's nephew, Lucan, also found his death upon this charge. Upon reading Lucan's work *De Bello Civile* or the *Pharsalia*, several modern scholars have discussed Lucan's motives for participating in the plot. Lucan might actually have wanted to go further than to replace Nero with another autocrat; his highest ideal might have been to restore the government to a more republican form.¹⁵⁵

Marcus Annaeus Lucanus (39-65) was born in Spain into the family of Seneca. He probably received a Stoic education and came to Rome as a young adult, where he would become close to Nero.¹⁵⁶ Being related to Nero's tutor probably gave him an advantageous position at court, but since Lucan and Nero were almost of the same age (Nero was only two years older) and both enjoyed the literary arts, especially poetry, their friendship could well have been based on more. It did not last, though. Some sources mention an artistic conflict between the two men which caused Nero to prohibit Lucan from further publishing his poetry in 64 AD. In 65 AD, Lucan was forced to commit suicide on Nero's orders on charge of participation in the Pisonian plot.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵² Robert Garland, *Death without dishonour*, 35; Griffin, 'Philosophy, Cato and Roman Suicide: I', 73; Sullivan, *Literature and politics*, 117.

¹⁵³ Seneca, *Epistle XIII*.14

¹⁵⁴ Griffin, *The end of a dynasty*, 167.

¹⁵⁵ Charles Martindale, 'The Politician Lucan', in: Charles Tesoriero (ed.), *Lucan* (Oxford, 2010), 269-279, 273-274.

¹⁵⁶ Ahl, 36; Braund, xiii.

¹⁵⁷ Braund, *Civil War* xv; Thorne, 11-12;

Of Lucan's repertoire only one work survives to this day: the *De Bello Civile* or *Pharsalia*. It consists of ten books, but it is not complete. Whether its publication was cut short by Lucan's death or the last books got lost over time is a matter of speculation.¹⁵⁸ Only the first books were officially published before Nero ended Lucan's literary career.¹⁵⁹ The others had been published either after Lucan's death or in secret, for Lucan did continue to write after Nero's restriction.

In the *Pharsalia*, Lucan describes the civil war between Julius Caesar and Pompey. The scholarship on this work is quite extensive.¹⁶⁰ Several parts are important for the understanding of Lucan's attitude towards suicide, his political views and his relationship with Nero. Significant are the ways Lucan describes the main characters of the civil war: Caesar, Pompey and Cato.

Lucan portrays Caesar as a virile fighter and a decisive leader, but the way he is described is not entirely positive:

*He had not only a general's name and reputation, but never-resting energy; his only shame was conquering without war; fierce, indomitable, wherever hope and indignation called he moved to action, never shrank from defiling his sword, he followed up his own successes, pressed hard upon the deity's favour, driving back all obstacles to his high ambitions and rejoicing to create his path by destruction.*¹⁶¹

Pompey is presented as a man past his glory days, whose fighting spirit had grown soft from the absence of threat during the peace time:

*One with years declining towards old age and grown milder through long experience of civil life and is now in peace unlearned the general's part [...].*¹⁶²

Neither Caesar nor Pompey is presented by Lucan as the ideal leader or the desired victor. Nevertheless, Lucan does acknowledge Caesar's victory, describing the outcome of the civil

¹⁵⁸ Braund, 'Introduction', *Lucan: Civil War* (1992), xxxvii; Thorne, 13.

¹⁵⁹ Pierre Grimal, 'Is the Eulogy of Nero at the Beginning of the *Pharsalia* Ironic?', in: *Lucan*, 59.

¹⁶⁰ Susan H. Braund, *Lucan: Civil War*; Charles Tesoriero (ed.), *Lucan*; Frederick M. Ahl, *Lucan: An Introduction*. For an overview of the scholarship done on Lucan, see: Susanna Braund, 'Introduction', in Charles Tesoriero (ed.), *Lucan*, 1-14.

¹⁶¹ Braund, *Civil War*, 1.143-150.

¹⁶² Braund, *Civil War*, 128-131.

war is as ‘the suicide of a nation’, carried out by the *victorious* sword-hand.¹⁶³ So, even though Caesar is accepted as the winner, he is also blamed for the destruction of the state. The ideal leader, therefore, must be found in someone else. To Lucan, this could be Cato.

Cato was a significant figure for Lucan, because Cato had become a symbol for Republicanism and anti-Neronian sentiments.¹⁶⁴ Moreover, Cato had another layer of significance: he was a renowned Stoic. In Lucan’s narrative, Cato takes over the leadership of the Republican side after the death of Pompey, and thus comes to personify the Stoic saying ‘only the wise man can be king’.¹⁶⁵ For the educated elite, it was evident what Cato was meant to portray from this moment onward: a sage, and therefore the only good alternative to Caesar as ruler. Indeed, Cato is being described as fighting not for himself, but solely for the benefit of the state:

*This was the character and this the unswerving creed of austere Cato: to observe moderation, to hold the goal, to follow nature, to devote his life to his country, to believe that he was born not for himself but for all the world. [...] for Rome he is father and for Rome he is husband, keeper of justice and guardian of strict morality, his goodness was for the state; into none of Cato’s acts did self-centred pleasure creep in and take share.*¹⁶⁶

Cato’s cause is to defend *libertas* on behalf of Rome.¹⁶⁷ *Libertas* does not have the same definition as the modern term ‘liberty’. For the Stoics, it meant freedom of mind and not being forced toward unvirtuous behaviour. For the Republican elite, it meant freedom to do as one pleased, without being restricted by one man’s policies.¹⁶⁸ For Lucan, it does not seem to matter what kind of government would have the seat of power, as long as the people had freedom of mind, something Cato would not have had under Caesar’s rule. The civil war, then, is described by Lucan as a war in which Caesar directly attacked freedom:

*[...] that pair of rivals always with us – Liberty and Caesar;*¹⁶⁹

¹⁶³ Lucan, *Civil War* I.2-3.

¹⁶⁴ Thorne, 6, 10.

¹⁶⁵ Schofield, M., ‘Epicurean and Stoic political thought’, in: Rowe, C., Schofield, M, Harrison, S., and Lane, M. (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Political Thought* (Cambridge, 2008), 435-456, 447.

¹⁶⁶ Lucan, *Civil War* 2.379-391.

¹⁶⁷ Thorne, 13; Lucan, *Civil War*, II.234-325.

¹⁶⁸ Sullivan, *Literature and politics*, 115-116; Thorne, 17.

¹⁶⁹ Lucan, *Civil War* VII.696.

In the end, Cato chose freedom over Caesar by killing himself. Even though there is no account of Cato's suicide in Lucan's *Pharsalia*, there is a description of a mass suicide by the Caesarian legion under Vulteius. Surrounded by Pompey's men with no way to escaping, Vulteius encourages his men to commit mass suicide. Even though the legion is loyal to Caesar, Lucan praises their suicide by saying the following:

*Fame running through all the world spoke of no craft with a louder voice. Yet even after the example of these warriors, cowardly races will not grasp that to escape slavery by one's own hand is not an arduous act of valour, but tyranny is feared thanks to the sword and liberty is chafed by cruel weapons and they do not know that swords are given to prevent slavery. Death, I wish that you would not remove the fearful from life but that you could be bestowed by valour alone!*¹⁷⁰

Only courageous people can see that self-inflicted death is the way to freedom, and, most importantly, only the most courageous people realize that they can face death without fear: *it is not an arduous act of valour*, it takes not much trouble, nor bravery. *Death, I wish that you [...] could be bestowed by valour alone*. Lucan seems to be saying that only the courageous deserve to die. If this argument is turned around, only the cowards stay alive under tyranny.

Lucan, too, eventually took his own life in 65 AD. He did so, however, because he was forced by Nero. His self-killing initially does not seem aimed to protest against Nero's tyrannical tendencies, but Lucan might have tried to do so by writing the *Pharsalia*.¹⁷¹ The first lines seem to be praising Nero, and this part of the *Pharsalia* has been used many times to argue that Lucan did not mean to convey an anti-Neronian message. However, the *Pharsalia* was written over a number of years, and the later books were written after the falling out between Nero and Lucan. I would argue, therefore, that even if the praise towards Nero was indeed genuine, this does not necessarily rule out later anti-Neronian sentiments in this work.¹⁷² Nero's reign started out promising, so it is perfectly possible that Lucan's political ideals changed with the nature of Nero's rule.

Not only the personal content of Lucan's problems with Nero would have affected Lucan's opinions about the political situation, there is also enough ground to assume that Lucan

¹⁷⁰ Lucan, Civil War IV.573-581.

¹⁷¹ Martial mentions that the Lucan's poems sold really well, so Lucan must have been aware that his message would reach a broad audience. Martial, 14.194; Susanna Braund, 'Introduction', in: *Lucan*, 3; Eduard Fraenkel, 'Lucan as the Transmitter of Ancient Pathos', in: *Lucan*, 15-45, 17.

¹⁷² Pierre Grimal, 'Is the Eulogy of Nero Ironic?', 59-60.

had received a Stoic education, so he would want, like Seneca, to have a virtuous ruler who would adhere to Stoic ideals. When Nero turned out to be not that desired ruler, Lucan might have felt obliged by his Stoic ideas about political activity¹⁷³ to try and save the realm from yet another tyrant, Caesar having been the first one.

Like Seneca, Lucan was accused of participating in the Pisonian plot. Seneca's activity in the plot is debated, but Lucan did in fact participate. As mentioned before, the Pisonians were aiming to replace Nero with a better suited ruler, so the autocracy of the Principate would continue to exist, but this does not necessarily undermine the republican sentiments of the *Pharsalia*. Restoring the Republic could merely have been an unrealistic ideal, and Lucan probably realized that.

Tacitus tells us that Lucan recited some poetry after he had cut his veins. The lines were about a soldier, 'dying a similar kind of death'.¹⁷⁴ This sentence could refer to the Roman ideal of a soldier committing suicide before being captured upon defeat. This reference would be understood by a broad audience, because, as explained in chapter one, this ideal was rooted deeply in the Roman culture. Suicide by military leaders upon military defeat was considered a virtuous reason for suicide, so it could be that Lucan tried to mimic his suicide to a military one in order to justify his motive.

Even though Lucan's death was neither voluntary, nor calmly executed – apparently he gave away the names of his mother and other members of the conspiracy in order to gain a pardon from Nero¹⁷⁵ - he seems to have tried to mimic a Stoic death by reciting poetry, thus leaving life in a theatrical way, and resembling the suicide of a military man in order to preserve his honour.

The famous story of Cato, the Republican hero who rather died than live under Caesar's rule, increased in popularity under the reign of Nero. Even though Nero started his reign as princeps relatively well under the guidance of Seneca, his behaviour would show more and more tyrannical tendencies during the later years. Seneca tried to convince Nero of the importance of Stoic values, especially clemency, seemingly accepting the principate as a form of government. It was only after his retirement that Seneca criticized Nero, even if it was implicit. In the letters he wrote to Lucilius around the same time, he respects Cato for committing suicide, remarking that he had a perfectly Stoic motive: to save his political virtue. Seneca, however, tried to save

¹⁷³ See chapter one of this thesis for a short explanation on the Stoic ideas on political activity.

¹⁷⁴ Tacitus, *Annals* XV.70.1.

¹⁷⁵ Whether or not this is true is debated.

his own political virtue by withdrawing from Nero's court. His death was ordered, but it seems that Seneca tried to retain some dignity by modelling his suicide after Socrates and Cato.

While Seneca advocated the positive attributes of clemency, Lucan treats it with disregard. In his *Pharsalia*, he describes Caesar as the opposite of freedom, while Cato is venerated as the only 'good guy' in the conflict. Cato died not commit suicide for himself, contrary to what Seneca seems to think, but to save the state. Caesar's autocratic rule was the beginning of the end of the prosperous Roman society. Even though the first lines of the *Pharsalia* seem to be in favour of Nero, it seems as if Lucan tries to convey an anti-Neronian message with the poem. While Nero prohibited him from writing in 64 AD, Lucan continued the *Pharsalia*; this might have been his protest, rather than killing himself, like Cato, or withdrawing from court, like Seneca. Nevertheless, Lucan did not escape an early death either. He was forced to commit suicide by Nero, under circumstances different from his hero martyr Cato. However, Lucan, too, seems to have tried to preserve his honour, by referring to the Stoic ideal of a military suicide the minutes before it was his time.

What we can take away from the case studies of Seneca and Lucan, is that the story of Cato's suicide might have been used as a moral example and implicit form of protest against the despotic rule of Nero. However, the parallel with Cato the anti-tyrannical martyr was very artificial and contrived. The suicides of Seneca and Lucan were not a last protest against Nero's power abuse, but a necessity, involuntary and inevitable. The only thing they could do about it was to pretend it was not.

Conclusion

Suicide as a literary subject gained such popularity during the Julio-Claudian principates that the sources that treat it can be categorised into their own genre of 'death literature'. Up to the present, ancient suicide victims have inspired writers. A recent example is the appearance of a character called 'Seneca', in the popular fantasy trilogy 'The Hunger Games' (2008-2010), who is forced to commit suicide by the president of the fictional country of Panem. Framed as a protest-move, the suicide of Mohammed Bouazizi only recently sparked the fall of Tunisia's dictatorship in 2011. To put these suicide narratives in a historical perspective, I have looked at suicide narratives in the Augustan and Neronian principates.

At the end of the first century BC, Augustus laid the foundations of what would turn out to be the dynastical Julio-Claudian empire. At the same time, Livy wrote a massive treatise on the Roman history since its foundation. Even though he had a huge amount of subjects to cover, he paid a lot of attention to the story of Lucretia's suicide. When compared to the treatise of this same story by Ovid and Dionysius of Halicarnassus, it seems as if Livy might have dealt with the story the way he did to convey a political message to both his readers and Augustus: autocracy has not always been appreciated by the Roman people. When the perfect Roman matron Lucretia committed suicide upon her rape by the royal member Sextus Tarquinius, it ignited the riot that caused the abolishment of the Roman monarchy. By emphasizing the significant role of Brutus, Livy seems to be referring to the tyranny, and murder, of Julius Caesar.

Lucretia commits suicide because she could not go on living without honour. This motive made suicide to be considered acceptable, or even virtuous. The philosophical school of the Stoics have often been held accountable for the acceptance of suicide, at least when carried out for the right reasons. It is interesting to consider, then, that several Stoics showed significant interest in suicide, and even committed suicide themselves, during the Neronian principate. In those suicide narratives, too, is referred to the tyranny of Julius Caesar, or more specifically to the defiance of his tyranny by Cato the Younger. Cato, who was a Stoic himself, allegedly committed suicide to save his political integrity, which he would lose if he would submit to Caesar. This motive caused him to be venerated as the 'perfect Stoic'. Even though the Stoics were not opposed to autocracy per se, the ruler had to be virtuous, which Caesar had not been. When a century later Nero ruled the Roman empire as an autocrat, Seneca tried to convince him to take an example to the Stoic way of ruling, based on clemency and mildness. Apparently Nero did not heed this advice and after a falling out

between pupil and tutor, Seneca retreated from court and was eventually forced to commit suicide. Although Seneca's suicide was even less voluntary as Cato's was, it seems as though he wanted to frame it as a last expression of protest against Nero's tyranny, just as Cato's suicide was framed as a last protest against Caesar.

Another Stoic who was a victim of enforced suicide by Nero was the young poet Lucan. He was ordered to kill himself on charges of participation in the Pisonian plot against the emperor. Already before that, though, the relationship between Nero and Lucan had faltered, with Lucan being banned from publishing poetry in 64 AD. Lucan did, however, continue to write his *Pharsalia*, a poem treating the civil war between Julius Caesar and Pompey. Even though Lucan admits that Caesar came out of the conflict a victor, the real hero of the story would have been Cato, who had died to save the Republican state. Lucan's protest against Nero did not come in the form of suicide, but in the form of participation in a plot to depose him. Nonetheless, when it was his turn to commit suicide, he tried to do so honourably by imaging a dying soldier.

So, when the foundation of the Julio-Claudian empire was being laid, Livy used a suicide narrative to convey a message to the first Julio-Claudian emperor about the consequences of power abuse. By the time the last Julio-Claudian had come to rule, the principate as a governmental form had been accepted, yet the figure of Cato, a symbol for the fight against tyranny, was still popular. Seneca tried to make the best of the situation by advising Nero on the Stoic principles about ruling, while Lucan may have used the literary subject of the civil war between Caesar and Pompey as a stage for Cato to show the world that his sacrifice was still relevant. Both Stoics were ordered by Nero to commit suicide, but their deaths could not be claimed as protest moves, however they tried to present it.

Even when a suicide does in fact bring down a tyrant, the victim himself will not be able to enjoy the newly-begotten freedom, since he would be dead. So whether or not suicide is effective as a protest-move, it would ultimately be a final one.

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