

**NERO REVISED AND SENECA REVEILED: EDMUND BOLTON'S *NERO CAESAR*  
OR *MONARCHIE DEPRAVED***

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INTRODUCTION

In the preface to the second edition of *Nero Caesar or Monarchie Depraved* (1627), the historian and antiquary Edmund Bolton explains his reasoning in presenting his vindication of the Emperor Nero. Bolton addresses King James I directly, and states that it is his intention both to counter popular authors who 'haue so busied themselues to lay open the priuate liues of Princes', and to confront certain writers who had used historical examples to point to the inadequacies of their own rulers (Bolton 1627: sig. A3r).<sup>1</sup> In Bolton's view, Nero provided the perfect example to illustrate an important aspect of political theory:

Nor was there cause to trouble your sacred Maiestie with any but only *Nero*. For he is the man whom your most Princely detestation of his manners noted out vnto mee, with the proper word of his merits, *Villaine*. Yet hee notwithstanding (for the great aduantage of truth) will teach this pretious secret; *No Prince is so bad as not to make monarckie seeme the best forme of gouernment*. (1627: sig. A3v)

Even though Nero may have been considered a cruel and rapacious ruler, Bolton stresses that Nero's rule could still be used to demonstrate the power of monarchy as a constitutional system. As Alan Bradford has noted (1983: 140), Bolton was faced with the following question: 'How might one best demonstrate the thesis that no tyrant can conceivably be so odious as to discredit the institution of monarchy?' The solution, as Bradford (*ibid.*) continues, was to present an analysis of Nero — a man for whom James I had shown considerable disdain by describing him as 'a monster to the world' — and 'show that government under Nero, however bad, was preferable to any alternative political system'.<sup>2</sup>

Bolton's work, as his prefatory matter implies, was met with royal approval and, as some scholars suggest, it may have been sponsored by King James himself (Bradford 1983: 138-139).<sup>3</sup> It is for these reasons that Bolton has been considered a key proponent of royal absolutism. For example, David Norbrook (1993: 56) seeks to persuade that Bolton pursued a 'strategy' which would 'turn the republicans' arguments against them' by presenting the failings of Nero's reign as justification for absolutism. The relationship between Bolton's revisionist account of Nero and James I's royal policy remain open to debate. For example, although Graham Parry (2000: 172) suggests the manuscript of *Nero Caesar* was presented to King James sometime in 1622, following a court conversation on the topic of Nero, there seems to be little definitive evidence to suggest the precise connection between Bolton's text and James I. Furthermore, the idea that Bolton intended to counter republican political philosophy depends upon the idea that republican language had blossomed in England in the decades prior to the establishment of the English Commonwealth, but this premise continues to be debated in existing historical and political scholarship.<sup>4</sup>

What is clear, however, is that Bolton's *Nero Caesar* acted as an intervention in an ongoing debate about the political 'application' of Tacitus's works, and the value of Neostoicism in early modern statecraft. This political and philosophical context has been highlighted in existing scholarship, but few scholars have provided a detailed and sustained analysis of Bolton's argumentation.<sup>5</sup> It is certainly true that Bolton condemns Tacitus in *Nero Caesar*. Bolton targets Tacitus's worth both as an historian and as a political theorist. This is a stance Bolton had first adopted in his *Hypercritica*: a text which Ronald Mellor (2004: 169) describes as a 'monarchist critique of Tacitus'.<sup>6</sup> Bolton also pursues a line of attack

against the Neostoic movement and points to the poverty of Neostoicism as a philosophical 'doctrine'. This, like Bolton's critique of Tacitus, echoed the views of James I, (McIlwain ed. 1918: 41-42) who, in *Basilikon Doron*, condemned the contemporary vogue for Stoicism: 'Stoicke insensible stupiditie, wherewith many in our dayes, preassing to winne honour, in imitating that ancient sect, by their inconstant behaiour in their owne lives, belie their profession.'<sup>7</sup> This criticism of Neostoicism was crafted along familiar lines for, as J. H. M. Salmon (1989: 223) has noted, the Neostoics were traditionally attacked for their lack of Christian humility, and were lambasted as hypocrites for celebrating Seneca's virtues while ignoring the account of Seneca's failings related by Dio Cassius.

It is the latter aspect of Bolton's criticism of Neostoicism which will be discussed in the present paper. I will demonstrate that one of 'those popular authors' Bolton criticises in his prefatory dedication is Justus Lipsius. I will demonstrate how Bolton constructs his portrait of Seneca as a point-by-point dismantling of the favourable portrait of Seneca found in the 'Life of Seneca', a work which prefaced Lipsius's edition of Seneca's works.<sup>8</sup> Bolton's hostility towards Seneca is evident throughout his account, as he writes with the ultimate aim of transferring the responsibility for the ills and failings of Nero's reign from the emperor himself, to Seneca. This paper will conclude by noting that while Bolton aims to deconstruct the celebration of Seneca found in Lipsian *moral* philosophy, Bolton actually reinforces aspects of Lipsian *political* philosophy. Bolton's anti-Stoic tone, and his criticism of Stoic liberty, brings him into line with the vision of political organisation and political unity found in Lipsius's *Politicorum*.

#### BOLTON AND NEOSTOICISM

Lipsius published his 'Life of Seneca' as a prefatory celebration of the author whose works he published in a complete edition in 1605. Lipsian political philosophy was indebted to the works of Seneca and Tacitus, with the former inspiring Lipsius's *De constantia in publicis malis* (1569), and the latter shaping much of the political philosophy found in *Politicorum sive Civilis doctrinae libri sex* (1589). Both works were borne out of Lipsius's response to the political troubles which inflamed Europe. From the 1560s, his native Netherlands were embroiled in conflict with Spain, and this conflict provoked civil and religious uncertainty. The 'Life of Seneca' opens with an account of Seneca's birth in Corduba and traces his ancestry. It then outlines Seneca's political career under the rules of Claudius and Nero, before ending with a survey of the philosopher's extant works. The work itself is indebted to Tacitus's account of Seneca – a fact Lipsius (Lodge tr. and ed. 1614: sig. d3r) acknowledges in the section dealing with Seneca's death: 'AND let vs see the commoditie thereof, but from whence should we gather it rather then from *Tacitus*, the most faithfulest of all other Writers?' The narrative of Seneca's suicide is taken from Tacitus in full, and it is an evocative and protracted account of Seneca's constancy in death. Moreover, in preserving Tacitus's words intact, as James Ker notes (2009: 211-212), Lipsius is also dutifully continuing the task he had embarked upon as Tacitus's editor: to record Tacitus without blemish or emendation.

The tone of Bolton's account of Seneca stands in antithesis to that of Lipsius and it is clear that Bolton seeks to undermine an early modern vogue for Lipsian Neostoicism. As Salmon has noted (1989), Lipsius's works had a profound impact upon late Elizabethan and early Stuart political culture. In the late 1610s and early 1620s, when we might assume Bolton began composing his work, the philosophy of Neostoicism appeared to have been in the ascendancy. Lipsian Neostoicism celebrated, on the one hand, the virtue of constancy and, on the other, political prudence. In *De constantia* Lipsius contrasted constancy, which he described as a '*right and immouable strength of minde, neither lifted vp, nor pressed downe with externall or casuall accidentes*' with the vicissitude and irrationality of opinion (Stradling tr. 1594: sig. C1r). Lipsius explains (ibid.: sig. G1r) that the constant man feels no hurt or harm from misfortune which afflicts him, because such a man recognises the almighty power of providence, and remains detached from the 'inconstant variableness of all things'. Liberty, in Lipsian thought, was attained through the negation of emotion: the constant man was 'only subject unto God, enfranchised from the servile yoke of Fortune and affections' (ibid.: sig. C3v).

According to Freyja Sierhuis (2013: 47), a preoccupation with Lipsius's definition of liberty was the main legacy of Neostoicism in late Elizabethan and early Stuart England. Similarly, Adriana McCrea (1997) has pointed to the legacy of Lipsius in English political culture, and traces Lipsius's impact in the works

of Jonson, Bacon and Hall during the later decades of Elizabeth's reign and the first part of the seventeenth century. It is evident that Lipsius influenced a number of writers. For example, the essayist William Cornwallis was one key figure whose musings on court life are rich in stoic malaise. In his essay (Cornwallis 1600-1601: sig. L2v-L3r) on the 'fashions of life' he explains his dilemma: 'My Soule extolles Contemplation, and perswades me that way; my Body vnderstands not that language, but is all for Action.' In the anonymous play *The Tragedy of Nero* (1624 and 1633) the constancy of Seneca and Petronius is pitted against the frenzied political ambition of Nero.<sup>9</sup> Seneca's death in *The Tragedy of Nero* complements Lipsius's account, in that Seneca implores his friends not to feel sorrow at his death, since in death, he achieves freedom: 'Be not afraid my soule, goe cheerefully,/To thy owne Heauen, from whence it first let downe' (Anon. 1624: sig. G3v). It is this emphasis on stoic resoluteness and detachment which Bolton aims to counter. Bolton intends to undermine what he views to be a pernicious influence in English political thought. He targets the language of solitude, detachment and internal freedom which had become a vocabulary used by a political opposition to court culture. He aims to underline how this philosophy of withdrawal and isolation from political life represents a form of political subversion. To demonstrate this, he revises the account of Seneca provided by Lipsius to indicate how Seneca's actions were not those of a sage, but those of an ambitious upstart.

#### SENECA AND THE EDUCATION OF AN EMPEROR

Bolton's depiction of Nero seems to evoke the Platonic vision of the tyrant. Plato's tyrant is one who, through the failure of instruction and experience, has been unable to learn how to negate the power of *eros*. The tyrant does not subdue his passions but instead pursues a life dominated by the need to satisfy his basest impulses. In book nine of the *Republic* Plato outlines the early development of the character of the tyrant, and points to the importance of kin and counsel in deterring an individual from embarking upon a tyrannical path. Whilst most men are capable of achieving moderation in the pursuit of their passions, '[h]e (the young man, soon to become a tyrant) is drawn toward utter lawlessness', and while his father attempts to temper his youthful wildness, 'dread magi and king-makers' implant in the young man a 'monstrous winged drone' which incapacitates all propensity for decency and shame (Plato, *Republic*: 341-343).<sup>10</sup> The young man becomes prey to those who seek to establish a tyranny, and he falls victim to a malicious form of instruction.

There are echoes of this transformation in Bolton's description of Nero's early education, where Nero is cast as the archetypal tyrant, and Seneca and Agrippina are those 'dread magi'. There is little doubt, as Bolton explains, that Nero was a tyrant guided only by his passions, and held captive by his basic impulses:

For what made NERO himselfe miserable, but the wilde and vndistinguisht pursuit of appetites? Or what turned him out of a prince, into a tyrant, but captiuitie to passions? No man becomes miserable but by such subiection. Tyrants, (and what a kinde of creature a tyrant is, I have toucht before) are the worst of all wilde broods. Wolues, and beares, in regard of them, are meeke and tractable. (1627: 241)

The reason for Nero's tyranny is explored in chapters two and three of *Nero Caesar*, where Bolton explains that Nero's failure in government stemmed from the detrimental instruction of Nero's royal tutors. Agrippina, Burrus and, most importantly, Seneca, neglected their obligations towards the young Nero, and allowed the ruler to embark upon a path of tyranny. Bolton first chastises Agrippina for having 'auerted his [Nero's] affections from the studie of all philosophie, as a thing vnfit for a Souereign (ibid.: 4).' This, Bolton continues (ibid.), was '[an] opinion worthy of a gracelesse woman, and orginallie the most certaine cause of his ouerthrow.' Agrippina's error in preventing Nero's education in philosophy ultimately led him to be a weak and vain ruler who delighted more in 'showes, and seemings' and 'crownes of leaues, or garlands, for singing, fiddling, piping, acting on stages, and the like ignobler trials' than he did in political victory (ibid.). According to Bolton (ibid.), Nero's revelry in performance and triumphant theatrical displays were 'the error of his breeding', as Nero had been encouraged by his closest advisors to consider these shows and performances 'transcendently heauenly gifts'. Bolton rejects any notion that Nero's attraction to theatre and 'idle' pursuits was in fact a natural proclivity, and instead suggests that Agrippina cultivated an individual void of any morality or erudition.

By focussing attention upon the role played by Nero's counsel in creating Nero's character, Bolton contradicts the account of Nero's youth found in Tacitus. In book thirteen of the *Annals* Tacitus points to the defects in Nero's character, and lauds the efforts of the imperial tutors who attempted to counter Nero's natural rapacity.

The tendency, in fact, was towards murder, had not Afranius Burrus and Seneca intervened. Both guardians of the imperial youth, and — a rare occurrence where power is held in partnership — both in agreement, they exercised equal influence by contrasted methods; and Burrus, with his soldierly interests and austerity, and Seneca, with his lessons in eloquence and his self-respecting courtliness, aided each other to ensure that the sovereign's years of temptation should, if he were scornful of virtue, be restrained within the bounds of permissible indulgence.<sup>11</sup> (Tacitus, *Annals*: 5)

In Tacitus's account it is Nero's natural temperament which needs to be bridled by the imperial guardians. The influence of these guardians was benevolent and would have been beneficial were it not for the unruliness of Nero's character.

Bolton, however, argues that responsibility for Nero's misrule rests with the imperial tutors, and he underscores this by foregrounding the accounts of Suetonius and Dio Cassius over that of Tacitus. Bolton bases his account of Nero's education on Suetonius's *Nero* 52:

As a boy Nero read most of the usual school subjects except philosophy which, Agrippina warned him, was no proper study for a future ruler. His tutor Seneca hid the works of the early rhetoricians from him, intending to be admired himself as long as possible. (Suetonius, *Twelve Caesars*: 239)<sup>12</sup>

After condemning Agrippina (see above) Bolton turns his attention to Seneca and declares that Seneca, as royal tutor, was not 'without part in the blame' in creating such an unfit ruler:

[Seneca] kept him [Nero] from solid eloquence proper to the ancient orators, to hold him the longer in admiration of himselfe, Who taught him how to answer readily, who much more profitably might haue taught him how to thinck deeply. (1627: 5)

In borrowing Suetonius's account in this way, Bolton charges Seneca with a lack of humility. Not only does Bolton imply that Senecan teaching is without the 'solid' foundation of ancient orators, but he also suggests that Seneca thought only of self-promotion and deterred Nero from learning 'solid eloquence'.

In Bolton's overall attitude towards Seneca's role in Nero's early education there is also an echo of Dio Cassius's account of the tutelage of Nero. In book sixty-one, Dio passes judgement upon the role played by Seneca and Burrus:

His two advisers, then, after coming to a common understanding, made many changes in existing regulations, abolished some altogether, and enacted many new laws, meanwhile allowing Nero to indulge himself, in the expectation that when he had sated his desires without any great injury to the public interests at large, as though they did not realize that a young and self-willed spirit, then reared in unrebuked licence and absolute authority, so far from becoming sated by the indulgence of its passions, is ruined more and more by these very agencies. (Dio, *Roman History*, 41)<sup>13</sup>

Bolton's *Nero Caesar* presents a similar picture of Nero's early reign in that Bolton demonstrates how the reins of government were wrested from the hands of the young Emperor, and held instead by Burrus and Seneca. In this description Bolton directly challenges the favourable presentation of Seneca articulated by Lipsius. Throughout his account of Seneca's life Lipsius warns the reader to 'alwaies ... be warie in *Dions* obiections' (1614: sig. d1r) and he balances Dio's harsher account of Seneca's life, with that of other writers to present a measured view of the philosopher. Bolton counters this tactic entirely. In the tenth chapter of his 'Life of Seneca' (1614: sig. d7r) Lipsius acknowledges the common charge

against Seneca: 'his calumners object against him to Nero; For they objected against him that hee got the praise of eloquence to himsele only, and wrote verses very often, after that he knew that Nero was in loue with them.' Lipsius, however, stresses that Seneca rejected all riches and self-glorification. Lipsius (1614: sig. d2r) claims of Seneca that '[t]he Court corrupted him [Seneca] not, neyther inclined he vnto flatterie, a vice almost familiar, and allied to such places.' As seen above, Bolton disagrees, and instead follows Dio's narrative in which Seneca's pride and ambition caused him to manipulate his role as tutor.

#### SENECA AND NERO'S SUCCESSION

In Plato's description of the tyrant, the 'dread-magi' use the young man/ruler for their own gain since their ultimate aim, as Richard D. Parry (2007: 395) has noted, is to 'keep the young man for themselves and their political plans for tyranny'. Bolton perhaps has this image of the machinating counsellor in mind when describing Seneca who, in Bolton's narrative, seems to fill the role of the Platonic 'dread-magi'. Bolton seeks to persuade his readers that Seneca ultimately sought to manipulate Nero and take charge of the imperial regime himself, using Nero merely as a puppet ruler.

Bolton highlights Seneca's ulterior motives by expounding how the royal tutor sought to undermine Nero's public image. Bolton draws attention to two orations delivered by Nero: both of which reflected upon the character and rule of Nero's predecessor, Claudius. The first, Bolton argues (1627: 8), 'pretended by all sorts of praises to make him [Claudius] seem worthy the title of a god... yet this had some such passages in it, as publickly moued the hearers to laugh'. The second (*ibid.*) 'gaue them [the hearers] an idea of what should bee otherwise vnder him, and better then before, [and] did abatingly insinuate the wants of his predecessour.'<sup>14</sup> These orations, Bolton implies (*ibid.*), ultimately destabilised Nero's reputation and his authority — '[t]hese beginnings....do seeme to haue conferred somewhat towards the weakening of pious respects in NERO' — for Nero, through Seneca's orations, appeared to revel in denigrating the memory of Claudius. Bolton explains:

For seeing imperiall maiestie doth subsist by the veneration which is owing therevnto, for the reason of fatherly, and lordly power, they doe make examples to show their owne harmes who beeing hereditarie, or beneficiarie princes minister the least suspition of irreuerent affections towards their proper parents, or founders. The most bottomly stone which can be laid for all future felicitie is digged out of none other quarrie then pietie, and whatsoeuer superedifide is not of like nature, will fall to ground, and in the fall thereof will carry it selfe, and with it selfe all the rest, either into obliuion, or infamie. To constitute CLAVDIVS diuine, and to deride him, was absurd in it selfe, as being against both their religion, and the clearnesse of their reason. And let the insinuations of his disgrace bee neuer so iust, yet they could not iustly seeme to spring from any other fountaine of affections then that which traiterously tooke away his life. (1627: 9-10)

Bolton condemns Seneca and Nero for their impiety in their attitude towards Claudius's death, and for their disingenuous celebration of Claudius's virtues. Bolton (*ibid.*: 8) appears to take great pleasure in underlining how even Lipsius himself, the eminent Tacitean and Neostoic scholar, could not condone 'that euill spirit in SENECA', a spirit which was revealed, Bolton argues, through the royal tutor's involvement in mocking Nero's predecessor.

Furthermore, Bolton claims that, in these orations, Seneca also raised the hopes and aspirations of the Roman Senate by establishing a pattern of the perfect commonwealth. This image of rule would be held up as an exemplar against which Nero's rule would be measured. Seneca (*ibid.*: 10-11) 'not without some suspicion of vanitie on his part' penned an oration detailing 'the picture of the NERONIAN commonweale as there it was described... cut in a columnne of siluer, for euerlasting remembrance'. Bolton, of course, refers to the account given by Dio Cassius, who describes how the Senate voted to have the speech inscribed in silver and read at the entry into office of new consuls.<sup>15</sup> However, the role of the Senate in this decision is irrelevant for Bolton, since he considers that the blame lies with Seneca since it was Seneca who had created a perfect model of government which would rest with Nero for perpetuity.<sup>16</sup> Bolton's particular criticism of Seneca's actions, here, is that in penning such a hopeful oration — in which Nero promised to suspend venality of offices and end imperial influence over judicial

cases, and in which he declared that the senate would retain its prerogatives — Seneca established a lasting benchmark for ‘good’ rule which only served to magnify Nero’s shortcomings.<sup>17</sup> Seneca’s golden vision for the new reign was ‘spoiled’ by Nero’s ‘incredible excesses’:

... yet the oration remained still, an evidence of his engagement, a touchstone of his actions, and by the disparity of premises, and sequels, did draw the greater foulness upon his deformities. (1627: 11)

Although Seneca remains Bolton’s main target, he extends his criticism to those who perpetuate Seneca’s irreverent attitude towards Nero’s rule. For example, Bolton (*ibid.*: 11) also condemns Traiano Boccalini, for making ‘unfriendly use’ of the same speech in his twenty-ninth ‘advertisement’ in which Tacitus, like Nero, offers a promising speech on having been inaugurated Prince of Lesbos.<sup>18</sup> For Bolton, Seneca is held responsible for condemning Nero’s character in the emperor’s lifetime, and for indirectly tarnishing the emperor’s historical reputation.

#### THE HYPOCRITE SENECA

Bolton’s depiction of Seneca in *Nero Caesar* is crafted to suggest that Seneca’s main aim as imperial tutor was to sabotage Nero’s reign in order to profit from the spoils. In this depiction, Bolton follows criticism of Seneca conveyed by Dio, and it is clear throughout the work, that Bolton considers Dio a more reliable judge of character than Tacitus.<sup>19</sup> In his discussion of the Pisonian conspiracy, Bolton describes Seneca with a palpable revulsion. Bolton suggests (1627: 233) that we must consider Seneca’s ‘[a]ctions of life’ rather than his writings, and Bolton relates Dio’s account both of Seneca’s avarice and of his betrayal of Nero.

DIO chargeth him [Seneca] with many pointcs in practise of things contradictorie to his doctrines, as with *auarice*, with *incontinencie*, with *flatterie*. That in onely the first foure yeares vnder NERO, hee had gathered an estate of money of fifteen hundred thousand pounds sterling... As for *incontinencie*, for which he was both accused vnder CLAVDIVS, by PVBLIVS SVILIVS, and banished also, the same SENECA was most iustly sentenced for defiling the house of the CAESARS, meaning the person of the ladie IULIA, the daughter of GERMANICVS, and SVILIVS (not without SENECA’S enuie) was therefore sent vnder NERO into exile, in extreame old age, as a calumniator. As for *flatterie*, it is plaine that DIO doth not wrong him, for hee courted AGRIPPINA’S fauour, and the fauour of freed-men... . (1627: 234-235)

This account is adapted entirely from book sixty-one of Dio’s *Roman History* and Bolton similarly echoes Dio’s tone in reporting the accusations against Seneca. Dio (*Dio, Roman History*: 57) draws attention to Seneca’s hypocrisy throughout his account of the charges against Seneca, and he points to the ways in which Seneca’s ‘conduct was seen to be diametrically opposed to the teachings of his philosophy.’ Seneca may have condemned tyranny, power, flattery and wealth in his words, but in his deeds, Dio contends (*Dio, Roman History*: 55-59), Seneca betrayed the precepts of his teaching.

Bolton contradicts the account of Seneca as a sage and undermines the hagiographic portrait of Seneca established by the Neostoics. Lipsius defended Seneca’s wealth in his ‘Life of Seneca’ by stressing how Seneca’s character was not acquisitive: Seneca was the passive recipient of riches.

... hee grew again into reputation, being both at that time, and before his aduancement in Court plentifully enstated, for his father had left him rich... This before he came to Court; but when he liued there he got mightie riches, or rather admitted them which thrust themselues vpon him before he sought them. (1614: sig. C7v).

Furthermore, Lipsius (1614: sig.d1r) expresses doubt about the truth of Dio’s account of the connection between Seneca’s decision to recall his loans to the Britons, and the subsequent revolt led by Boudicca. Dio’s accusation against Seneca is difficult for Lipsius (*ibid.*: sig. d1r-d1v) to accept ‘for euery wayes he [Dio] was a mortall and professed enemy of our *Seneca*’ and Lipsius urges the reader to judge Seneca by his works not his actions. In response to Lipsius’s argument here, Bolton (1627: 235) accuses Lipsius

of having distorted 'that wholenesse of truth which the lawes of historie doe exact, no lesse against the best wits, then against the greatest kings.' For Bolton (ibid.), there is little doubt about Dio's reliability as a narrator. Bolton accepts '[t]hat noble DIO (for hee onely reports what he found, and is not found to haue fained any thing)', and follows his account of Seneca's greed and usury without reservation, refuting wholeheartedly the doubts expressed by Lipsius. In Bolton's view Seneca ought to be judged by his deeds not, as Lipsius argues, by his words:

Actions of life (to whose description an historians penne is iniunctiue tied) are of all other in the world, the most apparently legible, and transparently intelligible booke, in which to behold any person, according to the truth of his qualities, distinctly, and dispersonated. And although it may concerne mankinde, that the good which comes by the writings of any great author, should not be empaired by the contradictions of his deedes, yet there belongs no such priuiledge to words, that for their sakes the report of facts should be falsified, or (which amounts to a forgerie) that a part of the truth should be withdrawn, or smothered. (1627: 233-234)

Bolton questions Lipsius's credentials as an historian. Bolton argues that 'Truth' is axiomatic to historical scholarship and that only deeds and actions can be attested to as fact. Seneca must be judged on the basis of his behaviour rather than his ideals, and for Lipsius to suggest otherwise implies that Lipsius is guilty both of impartiality, and of distorting historical reality. According to Bolton's reasoning, by suggesting that Seneca's writing rather than behaviour ought to be foregrounded, Lipsius creates portrait of the stoic philosopher which is merely fiction rather than historical fact.

#### SENECA AND THE EARLY CHRISTIANS

Bolton continues his assault on Neostoicism by undermining the connections his contemporary Neostoics had forged between stoic philosophy and Christianity. Again, it appears his principal target here is Lipsius for, as Kenneth Schellhase (1976: 137-138) has stated, Lipsian stoicism represented a blend of stoic tenets with Christian doctrine. In his 'Life of Seneca', Lipsius underlines the similarities between Senecan philosophy and Christian teaching. Lipsius (1614: sig. d2v-d3r) suggests that, in Seneca's works and in his manner of life, we witness how Seneca submitted himself to God, and Lipsius declares that, in Seneca's death, we learn 'how he addicted himselfe to God'.<sup>20</sup> Lipsius quotes from Seneca's ninety-sixth epistle to support his suggestion that Seneca articulated a faith similar to Christian doctrine.

I will set downe one thing that I gathered from him: If thou beleueest me any waies, when I discover my most inward affections to thee, I am thus formed in all occurents, which seeme either difficult or dangerous. I obey not God, but I assent vnto him; I follow him from my heart, and not of necessitie.<sup>21</sup> (1614: sig. d2v)

Lipsius continues to present the evidence for Seneca's 'Christian' piety:

Yea, some of that vnstained pietie that *Tertullian* and the Auncients call him Ours. I haue in my Fragments set downe some of his counsailes, let them make vse of them. Furthermore, *Otho Frigenis* affirmed, that *Lucius Seneca* was not onely worthie to be reputed a Philosopher, but also a Christian. (ibid.)

Bolton refutes this directly in a tirade against those who imply Seneca was an adherent of Christian teaching. Bolton (1627: 235) reflects upon the subtlety of Tertullian's phraseology, and offers a critique of the view espoused by Lipsius: 'Some haue reputed him a *Christian*, but TERTVLLIAN hath all in a word, HEE IS OFTEN OVR'S.' He adds (ibid.) the weight of St Augustine's judgement in the matter who, according to Bolton, merely stated Seneca was 'a friend' to Christianity. Bolton (ibid.) argues that those, like Lipsius, who hold Seneca up as a martyr who begged for retirement due to persecution, 'goe too farre' in attributing a Christian piety to the imperial tutor. Bolton pursues Lipsius further, and undermines the celebratory tone Lipsius uses when describing Seneca's death:

His (Seneca's) extant writings make TERTVLLIANS censure of him true, and his last words (repeated by TACITVS) ending in a friuolous ceremonie to IVPITER, conclude on behalf of paganisme. (ibid)

Moreover, Bolton (1627: 235-236) concludes, the manner of Seneca's death and his involvement in the conspiracy against Nero do not attest to Seneca's Christian belief. 'And if other arguments were wanting', Bolton continues, 'one alone might serue in stead'; Seneca 'had not the right spirit', for he subverted the will of God in contravening 'the doctrine of *selfe-murther*' and in conspiring to depose 'his soueraigne Lord.' It is the latter act of deposing a ruler which Bolton considers most heinous. As Edward Paleit (2013: 155) underlines, in Bolton's view tyrannicide is an irreligious act, and, thus, the conspirators (Paleit is particularly concerned with the presentation of Lucan) are charged with committing an act of political and religious destruction.<sup>22</sup> Bolton adopts a conventional view of the inviolability of the tyrant that we encounter in, for example, William Tyndale's *The Obedience of the Christen Man* where resistance is expressly condemned based on the Pauline injunction in Romans 13.1.<sup>23</sup> Bolton (1627: 236) condemns Seneca's participation in the rebellion and remarks that Seneca had 'profited little in his supposed familiaritie with *Saint PAVL* who in these very times of NERO, and to these very ROMANS taught quite the contrary...'. For Bolton it is impossible for a pious and godly Christian to even consider, let alone conspire to, the overthrow of a ruler, and he uses this argument to denounce any arguments favouring Seneca as a proto-Christian martyr.

#### BOLTON'S ORDERED POLITICS

In *Nero Caesar* Bolton provides a systematic rebuttal of Lipsius's favourable portrait of Seneca. In Bolton's view, Nero fell victim to the machinations of a manipulative and ambitious counsellor. To some extent, Bolton infantilises Nero by presenting him as a misguided and over-indulged child who is merely used and manipulated by overbearing and malicious tutors like Seneca. However, in spite of Bolton's criticism of Lipsius and of the Flemish scholar's celebration of stoic virtue, Bolton's vision of statecraft is remarkably similar to that of Lipsius.

Gerhard Oestreich (1982) celebrated the Lipsian legacy in early modern statecraft and argued that it was Lipsius's vision of politics in *Politicorum* and *De constantia* which inspired the rationalisation of the state and the growth of authoritative and centralised government. Lipsian Neostoicism, according to Oestreich (1982: 7), 'demanded self-discipline and the extension of the duties of the ruler' in order to safeguard the state against ill fortune. The same idea is conveyed in Bolton's *Nero Caesar* where the stability of the state is presented as being threatened by subversive individuals, like Seneca, who Bolton seeks to identify as an opponent to imperial culture. In his political philosophy Lipsius had hinted towards the possibility that stoic pride had the potential to transform men into rebels, and he used this as the basis to forge a political philosophy stressing the need for an authoritarian ruler to unify individuals (Brooke 2012: 72-73).<sup>24</sup> In late Elizabethan and early Stuart England, however, it was Lipsius's earlier philosophy of detachment and inner liberty that seems to have gained currency amongst opponents to the culture of the royal court, and this philosophy served to directly undermine Lipsius's vision of political organisation conveyed in the *Politicorum*.

Bolton counters the cynical version of Neostoicism which, scholars (Salmon 1989: 224) have argued, presented rebellious detachment as the best stance for those opposed to the idea of participation in a corrupted 'state' or court.<sup>25</sup> In attacking this brand of Neostoicism or, more specifically, this interpretation of Lipsius that had flourished in the royal court and its surroundings, Bolton, much as Hobbes would later do, creates a philosophical mix of Tacitus and Seneca, paving 'the way... for rational statecraft and the prudential participation of the citizen as the servant of the absolutist state' (Salmon 1989: 224).<sup>26</sup> In Bolton's *Nero Caesar* we encounter an attempt to dismantle Lipsius's moral philosophy of constancy, and through this action, Bolton reinforces Lipsius's political philosophy of prudence. For example, Bolton shares Lipsius's belief in the unifying power of monarchy, and the role of the sovereign in harmonising the passions of individuals. Bolton (1627: 287) celebrates monarchy as 'the pole of the world, where all the meridians meet'. The sacrosanct nature of monarchy lies in its cohesive power:

T[h]at sacred monarckie could preserue the people of ROME from finall ruine, not-withstanding all the prophanations, blasphemies, & scandals of tyranous excesses, wherewith NERO defiled

& defamed it, is the wonder which no other forme of gouernement could performe, and is the principall both of his time, and of pryncedome it selfe. A wonder of imperiall maiestie within the wonder of most extreame vnworthynesse. (1627: 69)

Bolton ultimately concurs with Lipsius in underscoring the benefits of strong monarchical rule.

The parallel between Bolton's politics and Lipsius's political philosophy comes into closer focus in their treatment of monarchy as a unifying force. Bolton draws upon the concept of the state as a 'body' to explain that the benefit of monarchy is its ability to synchronise the will of the nation as a whole. His argument here mirrors Lipsius's, and it is noteworthy that both Bolton and Lipsius take inspiration from the same passage of *De Clementia* to underscore the stability afforded by monarchical rule. Bolton, surely with the intention of highlighting the irony and disingenuity of the philosopher's comments, draws upon Seneca's evaluation of the role of emperor:

But the ioynts, and compactures of the empires fabricke vnder an head, were so supple, and solid, that what SENECA worthely praised in generall, as the prerogatiue of monarckie, is exemplified true in this. ... But whereas the sentence points vpon CLAVDIVS, who was that olde, and feeble man, it holds good not only to olde, and feeble, but to all sorts of princes persons, whether olde, or young, tame or violent, ciuil or sauage. (1627: 69-70)

Similarly, in the second book of the *Politicorum*, government is characterised as being primarily concerned with "order" and "obeying", and Lipsius interprets *De Clementia* drawing the same conclusions Bolton would later make (1595: sig. Ciiijv).

Surely, *this is the chaine, by which the common wealth is linked together, this is the vitall spirit, which so many millions of men do breath, and were this soule of commanding taken away the common wealth of it selfe should be nothing but a burthen, and open prey.* (Ibid.: sig. Ciiijv - sig. Dr)

Both Lipsius and Bolton reference the passage from *De Clementia* in order to confirm the benefits of prudent and stable monarchy.<sup>27</sup> Whereas Lipsius speaks in more general terms about the nation "where this settled vnderprop is wanting" (1595: sig. Dr), Bolton uses Nero's reign as the perfect historical illustration of the damage caused by subversion and deposition of a monarch.<sup>28</sup> The sentiment expressed in *Nero Caesar* regarding the unity provided for the body politic by the monarch, echoes the overriding tone of Lipsius's *Politicorum*, in which the monarch acts as both the life-source and guide for the entire polity.

We that are commanded, are linked together as it were with a straight chaine, with him that commandeth. And as the mind in mans bodie, cannot either be whole, or diseased, but the functions thereof in like maner, are either vigorous, or do languish: euen so is the Prince, in this societie (1595: "The Author his Epistle.")

Bolton, like Lipsius in the above extract, stresses the importance of a centralising and unifying authority. The whole narrative of the *Nero Caesar*, much like Lipsius's *Politicorum*, rests on the dichotomy between order and chaos: the former guaranteed by the presence of a clement and just monarch, the latter inevitable in the absence of such a ruler. In his treatment of Seneca's role, as seen earlier, Bolton draws attention to the ways in which undermining the foundations of monarchy causes the state to collapse from within, carrying "it selfe and with it selfe all the rest, either into obliuion, or infamie" (1627: 9-10). Bolton goes on to demonstrate, in his narratives of Boudicca's rebellion and the Pisonian conspiracy, that the removal of monarchy causes a breakdown of order. He concludes with the same theme, affirming monarchy to be "the pole of the world", whose removal causes "vniuersall perturbations" to reverberate throughout a commonwealth (ibid.: 287). This obsession with the confusion and instability caused by the removal, or indeed the absence, of a monarch, pervades the *Politicorum*, a work which exudes Lipsius's anxiety about the perpetual threat of religious war.

More specifically, Bolton expresses a similar disdain compared with that of Lipsius, towards those, particularly the multitude, who seek political change in the name of liberty. In his analysis of Boudicca's revolt, Bolton (1627: 190) condemns those rebels who are misguided by 'loftie propositions' where all 'reason is forein'. Bolton (ibid.: 287), like Lipsius before him, borrows the words of Cossutianus Capito, the prosecutor of the stoic Thrasea Paetus (who famously walked out of the senate in disgust at Nero's celebration of Agrippina, Nero having himself been her murderer) and outlines how misguided the Gauls and Galba were in overthrowing Nero: '*to ouerthrow souereignty, liberty was cryed vp, but if souereignty was thereby ouerthrowne, then would liberty it selfe be set vpon*'.<sup>29</sup> Bolton rejects the conception of liberty which inspired the Gallic rebellion against Nero and the actions of the Britons. In doing this, and in adapting Cossutianus Capito's words, as Lipsius had done before him, Bolton seems to underscore an important element of Lipsius's treatment of stoic liberty and the concept of rebellion. As Brooke has argued (2012: 72-73), Lipsius appropriates Capito's words to discuss those who rebel against sovereign power, but as Brooke outlines, it should not go without mention that in Tacitus's text Capito was 'not so much reflecting in general on the activities of those who would start civil wars as he was specifically criticising Stoic politicians' (ibid.: 73). Bolton, arguably, much as Hobbes would go on to do (ibid.: 72-73), makes explicit the connection between stoic withdrawal and rebellion. Unlike Lipsius, Bolton directly stresses the similarity between the actions of the rebels, and those of Seneca. For Bolton, Seneca's philosophy of inner tranquillity and Seneca's attempts to undermine Nero's power ought to be considered as equally detrimental to order and cohesion as the actions of the Gauls or Britons. Bolton deconstructs the philosophy of detachment and sagehood found in Lipsius's *De constantia* and reinforces the politics of prudence and unity found in the *Politicorum*. Bolton reinforces Lipsius's political philosophy of obedience and prudence, but takes Lipsius's politics further by reconciling the act of stoic withdrawal and the act of rebellion, as two acts with similarly politically damaging repercussions. He rewrites Lipsius's version of Seneca and Nero's relationship to salvage Nero's reputation from defamation and ultimately cast Seneca, in his role as royal tutor, as the figure who threatened the freedom, independence and glory of imperial Rome.

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<sup>1</sup> For convenience and consistency all subsequent references are taken from the second edition (1627) unless stated otherwise.

<sup>2</sup> King James I described Nero as 'a monster to the world' in King James I, *Trew Law of Free Monarchies*. In McIlwain (ed.) 1918: 60-61.

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of Bolton's relationship with the royal court and the manuscript evidence documenting the connection between Bolton's *Nero Caesar* and James I, see Goodburn, (2015): chapter four.

<sup>4</sup> The arguments in favour of the existence of republican ideas in Elizabethan and early Stuart England are explored in, for example, Peltonen (1995) and Hadfield (2005). For a good evaluation of this trend in scholarship see Worden (2005) in Skinner and Van Gelderen (eds.) (2005).

<sup>5</sup> See for example Bradford (1983) and Salmon (1989).

<sup>6</sup> See also Bolton (1815) in Haslewood (ed.) (1815).

<sup>7</sup> See also the discussion in, for example, Mellor (2004:153-193) and Salmon (1989:199-225).

<sup>8</sup> Justus Lipsius's edition of Seneca's extant works was first published in 1605: Justus Lipsius, *L. Annaei Senecae Philosophi Opera, quae exstant Omnia, a Iusto Lipsio emendate, et scholijs illustrate*, Antwerp, 1605 prefixed by Lipsius's 'Life of Seneca'. Lipsius's edition was translated into English by Thomas Lodge. Citations are taken from Lodge's translation unless stated otherwise.

- <sup>9</sup> Subsequent quotations are taken from the 1624 edition.
- <sup>10</sup> All translations taken from Shorey (1935).
- <sup>11</sup> See Jackson (tr.) (1994), Tacitus, *Annals*, 5. All translations are taken from this edition.
- <sup>12</sup> All translations taken from Graves (1958).
- <sup>13</sup> All translations taken from Cary (1925).
- <sup>14</sup> The passage here refers to Tacitus's account. See Jackson (tr.) (1994), Tacitus, *Annals*, 5-9.
- <sup>15</sup> See the account given in Dio Cassius: Cary (tr.) (1925), Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, 37.
- <sup>16</sup> The response of the senate to the succession oration are recorded by Dio: see Cary (tr.) (1925), Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, 37-39.
- <sup>17</sup> The details of this speech are related in book thirteen of the *Annals* see Jackson (tr.) (1994), Tacitus, *Annals*, 7-9.
- <sup>18</sup> The passage referred to by Bolton is the twenty-ninth advertisement; see Carey (tr.) (1656: 47-48).
- <sup>19</sup> See for example Bolton (1627: 233).
- <sup>20</sup> For quotation see sig. d3r.
- <sup>21</sup> The quotation Lipsius cites from the *Epistles* reads as follows in the same volume translated by Lodge (ed. and tr.) (1614: sig. Mm3v.): 'If thou thinke me to be a true man, when I discover freely vnto thee what I thinke, know that in all accidents which seeme aduerse and hard, I am so formed. I obey not God forcibly but freely, I follow him with a free heart, and not enforced.'
- <sup>22</sup> Paleit cites Bolton (1627: 236) in particular.
- <sup>23</sup> See the text in Tyndale (1528: f.xxix-f.xlvij); Bradford (1983) discusses the use of Nero in the obedience/resistance debate.
- <sup>24</sup> See the discussion in Brooke (2012: chapter 3 'From Lipsius to Hobbes', specifically 72-73).
- <sup>25</sup> See for example: Salmon (1989:224); Burchell (1999: 520). Both authors explain that English engagement with Lipsian Neostoicism and Tacitism reflected a preference for *otium* and a weariness with engagement in a polluted state.
- <sup>26</sup> For two discussions of Hobbes's indebtedness to Lipsian philosophy see Burchell (1999: 506-524) and Brooke (2012: chapter 3).
- <sup>27</sup> The passage from *De Clementia* reads as follows (Lodge tr. and ed. 1614, sig. Ccc7v): "T[h]ey therefore loue their owne safetie, when as for one man they leade ten legions to the battell, when they runne resolutely to the charge, and present their breasts to bee wounded, to the end their Emperours coulours should not be taken. For he it is that is the bond, whereby the Common-wealth is fastened together; he is that vitall spirit by which so many thousands liue: of her selfe shee should be nothing but a burden and pray, if so be that soule of the Empire were taken from her."
- <sup>28</sup> Lipsius quotes Sophocles, *Antigone* here: "*There is no greater mischief in the world then want of gouernement, it is the destruction of Cities, it ouerthroweth houses, and leaueth them wast, it causeth the souldier to turne his backe in battell: but obedience preserueth the substance and life of such as follow her.*" For the passage see Sophocles, *Antigone* in *Sophocles: The Theban Plays* trans. E. F. Watling (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), 144.
- <sup>29</sup> For Lipsius's similar stance see: Jones (tr.) (1594: sig. Ccijr). Also see discussion in Brooke (2012: 72-73). The passage by Lipsius reads as follows: 'Immediatly [sic] after, they proceede with more boldnesse, by the meanes of other ministers of sedition who are in a readinesse: and do openly couer themselues with this word libertie, and other glorious names. But how falsely this is? For to the intent they may ouerthrow the estate, they prefer libertie, which if they could get the upper hand, they would set upon.' For the account in Tacitus see; Jackson (tr.) (1994), Tacitus, *Annals*, 371.