

## The Magic of Representation in Nero's Tradition

### 1. Tacitus, *Annals* 14.6

Corpus non igni abolitum, ut Romanus mos, sed regum externorum consuetudine differtum odoribus conditur tumuloque Iuliorum infertur. Ductae tamen publicae exsequiae, laudavitque ipse apud rostra formam eius et quod divinae infantis parens fuisset aliaque fortunae munera pro virtutibus.

Her body was not cremated, according to the Roman custom, but in the convention of foreign kings, was preserved stuffed with perfumes/spices, and interred in the mausoleum of the Julians. Nevertheless, a funeral procession was carried out, and Nero himself, at the rostra, praised her beauty and the fact that she had been the mother of a deified infant daughter, and other gifts of fortune, instead of her virtues.

### 2. Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 62b.9.4-6 (from Xiphilinus)

καὶ τὸ προσωπεῖον ὑποδύνων ἀπέβαλλε τὸ τῆς ἡγεμονίας ἀξίωμα, ἐδεῖτο ὡς δραπέτης, ἐποδηγεῖτο ὡς τυφλός, ἐκύει ἔτικτεν ἐμαίνετο ἠλᾶτο, τὸν τε Οἰδίποδα καὶ τὸν Θυέστην τὸν τε Ἡρακλέα καὶ τὸν Ἀλκμέωνα τὸν τε Ὀρέστην ὡς πλήθει ὑποκρινόμενος. καὶ τὰ γε προσωπεῖα τοτὲ μὲν αὐτοῖς ἐκείνοις τοτὲ δὲ καὶ ἑαυτῷ εἰκασμένα ἔφερε· τὰ γὰρ τῶν γυναικῶν πάντα πρὸς τὴν Σαβῖναν ἐσκεύαστο, ὅπως κάκείνη καὶ τεθνηκυῖα πομπεύη.

And putting on the mask, he threw off his position of authority, so that he might be bound as a slave, be led as a blind man, be pregnant, give birth, rave, and wander, playing, for the most part, the roles of Oedipus, Thyestes, Heracles, Alcmeon and Orestes. And the masks he wore sometimes resembled those characters themselves, and sometimes his own aspect. But all the masks of female characters had been made like Sabina, so that she, although dead, could take part in the festivities.

### 3. Suetonius, *Vespasian* 19.2

Sed et in funere Favor archimimus personam eius ferens imitansque, ut est mos, facta ac dicta vivi.

At his funeral, Favor, a chief mimic actor, wore Vespasian's mask, and, according to the custom, imitated the words and deeds of the living emperor.

4. Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 62.28.2-3 (from Xiphilinus)

καὶ οὕτω γε αὐτὴν ὁ Νέρων ἐπόθησεν ὥστε μετὰ τὸν θάνατον αὐτῆς τὰ μὲν πρῶτα γυναῖκά τινα προσφερῆ οἱ μαθὼν οὐσαν μετεπέμψατο καὶ ἔσχεν, ἔπειτα καὶ παῖδα ἀπελεύθερον, ὃν Σπόρον ὠνόμαζεν, ἐκτεμών, ἐπειδὴ καὶ αὐτὸς τῇ Σαβίνῃ προσεώκει, τὰ τε ἄλλα ὡς γυναικὶ αὐτῷ ἐχρῆτο καὶ προϊόντος τοῦ χρόνου καὶ ἔγημεν αὐτόν, καίπερ Πυθαγόρα τινὶ ἐξελευθέρῳ γεγαμημένος, καὶ προῖκα αὐτῷ κατὰ συγγραφὴν ἔνειμε, καὶ τοὺς γάμους σφῶν δημοσίᾳ οἱ τε ἄλλοι καὶ αὐτοὶ οἱ Ῥωμαῖοι ἐώρτασαν.

Nero longed for her so much that after her death, initially, when he learned of a woman who was similar to her, he summoned her and kept her—but then, later, he castrated a freed boy whom he called Sporus, since he too resembled Sabina, and in all others ways treated him as a wife, and as time went on, he married him, (although he had already given himself as a wife to the freedman Pythagoras,) and gave him a dowry according to agreement, and the Romans as well as others publicly celebrated their wedding.

5. Euripides, *Alcestis* 348-354

σοφῆ δὲ χειρὶ τεκτόνων δέμας τὸ σὸν  
εἰκασθὲν ἐν λέκτροισιν ἐκταθήσεται,  
ᾧ προσπεσοῦμαι καὶ περιπτύσσων χέρας  
ὄνομα καλῶν σὸν τὴν φίλην ἐν ἀγκάλαις  
δόξω γυναῖκα καίπερ οὐκ ἔχων ἔχειν·  
ψυχρὰν μὲν, οἶμαι, τέρψιν, ἀλλ' ὅμως βάρος  
ψυχῆς ἀπαντλοίην ἄν.

Your image, represented by the skilled hands of craftsmen, will be stretched out on our marriage bed. This I will embrace, and enfolding myself in its arms, and calling it by your name, I will imagine that I hold my dear wife in my arms, although I do not. A cold joy, I know, but all the same I may lessen the weight of my soul.

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