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# THE REIGN OF NERO

## A DELUSIONAL JOURNEY TO SUICIDE

A THESIS BY

CAYCE J. WALKER

SUBMITTED ON APRIL 28, 2020

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR DEPARTMENTAL HONORS IN CLASSICS

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**Abstract:**

This paper follows the life of Emperor Nero from Ancient Rome. When he first became emperor, he hosted lavish celebrations and parties, even participating in performances and was praised by his people and the senate. However, he quickly turned into a tyrannical and murderous emperor, plagued with paranoia and delusion, and began murdering his family and citizens. This paper attempts to sort through Nero's life and to match his experiences and actions with those of someone undergoing psychosis, a mental disorder where the victim loses sight of reason and the difference between right and wrong, often leading to delusion and hallucination when left untreated. Nero meets many of these qualifications and although it is impossible to diagnose conclusively someone with a mental disorder post mortem, such a diagnosis would explain many of his odd behaviors and criminal behavior. After discussing his psychotic development throughout his life, this paper concludes that in an advanced stage of psychosis, Nero may have devolved into a delusional state where he took on, in real life, the roles of the characters that he played on stage, including their actions and reactions to their crimes, later causing him to advance into a further state of delirium, ending in his suicide.

For my parents, Jennifer and Larry Walker, and my number one fan, my Opa(Grandpa), Nelson Streeter.

Pledge: Cayce Walker (Digital signature)

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## Introduction

Nero was born in the year 37 CE to Agrippina the Younger and Gnaeus Domitius Ahenobarbus in Ancient Rome.<sup>1</sup> Nero became emperor at the age of 17. The beginning of his emperorship was characterized by a lavish lifestyle and luxurious celebrations. He had no restraint when it came to spending money: he held games for his people, raised salaries, and lessened debts. Suetonius, an ancient historian, mentions multiple instances where the people of Rome and the senate, itself, would applaud and support him, which suggests that he was in their approval at the beginning of his reign.<sup>2</sup> However, many of these instances exist in relation to his musical and theatrical performances rather than his political decisions as emperor. His popularity did not last long as he quickly began to stray from Rome's normal values and to lose that love from the people which he greatly desired. According to later historians, the young emperor became paranoid; he raped people, castrated a man in order to parade him as a woman, murdered his mother and many of his friends, and became obsessed with theatrical productions and performances, just to name a few of his unusual behaviors.<sup>3</sup> His life deteriorated so quickly that he committed suicide when he was 30.

Many scholars have studied what caused this great change in Emperor Nero toward violence and paranoia, and proposed reasons behind all of his strange behaviors. These arguments fall into four main schools of thought, which may be called: "Nero the Philhellene/Artist," "Nero the Evil Tyrant," "Nero the Insane," and "Nero the Magician." Before discussing them in detail, it is necessary to discuss briefly the ancient sources from which these schools of thought are derived: Tacitus'

*Annals*,<sup>4</sup> Suetonius' *Vita Neronis*,<sup>5</sup> and Pliny the Elder's *Naturalis Historia*.<sup>6</sup> While these sources do not conclusively give one explanation or another for Nero's behavior, they do provide different viewpoints that fall rather neatly as the evidence for the schools of thought listed above. Therefore, these ancient sources will be represented, when appropriate, alongside the school within which they are referenced most frequently.

The most common explanation for Nero's behavior is that he was an artist and a philhellene at heart. This school, "Nero the Philhellene/Artist," does not follow closely any of the three ancient sources listed above, but gathers its information somewhat equally from each. Elaine Fantham's chapter, "The Performing Prince," and Sigrid Mratschek's chapter, "Nero the Imperial Misfit: Philhellenism in a Rich Man's World," both of which appear in *A Companion to the Neronian Age*, published in 2013, argue that Nero's bad reputation and dislike from the community were products of his philhellenism.<sup>7</sup> They state that this very love of the theater and other Greek things led him to become an outcast of normal Roman society, which typically prioritized its own versions of Greek festivals, celebrations, and games. They argue that this discontent is what pushed ancient Roman historians to paint him in a deviant light, highlighting his divergent behaviors rather than his respectable ones. Korana Deppmeyer's article, "Die Kunst der Verfehlung: Kaiser Auf Abwegen," in *Antike Welt*, published in 2016, follows a very similar ideology and goes as far as to say that his love of theater and all things Greek was a violation of the traditional Roman society.<sup>8</sup> Her article paints Nero as a man who wanted to be accepted as an artist, and she asserts that because Rome was not progressive enough, he caused his own demise

by deviating from normality. In a similar vein, Jan Friedmann's "Ein Kaiser als Popstar: Unter Nero Brannte Rom, aber der Kapriziöse Herrscher hat Seinen Schlechten Ruf Nicht Verdient," published in 2009, states simply that his desire to be liked and popular is the reasoning behind him pursuing the theater and games.<sup>9</sup> He adds that Nero focused on diplomacy over conflict and preferred less-violent, Greek games over the traditional Roman bloodbaths, which he claims proves his point that Nero was not an evil man and wanted only to be appreciated and admired. He fails, however, to reference the multitude of murders and other violent crimes that are attributed to Nero. Rolf Rilinger's article, "Seneca und Nero: Konzepte Zur Legitimation Kaiserlicher Herrschaft," published in 1996, argues that Nero wanted to legitimize his power by becoming something similar to the modern idea of a celebrity.<sup>10</sup> He specifically states that Nero's love for the arts and theater was not a consequence of his insanity, which others had argued previously, and that instead, he used it as a type of propaganda.

There is another, smaller branch of this school of thought where scholars argue that Nero's explicit love of performance and desire to be loved was not the cause of his demise, but rather that it was directly reflective of his reign. For example, Ulrich Schmitzer's article, "Der Tod Auf Offener Szene. Tacitus über Nero Und Die Ermordung Des Britannicus," published in 2005, shines a slightly different light on Nero by saying that his reign was remarkably similar to that of a dramatic play where Nero is both the director and the actor.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, Edward Champlin argues in *Nero Reconsidered*, published in 1998, that the line between myth and reality was always blurred in the ancient world, especially in hindsight.<sup>12</sup> Champlain points out that

many Roman leaders, whether king, consul, general, or emperor, were placed in myths and were deified after death, including Quirinus, who is often identified as Romulus, the mythical founder of Rome, and Augustus, the first emperor of Rome. Champlin focuses specifically on how Nero seemed to play the characters from his plays on and off stage, mainly the character Orestes. He does not analyze whether Nero did this actively or passively. He centers his evidence around how Nero may have been actually acting in the role of Orestes during and after the murder of his mother, Agrippina. This smaller school of thought is mostly anecdotal and lacks extensive analysis.

The second school of thought is that of “Nero the Evil Tyrant.” These arguments most often rely on Tacitus’ *Annals*,<sup>13</sup> because Tacitus provides a critical account of Nero’s reign, highlighting his eagerness to kill his mother and his love affairs. Laurie Lefebvre follows this ideology in *Le Mythe Néron: la Fabrique d’un Monstre Dans la Littérature Antique*, published in 2017.<sup>14</sup> She uses literary accounts of Nero and his rule to explain the common argument that he was immoral and how this immorality developed and evolved over time. Aloy Winterling also discusses this belief in his chapter, “Imperial Madness,” in *Evil Lords: Theories and Representations of Tyranny from Antiquity to the Renaissance*, published in 2018.<sup>15</sup> Here, the evil nature is attributed to the nature of Rome rather than to Nero. He explicitly states that the psychological analyses of the Roman emperors are inaccurate and that the blame falls on the Roman government which gave complete, unrestrained power to someone who grew up in a world surrounded by murder and other terrible crimes. It is important to note here that these two works, listed under the “Nero the

Evil Tyrant” school of thought, often do not attempt to supply an explanation for the tyranny. They either state it factually as a characteristic of Nero or discuss how this mindset came to be throughout history. This absence of explanation is what makes this a separate category, because although many other scholars may also discuss Nero as a tyrannical and misguided emperor, they attribute his tyranny as a characteristic of some other cause.

The third school of thought is ‘Nero the Insane.’ This category is surprisingly less investigated than others. This is likely due in part to the fact that developments in the psychological field are more modern and still growing, but also because of the difficulty and uncertainty of analyzing and diagnosing patients without either meeting them or having a large amount of biographical or clinical information. Due to its need for biographical information, this school of thought usually branches from Suetonius’ *Vita Neronis*, which provides the most complete biography of Nero that survives from the ancient world, including things such as his childhood, schooling, and relations with other people.<sup>16</sup> Suetonius’ biography spans the entirety of Nero’s life from birth to suicide. Although this ideology is mentioned in passing within some articles and works, it comes to light primarily in an article by Carlos Henrique Ferreira Camargo and Hélio Afonso Ghizoni Teive, *Searching for Neurological Diseases in the Julio-Claudian Dynasty*, published in 1984, where they discuss each member of the Julio-Claudian dynasty and their symptoms, coming up with plausible psychological explanations for each.<sup>17</sup> They focus on the physical characteristics of Nero, written by Suetonius (his odor, skin spots, pustules, etc.), along with the abnormalities of his behavior, to come to the conclusion that he may have been a victim of neurosyphilis.

Neurosyphilis includes symptoms such as irritability, dementia, and delirium, all of which may have been causes for his deviant behavior.

Lastly, the fourth and smallest school of thought is that of ‘Nero the Magician.’ Pliny, in his *Naturalis Historia*, discusses magic to a great extent, and he explicitly mentions Nero numerous times as a follower of magic in a very critical manner.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, followers of this school rely heavily on this work. The primary example in this school of thought is Georgios Andrikopoulos’ dissertation: *Magic and the Roman Emperors*, released in 2018. Andrikopoulos studies each member of the Julio-Claudian dynasty and discusses how they may have used magic to further their political agendas.<sup>19</sup> He mentions that Nero used astrology, divination, poisoning, and even summoning of ghosts in order to restate and build upon Pliny’s argument that Nero’s ultimate goal was to become in control of the gods.<sup>20</sup>

The main historical source for the argument within this paper is Suetonius’ “Vita Neronis,” within *De Vita Caesarum*.<sup>21</sup> As such, it is important to discuss this work in terms of its reliability and historical accuracy. Suetonius was the head of the imperial libraries, which suggests that he had access to a plethora of information on the emperors. He was also Emperor Hadrian’s scribe, which suggests he was a respected recorder and writer even before he began to publish his biographies.<sup>22</sup> According to Susan Sorek’s book on the ancient historians, not only did Suetonius write a lot of trivial information on the emperors, but he also relayed his information more objectively than most authors, keeping his personal biases and opinions separate from the text.<sup>23</sup> This would imply that his writings are more reliable than others. However, many of the trivial accounts are likely the subject of rumors: his

information was not discovered first hand, as he did not write until many years after Nero's death. Suetonius seems to have written his biographies on the earlier emperors by mentioning everything that he had heard or read on the subject. It would stand to reason, then, that Suetonius likely had more accurate information than any other biographer at the time, but also had more inaccurate information. It is impossible to know exactly how dependable Suetonius' writings are. However, for the context of this paper, when there lacks direct dispute on the information, it will be regarded as based on fact. In addition, Suetonius also strayed from his contemporaries in that he did not always write in chronological order.<sup>24</sup> This paper uses a variety of references to events to determine the correct timeline, such as deaths and marriages, but lacks important information in many cases, such as exact dates and ages.

In addition to Suetonius' background for information, there also lies the issue of the literary genre of biography, from Ancient Rome. There was an important distinction, even in antiquity, between the literary genre of biography and that of historiography. B.H. Warmington, in his introduction to Suetonius' *Nero*, states "above all, biography differed from historiography, which for Greek and Roman alike meant narrative history with a pronounced emphasis on military and political history chronologically arranged."<sup>25</sup> Biography, on the other hand, from what modern day historians can glean from its limited survivors, "had a pronounced ethical concern and tended to serve didactic purposes."<sup>26</sup> Warmington also takes the time to state that although Suetonius was a biographer, he lacked the didactic messages in his biographical works on the Caesars. Despite this fact, though, the literary genre still suggests a more emotional and personalized account of biography, rather than the

more factual and evidence-based genre of historiography, further weakening his level of historical accuracy, but not discrediting it entirely. The other important factor of biography is its place within societal and class structure. The emperors about whom Suetonius writes critical and hostile chapters were “condemned outright by the social class to which he [Suetonius] belonged and in the historical sources he used.”<sup>27</sup>

Therefore, there is undoubtedly implicit bias in his biographies, which was common among ancient historians. To write a supportive and favorable account of Nero’s reign would contradict the decisions of Suetonius’ social class to discredit and condemn Nero due to his actions. According to Warmington, there have been attempts to create a biography surrounding Nero which removes all defamatory information.<sup>28</sup> However, the most favorable account of Nero’s life is, indeed, Suetonius’ *Nero*, which in addition to listing his crimes, also lists his accepted and admirable actions and characteristics. The problem lies in that all of the information that exists in modernity about Nero was written by people existing in the same class as Suetonius, who would benefit from writing critical accounts. Since this task has not been done successfully, the only option that remains is to take Suetonius’ words as truth, while also accepting and keeping in mind that some of the most grievous crimes may be inaccurate and exaggerated.

Nero’s behavior can be attributed to many things and can be viewed from many angles to create drastically different opinions, sometimes in direct opposition to one another. The argument in this paper falls closely under the second branch of the “Nero the Philhellene/Artist,” school of thought, in which Nero’s behaviors and oddities are viewed in parallel with his performances in the theater, but it differs from

previous works because it ties in some factors from the ‘Nero the Insane’ school as well. It builds upon the arguments of Nero acting as Orestes and blurring the lines between reality and theater from a psychological standpoint by studying how he may have come to that point in his life, referencing many moments in his biography and tracking his odd developments, which ultimately led to his tragic demise. Nero may have been able to reach the point of suicide because his childhood and life thereafter allowed him to match the characteristics of a man enduring psychosis, a mental disorder where the affected person has trouble distinguishing between reality and lack thereof. The completed scholarship on this particular idea has only focused on small moments of his life, but this paper will look at his life holistically, to discuss not only that he was unable to differentiate between on and off stage, but also how he was vulnerable enough from his childhood experiences to become psychotic. This argument will follow Nero throughout his life, from childhood to suicide, highlighting critical moments which are in parallel with modern developmental characteristics of psychosis. Ultimately, because of his psychosis, Nero devolved into a delusional state where he took on, in real life, the roles of the characters that he played on stage, including their actions and reactions to their crimes, later causing him to advance into a further state of delirium, ending in his suicide.

### **Overview of Psychosis**

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, psychosis describes “conditions that affect the mind, where there has been some loss of contact with reality.”<sup>29</sup> In modern science, there are three commonly recognized stages of psychosis: prodrome, acute, and recovery. The preliminary phase, prodrome, is

characterized by things such as “reduced concentration, decreased motivation, depressed mood, sleep disturbance, anxiety, social withdrawal, suspiciousness, deterioration in functioning, withdrawal from family and friends, and odd beliefs/magical thinking.”<sup>30</sup> The second, or acute phase is often referred to as the critical phase. This is where the victim may become delusional and experience things such as hallucinations. The third phase, where late-term *would* appear is, instead, usually the recovery phase today because modern science lacks the research and observance of late-term psychosis due to the fact that every patient whom modern scientists have studied in detail has undergone recovery treatment. However, psychosis is a very large component of schizophrenia, defined as “a chronic and severe mental disorder that affects how a person thinks, feels, and behaves.”<sup>31</sup> Thomas Insel, in his “Rethinking Schizophrenia” from *Perspective*, outlines psychosis as the third stage of schizophrenia, followed by chronic disability.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, in the context of this paper, it will be assumed that the later stages of psychosis are similar in nature to the later stages of schizophrenia. It can then also be deduced that late-stage psychosis is defined by more extreme levels of the characteristics experienced in both the prodromal and acute phases to the point where the victim’s entire life is defined by their disability, concluding in their life being threatened.

In addition, although the exact causes for schizophrenia and psychosis have not been officially determined in today’s modern science, there have been studies which highlight certain risk factors increasing a person’s chance of developing these symptoms later in life. One such study is *Childhood Trauma, PTSD, and Psychosis:*

*Findings from a Highly Traumatized, Minority Sample*, conducted by Abigail Powers et al. in 2016.<sup>33</sup> Here, the writers conclude that “exposure to childhood abuse was significantly associated with the presence of a psychotic disorder.”<sup>34</sup> Therefore, in this paper, the known life events and situations of Emperor Nero will be discussed and evaluated to determine that his childhood trauma combined with his behaviors throughout his life (obsession with performance, murder, paranoia, etc.) provide adequate evidence to suggest that he could have suffered from a psychotic disorder which then, in an advanced state of delusion and dementia, led to his eventual suicide.

### **Nero’s Early Years**

According to Suetonius, Nero was born on December 15<sup>th</sup>, 37 CE.

Suggestions of hatred toward the young boy began almost immediately after birth.

Suetonius writes that soon after Nero was born, his father said that *quicquam ex se et Agrippina nisi detestabile et malo publico nasci potuisse*, “nothing that was not abominable and a public bane could be born of Agrippina and himself.”<sup>35</sup> This shows that before the child was even able to act, he may have already been despised by his own family.

For the first few years of Nero’s life, he enjoyed the wealth and power that his family had acquired. However, his father had been known as a despicable man who, according to Suetonius,

in viae Appiae vico repente puerom  
citis iumentis haud ignarus obtrivit et  
Romae medio Foro cuidam equiti R.  
liberius iurganti oculum eruit,

in a village on the Appian Way,  
suddenly whipping up his team, he  
purposefully ran over and killed a boy;  
and right in the Roman Forum he  
gouged out the eye of a Roman  
knight[horseman: a member of the

equestrian order] for being too outspoken in chiding him.<sup>36</sup>

Violence may have been common in Ancient Rome, but even this was extreme. Although these actions of his father would not be classified as childhood abuse, since he apparently did not actually act upon Nero, himself. It can be assumed from this quote that he was often impulsive, brash, violent, and powerful. It is essential to reference that having a man of this character as a father figure in addition to high levels of wealth and power, would already start the process of blurring the lines between right and wrong for such a young boy.

The other powerful male figure in Nero's early life likely would have been Caligula, the emperor of Rome who was in power from Nero's birth until age four. Caligula was an emperor who took unbridled power to extreme levels. Supposedly, he fed criminals to his wild animals because meat was too expensive, forced parents to watch their children's executions, and engaged in incest with his sisters.<sup>37</sup> He is known as one of the cruelest and most tyrannical emperors in Rome's history. Therefore, the influential men in Nero's early life, even in the absence of direct abuse, were not positive role models. The powerful men by which he was surrounded certainly played a part in Nero's image of how a powerful man should act.

When Nero was three years old, he lost his father and consequently inherited one-third of his estate. However, Caligula took all of Nero's inheritance and banished Nero's mother, forcing him to be stripped of the wealthy lifestyle he once knew. Consequently, he had to move in with his aunt, Domitia Lepida, where he was raised in poor conditions. Soon thereafter, Caligula was assassinated, and Claudius took

power. Claudius returned Nero's inheritance and allowed his mother to return, so Nero's life of luxury and power was back in place.<sup>38</sup>

The first true instance of childhood trauma came about not long after. Emperor Claudius was married to Messalina, and the two had a son named Britannicus. Suetonius writes that Messalina became aware that Nero posed a threat to their son's succession and thus organized an assassination attempt on the boy. Luckily for Nero, the assassins supposedly ran in terror when a snake darted out from beneath Nero's bed.<sup>39</sup> Although he was not injured, it would stand to reason that he was affected negatively by the event.

His entire childhood was not abusive, however. As a boy, he participated in the Troy Games, a set of equestrian drills showcasing the noble youth of Rome, and reports indicate that he performed very well, earning loud applause. This is the first documented praise that Nero received. This may have sparked his obsession with performance and insatiable desire to be loved and praised, making this a crucial moment. Soon thereafter, Claudius officially adopted Nero, increasing his chances of taking power from his new brother, Britannicus, who ridiculed and teased him incessantly.<sup>40</sup>

When Nero was 17, Claudius died, and he became emperor. Following his desire to be loved, he lowered taxes, gave out gold, and raised salaries. He also put on lavish games and entertainments and did not allow for people to be killed during gladiatorial combats. He supposedly hated signing executions, and Suetonius writes that he would say *quam vellem ... nescire litteras*, "How I wish I had never learned to write."<sup>41</sup>

This generosity and appreciation toward his people are extremely significant in determining exactly why Nero committed so many crimes against Roman tradition later in his life. If he hated to sign execution orders, disallowed killing, raised salaries, and lowered taxes, then how could he become a serial rapist, castrator, and murderer later? Clearly whatever happened to him and his morals was not from birth, but was a slow process. In addition, there is no major documented event that would have changed him. His journey into delusion and psychosis was not sudden. Therefore, it is unlikely that the arguments made by followers of the “Nero the Evil Tyrant” school of thought are completely correct. While not impossible for a leader to become evil and tyrannical without reason, it is unlikely. If the change had been sudden, there likely would have been rumors around the cause existing from antiquity.

In addition, throughout all of Nero’s life, there is evidence suggesting that his mother was overbearing and controlling. She convinced Nero to testify against his aunt, Domitia Lepida, who was then found guilty of cursing Claudius’ marriage bed. According to Suetonius, his mother *facta dictaque sua exquirentem acerbius et corrigentem hactenus ... gravabatur*, “offended him by too strict surveillance and criticism of his words and acts.”<sup>42</sup> Although she may not have physically abused Nero, she may have attributed to some amount of mental abuse to the young boy. She remained the only barrier to his otherwise unrestrained power, which cost her her life later.

According to a modern psychological study, “The Biological Effects of Childhood Trauma,” trauma is defined as “exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence. This includes experiences of direct trauma

exposure, witnessing trauma, or learning about trauma that happened to a close friend or relative... Exposure to domestic and community violence are common types of childhood traumas that result in distress.”<sup>43</sup> Nero clearly meets the criteria. His assassination attempt satisfies exposure to threatened death, and he witnessed trauma happening to close friends or relatives when his mother was banished and likely when Caligula was murdered, whom he adored.<sup>44</sup> He also experienced a lot of exposure to community violence, as Caligula allowed criminals to be fed to animals and organized many executions.

### **Prodromal Phase**

After experiencing childhood trauma, the first phase of psychosis is the prodromal phase. As mentioned above, the prodromal phase is characterized by things such as “reduced concentration, decreased motivation, depressed mood, sleep disturbance, anxiety, social withdrawal, suspiciousness, deterioration in functioning, withdrawal from family and friends, and odd beliefs/magical thinking.”<sup>45</sup> However, in “Problematic and Risk Behaviors in Psychosis,” Alan Meaden and David Hacker recognize the more violent and aggressive characteristics that a person with psychosis may have. These behaviors are not identified as either part of the prodromal phase or the acute phase of psychosis, but are categorized as “early.” Therefore, it can also be assumed that they would appear in some form during the prodromal phase, but likely not come to complete fruition until the acute phase. These behaviors are physical aggression, verbal aggression, paranoia, attention-seeking behaviors, distress, manipulation, and impulsivity.<sup>46</sup>

As a young child, he began showing signs of aggression and indifference to murder. Suetonius writes that Nero knew about Claudius' poisoning and chose to do nothing to prevent it. Nero was also paranoid that the people of Rome would not accept him as emperor while Claudius' birth son, Britannicus, still lived. Therefore, he hired a poisoner to create a poison to dispose of Britannicus. He tried it first on a child, but claimed that it took too long for the child to perish and made the poisoner create a more potent version. During dinner one night, he gave the poison to Britannicus, who died instantly.<sup>47</sup> Although murdering to ensure succession was not rare in Rome in that period, it still highlights certain factors of his mental state at a young age. More surprising in this case is that he first tried the poison on another young boy, who caused no threat to him, in order to determine its effectiveness and potency.

Another early example of Nero's descent into psychosis is his interaction with the theater at a young age. Although Suetonius' *Vita Neronis* does not discuss Nero's exact age, he does mention that this was soon after he became emperor, which was at age 17. As mentioned above, Nero's first documented praise was in performance, so it stands to reason that a young boy would chase that praise again, especially one who had experienced childhood trauma. Also, attention-seeking behaviors are listed in "Problematic and Risk Behaviors in Psychosis."<sup>48</sup> Nero appeared in the theater often and spent much of his time strengthening his voice and lyre-playing so that he could perform better, oftentimes neglecting his duties as emperor to do so. He also loved receiving applause so much that he organized more than 5,000 youths and some cavalry into three groups to learn the Alexandrian methods of applause. These were

known as the ‘Bees,’ who make a humming sound, the ‘roof-tiles,’ who clap with hollow hands, and the ‘Brick Bats,’ who clap with flat hands. These claque were required to applaud whenever he sang.<sup>49</sup> He also performed in the theater whenever he had the chance and played in many competitions and festivals, making sure always to win. He would verbally abuse and bribe or manipulate his competitors off stage to make sure that they would not win. In addition to performing in the theater, he also decided to perform in chariot races.<sup>50</sup> Performing in the theater was very distant from normal emperor behavior, and Nero was the only emperor to compete in chariot races.

Another odd behavior of Nero that compliments his attention-seeking theater performances is that when he performed, people were not allowed to leave, regardless of circumstance. Suetonius writes of rumors that a woman once gave birth during one of his performances, because she was not permitted to leave, and of other instances of men jumping from walls due to boredom.<sup>51</sup> These instances are possibly reflective of bias from Suetonius’ literary genre of biography and therefore are likely exaggerated. Due to this, the idea that Nero was strict to ensure people did not leave his performances will remain as evidence for Nero’s psychological analysis and attention-seeking behavior, but the direct examples will be discredited. Nero was also very afraid and paranoid of people not liking his performances, Suetonius writes:

atque, ut auderet hortantibus, aequiore animo recedebat, ac ne sic quidem sine sollicitudine, taciturnitatem pudoremque quorundam pro tristitia et malignitate arguens suspectosque sibi dicens.

When they [judges] bade him take heart, he withdrew with greater confidence, but not even then without anxiety, interpreting the silence and modesty of some as sullenness and ill nature, and declaring that he had his suspicions of them.<sup>52</sup>

He would manipulate the judges by saying that the winner of the competition was left up to chance, but that he knew the judges would be able to remove the factor of chance and make the correct decision. The last early example of his absolute obsession with theater and odd behavior is that even when called to Rome for urgent matters, he would not allow the performance to be stopped. He continued his habit of performing until the end of his life.<sup>53</sup>

Therefore, it is also clear that in addition to the childhood trauma requirements, he meets the requirements for the prodromal phase of psychosis as well. He exhibited signs of possible magical thinking, physical aggression, verbal aggression, paranoia, attention-seeking behaviors, and manipulation. Every sign that he was going to become a danger if untreated was present.

### **Acute Phase (Part 1)**

For the context of this paper, the last phase of psychosis, the acute phase, will be divided into two smaller phases. The first will encompass Nero's late symptoms of psychosis: his stronger levels of aggression, paranoia, and manipulation, while the second will include his descent into his last moments, characterized by advanced hallucination and delusion. The reasoning for breaking the acute phase into two phases is to account for the lack of study in late-term psychosis. The first phase is mainly derived from late term schizophrenia while the second phase is a melding of late term schizophrenia and more extreme symptoms of psychosis.

In terms of advanced physical aggression, Nero had a habit of roaming the streets of Rome after dinner and attacking men, often stabbing them and throwing

their bodies into the sewers. He would also steal from shops and sell their produce himself for profit.<sup>54</sup> He even raped a Vestal Virgin, Rubria.<sup>55</sup> The Vestal Virgins were very important to the religion of Rome and their history. They had to tend to a sacred fire that must not be allowed to go out. The consequences for breaking their vow were extreme; in one of Rome's foundation stories, the founder of Rome, Romulus, and his brother, Remus, were born to a Vestal Virgin, Rhea Silvia, who was buried alive because she had broken her vow of chastity. For this reason, it was extremely odd behavior to rape a Vestal Virgin, and was a great crime against Roman religion. Nero's sexual crimes did not end there. This rape is another possible example of Suetonius' class bias and exaggeration. If an emperor had raped a Vestal Virgin, there would likely be more accounts of it because of its extreme nature. Therefore, while important to mention because it shows the sentiment toward Nero, this exact reference will not be counted for the conclusion. There are other accounts of rape and this account will fall along with those. Nero also castrated a young boy, Sporus, in hopes of turning him into a girl for marriage. He went through with the marriage and paraded him through the city as his wife.<sup>56</sup> Suetonius also writes that he found a woman who looked exactly like his mother and then engaged in sexual intercourse with her. Suetonius even suggests that he may have indeed actually committed incest with his mother on occasion.<sup>57</sup> He also created a game where he would cover himself in animal skins, place himself in a cage, and tie men and women to stakes. Then he would be released from the cage and *cavea virorumque ac feminarum ... invaderet*, "attack the private parts of men and women."<sup>58</sup>

His next crime was another murder, but it was the murder of his own mother. After being banished from the palace and retracting her bodyguards, he could no longer endure her threats of violence and decided to commit matricide. He first tried poisoning her to no avail. Then he sabotaged her house so that it would collapse but this attempt also failed. His next attempt was to create a boat which would fall apart but she swam to safety when the boat sank. Eventually, he planned a fake assassination attempt on his own life and had his mother framed. Then, Nero also made her murder appear as a suicide.<sup>59</sup> Next, he decided to murder his aunt, Domitia Lepida. She was ill and he had the doctors give her a fatal dosage of medication and proceeded to take all of her belongings and ripped up her will.<sup>60</sup>

His murders did not stop there. He attempted to murder his second wife, Octavia, as well. First, he tried strangling her, but she did not perish. Eventually he declared her as barren, divorced her, banished her, and then had her executed for adultery. His next wife, a woman named Poppaea, seemed initially to make him happy. However, one night while she was pregnant, he kicked her to death for complaining.<sup>61</sup> In addition to wives, he had many other friends executed when they disagreed with him or did not give him what he wanted. Although he did not practice social withdrawal in the modern sense, a symptom of acute psychosis listed above, by murdering his entire family, he did indeed withdraw himself from family and friends in addition to exhibiting clear signs of physical aggression. He even forced his lifelong tutor, Seneca, whom he supposedly cared for deeply, to commit suicide when Seneca wanted to retire.<sup>62</sup>

Perhaps the most extensive assassination that he committed came after he received a bad omen. He asked an astrologer about a comet that he had seen and when the astrologer told him that it meant someone important would die unless some other important people were executed instead to distract it, he proceeded to massacre the members of the nobility.<sup>63</sup> He also developed a habit of using his power to execute for minor crimes and to force people to commit suicide.

Then came perhaps the most infamous moment of Nero's life, the fire of Rome. Many people, including Suetonius, claim that Nero may have played a part in this tragedy, but no concrete evidence has ever been brought forth. According to Suetonius, Nero watched the fire atop the Tower of Maecenas, doing nothing to prevent it.

This concludes the late phase of psychosis for Nero, characterized by his aggression, paranoia, and manipulation. Thus, begins his descent into true delusion, hallucination, and suicide.

### **Acute Phase (Part 2)**

Nero's extreme love and obsession for the theater is well known. Four of the characters that he played in the theater are listed by Suetonius. He played *Canacen parturientem*, *Oresten matricidam*, *Oedipoden excaecatam*, and *Herculem insanum*, "Canace in Labor, Orestes the Matricide, Oedipus Blinded, and the Hercules the Mad."<sup>64</sup> In *Nero Reconsidered*, Champlain alludes to the idea that perhaps Nero was more obsessed with theater than people had previously imagined.<sup>65</sup> Some analyses exist for his performance of Canace, but are not relevant to this argument.<sup>66</sup> The last three performances listed are directly related with one another. Orestes has to kill his

mother because she had become too powerful and was now a threat. He was also seeking revenge.<sup>67</sup> Clearly, this story parallels nicely with Nero's own circumstances. Killing one's own mother was frowned upon, even in Rome. People often wrote graffiti chiding him for this matricide. However, there is strong evidence that Nero may have endured psychosis, meaning that eventually he would become delusional and experience hallucinations. This paired with his obsession with theater could have allowed the two experiences to bleed into each other. Perhaps, then, he may have been unable to distinguish between the characters he played on stage and the responsibilities and life that he had outside of the stage. Therefore, both men, Orestes and Nero, were subject to very powerful mothers. The actions of the mothers may differ; Orestes' mother was a murderer while Nero's mother only made threats. However, both female figures threatened the power of their sons by becoming too powerful. This could mean either that Nero killed his mother thinking that he was Orestes or if he just used Orestes' reasoning of protecting their people and themselves from a too-powerful, ill-minded, figure to justify his actions.

If Nero killed his mother while acting as Orestes, then it stands to reason that his guilt and consequences from the murder would also manifest itself in the form of theater. Oedipus, in *Oedipus Blinded*, refers to the man who accidentally killed his father and had incestual relations with his mother.<sup>68</sup> After Nero killed his mother, Suetonius writes that Nero examined her entire body carefully, evaluating each part, an interaction with sexual undertones, though not overtly incestual. This, in addition to the rumors that he may have had incestuous relations with his mother, makes Nero a likely candidate for the part of Oedipus. However, Oedipus' answer to his guilt was

to blind himself. Nero did not take this route, but did commit suicide, which will be discussed later. Although he did not follow through with the punishment of blinding himself, his subsequent suicide does suggest that he felt extreme levels of guilt and was trying to work through them through his characters in the theater. Suetonius writes that Nero did indeed feel very guilty for this murder and said that he was *exagitari se materna specie verberibusque Furiarum ac taedis ardentibus*, “hounded by his mother’s ghost and by the whips and blazing torches of the Furies.”<sup>69</sup> This fate is similar to that which befell Orestes after he killed his mother, who was also chased by the Furies. The other character he played, Hercules the Mad, is also coming to terms with extreme guilt. Hercules had murdered his two children and wife when he was driven mad by the goddess Iris and the Furies.<sup>70</sup> This is a parallel to Nero when he kicked his pregnant wife to death, whom he previously had adored.

Nero’s psychotic episodes were not random. They were driven by his love of the theater which, in advanced delusion, he was not able to distinguish from reality. The murder of his mother was later in his life, when his psychosis would have been strongest. In a psychotic episode, he decided to murder his mother, just as his character Orestes had done. The murder of his wife could have been another psychotic episode, as well, where he was acting as Hercules. If the characters whom he played could murder, why could he not do the same? Then, subconsciously he dealt with his guilt through theater. However, his dramatic and stage-like life must have a dramatic and stage-like ending. If he truly believed himself to be part of a tragedy, then he must meet a tragic end.

Nero's demise began when he heard of the Gallic revolt. After hearing about the revolt, he allegedly went to the gym and distracted himself by watching athletic contests, saying no more on the subject. It was not until he received a letter from Vindex, a Gallic noble, which both insulted his lyre-playing and referred to him by the name which Britannicus, his now murdered brother, had teased him with as a child, that he decided to take action. After Nero read this letter and its claims, he finally asked the Senate to put down the revolt. Afterward, he seemed to gain his senses back again and called a meeting to discuss the revolt, however, he spent the majority of the time discussing a new invention of which he had been thinking, rather than discussing a plan.<sup>71</sup> This suggests some sort of delusion, defined as "an idiosyncratic belief or impression that is firmly maintained despite being contradicted by what is generally accepted as reality or rational argument, typically a symptom of a mental disorder."<sup>72</sup> It was not customary to ignore threats to Rome, especially to the emperor, himself. He ignored all signs of the revolt and chose to believe that there was no threat when it was clear that there was one. This was the crucial moment of delusion that led to his end.

Next, Suetonius writes a series of very dramatic, delusional, and irrational events. First, Nero hears of a Spanish revolt by Galba. Rather than react to this with planning and preparation, Nero fainted and remained *sine voce et prope intermortuus*, "without a word and all but dead."<sup>73</sup> After a while, he supposedly returned to his usual self and ripped his clothes and beat on his forehead in despair, another action which his predecessors, perhaps excluding Caligula, never would have done. Then, Nero came up with a few ideas of how to deal with this situation. His first thought

was to have all army commanders and governors killed in addition to all foreigners to ensure that they would not join the revolt; his other ideas were:

Gallias exercitibus diripiendas  
 permittere; senatum universum veneno  
 per convivia necare; urbem incendere  
 feris in populum immissis, quo  
 difficilius defenderentur.

To turn over the Gallic provinces to his armies to ravage; to poison the entire senate at banquets; to set fire to the city, first letting the wild beasts loose, that it might be harder for the people to protect themselves.<sup>74</sup>

This was not the customary way for an emperor to deal with threats to the Roman Empire. The Romans were known for winning battles and going on conquests. It was not long ago that Rome had been ruled by Augustus, who continued waging military campaigns and expanding the empire until his death. How then, could Nero possibly decide to run away, ignore the threat, and devise with these preposterous ideas if he was of a sane mind? One night, in a state of delusion, he declared that when he arrived at Gaul, he would walk to the front of the army and cry, believing that it would make the soldiers pity him and abandon the revolt.<sup>75</sup> This is another example of delusion as a man of sane mind would realize this as an irrational idea. At this point in his career as emperor, he was so hated that when he called for soldiers, not a single qualified soldier came forth, and he was forced to enlist slaves to protect Rome.<sup>76</sup>

Nero, in this time, was being threatened by the revolt and was hated by his subjects, he had succeeded in killing most of his friends and family and had reason to believe that his reign was ending. To top it all off, he began to have dreams of his death and saw other bad omens. He had murdered his mother and forced his tutor and chief consultant to commit suicide and was now virtually alone. His loneliness,

combined with his paranoia, threats, and bad omens, made him finally snap and reach a point of delusion and hallucination from which he would never return. Suetonius writes that Nero allegedly woke in the middle of one night to find the palace deserted. The friends he had left were nowhere to be found, and his valets disappeared, and when he called for any executioner to come end his life, no one came.<sup>77</sup> The likelihood of the palace actually being abandoned is slim. Therefore, it would appear that this was either some sort of hallucination, or perhaps a dream. Then, he left the palace to take some time to think. The next portion of Nero's life seems to be more of a hallucination than fact.

Before leaving for his villa to be alone, Nero saw lightning flash in the eyes of the four servants that he had brought along. Then, while his face was hidden, he heard voices of people talking about him and asking questions, they suggested that people were looking for him. In fear, he abandoned his horse and continued on foot.<sup>78</sup> Lastly, he reached his villa and decided to commit suicide. He received a letter declaring that he had been made an enemy of the state and would be executed violently when found. He prepared to commit suicide twice but decided it was not the right time for him to go, a theatrical action. Then he asked three of his servants to commit suicide as an example for him. Eventually, he heard the sound of horses galloping toward him and stabbed his own throat with his scribe aiding him. He bled out just after the soldier entered the villa.

Although in modern day, suicide is seen often as a definitive symptom of mental illness, whether it be one such as schizophrenia, psychosis, or even depression, this was not the case in Ancient Rome. To truly understand the purpose

and reasoning behind suicide in Ancient Rome, one must return to Cato the Younger. Julius Caesar, during his civil war, wanted Cato, a renowned Stoic philosopher to join his side. However, Cato did not agree with Julius Caesar, and rather than be captured and live under Caesar's tyranny, he committed suicide. The Romans reacted to this act of suicide as an example of virtue and purpose, of taking agency over one's own death and escaping tyranny. By killing himself, he defeated Caesar in his own rite.<sup>79</sup> After Julius Caesar was assassinated, Cato was perceived as a martyr for his suicide; his memory was not shunned. This brought forth the idea of political suicide and dying for a righteous reason.<sup>80</sup> However, this occurred in 46 BC, many years before Nero was born. As time moved on, suicide was painted in a different light. While some people were committing suicide for a cause, others committed suicide out of fear. Ruah, in his "Cato at Utica: The Emergence of a Roman Suicide Tradition," published in 2018, states that the Julio-Claudians may have been using forced suicides as a form of power. Previously, people could commit suicide to escape tyranny, as Cato did, but now the Julio-Claudians were using their tyranny to force the suicide on people, using their own weapon against them.

Nero's suicide was not an attempt to escape tyranny, and he was not standing up for any cause in which he believed. He committed suicide in fear; he had been backed into a corner and had nowhere to go. It is true that he took agency in his own death by taking his life rather than allowing the enemy to have the satisfaction, but this was done in extreme fear. Suetonius writes that the letter Nero received declaring him a public enemy mentioned that he would be killed in the 'ancient fashion.' This, according to Suetonius, meant that he would be stripped naked, his head (or neck,

depending on translation) would be pierced with a wooden fork, and then he would be beaten with wooden sticks.<sup>81</sup> Even in the ancient world, this was a crueler death than usual. It was not until he read this letter that he officially decided on suicide and went through with it. Therefore, while some suicides were righteous and praised by Romans, Nero's was seen as one of cowardice and mental illness. His paranoia, hallucinations, and delusions placed him on a path of no return, where his only escape was suicide, a tragic end to a theatrical man. Regardless of whether Galba had attacked Rome or not, without treatment Nero never would have been able to overcome his illness. Some way or another his life would have ended by suicide. He was alone after he had killed his family and friends, he had no support in his early life to help him battle this illness, and the only place he found joy and appreciation was in performance, whether that be the theater, chariot racing, wrestling, lyre-playing, or singing. He gleaned reason for some of his actions through the characters he played in the theater and dealt with his emotions and guilt the same way. He lived his life as a tragedy where he played all parts in the production, and just as so many tragedies end in suicide, so too, did Nero's life.

## **Conclusion**

Although mental illnesses cannot be determined post mortem, Nero had all of the puzzle pieces to create the picture of psychosis. As a young boy he watched powerful men do whatever it was that they needed to do to gain anything they wanted. He saw banishment, experienced murder attempts, lost his father, and was taken from his mother all before the age of five. He had no need to learn right from wrong because of the powerful position he held in society and all of these things led

him to be highly susceptible to psychosis. Not only did he experience a lack of treatment, but he also had little to no support system and he killed his family off one by one until he was alone. The only foundation on which he could rely was his position of power and his position of popularity through his performances and theater. As long as he held on to those things, he managed to pretend some sense of balance and normality to rule. However, Galba's revolt threatened his position of power and the growing hatred of the senate over time threatened his position of popularity. Without having any remaining close friends or family, except perhaps Sporus, his castrated wife, he completely engulfed himself in theater to express his emotions and sort out his guilt. When he no longer had theater as his escape from the distorted reality which he experienced every day, he conducted his last theatrical performance. He waited until the perfect moment to end his life, firstly making the others who accompanied him commit suicide as example, signifying the death of his audience, and then proceeding to draw the curtains on his own life and finally exacting the punishment for his crimes that most closely follows the conclusion of tragedies.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Thank you to Dr. Emily Stanley at the University of Mary Washington for her assistance in the psychological information for this paper.

<sup>2</sup> For an example, see Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus, "Nero," *Suetonius*, Vol. II, trans J.C. Rolfe, Loeb Classical Library. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914), 96.

<sup>3</sup> These historians and their works include Suetonius' *Vita Neronis*, Tacitus' *Annals*, and Pliny's *Historia Naturalis*.

<sup>4</sup> Publius Cornelius Tacitus, *Tacitus' Annals*, vol. II: Books XI-XVI, edited by Henry Furneaux et al. (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1907).

<sup>5</sup> Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus, "Nero," *Suetonius*, vol. II, trans. J. C. Rolfe, Loeb Classical Library. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914).

<sup>6</sup> Gaius Plinius Secundus, "Book XXX," in *Pliny: Natural History*, vol. VIII, ed. Jeffrey Henderson, trans. W.H.S. Jones. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1963).

<sup>7</sup> Elaine Fanthan, "The Performing Prince," *A Companion to the Neronian Age*, eds. Emma Buckley and Martin Dinter, (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2013), 17-28 and Sigrid Mratschek, "Nero the Imperial Misfit," *A Companion to the Neronian Age*, 45-62.

<sup>8</sup> Korana Deppmeyer, "Die Kunst der Verfehlung: Kaiser Nero auf Abwegen," *Antike Welt* 4 (2016): 13-19, (Darmstadt, Deutschland: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft).

<sup>9</sup> Jan Friedmann, "Ein Kaiser als Popstar: unter Nero Brannte Rom, Aber der Kapriziöse Herrscher hat Seinen Schlechten Ruf Nicht Verdient," *Das Ende des Römischen Reiches: Verfall und Untergang einer Weltmacht*, (München, Deutschland: Deutsche Verl.-Anstalt, 2009), 95-103.

<sup>10</sup> Rolf Rilinger, "Seneca und Nero: Konzepte zur Legitimation Kaiserlich Herrschaft," *Klio* 78, no. 1 (1996): 130-157.

<sup>11</sup> Ulrich Schmitzer, "Der Tod Auf Offener Szene. Tacitus über Nero Und Die Ermordung Des Britannicus," *Hermes* 133, no. 3 (2005): 337-57.

<sup>12</sup> Edward Champlin, "Nero Reconsidered," *New England Review* 19, no. 2 (1998): 97-108, especially p. 99.

<sup>13</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, especially Book XIII.

<sup>14</sup> Laurie Lefebvre, *Le Mythe Néron: la Fabrique d'un Monstre Dans la Littérature Antique*, (Villeneuve-d'Ascq, France: Pr. Universitaires du Septentrion, 2017).

<sup>15</sup> Aloy Winterling, "Imperial Madness," *Evil Lords: Theories and Representations of Tyranny from Antiquity to the Renaissance*, eds. Nikos Panou and Hester Schadee, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

<sup>16</sup> Suetonius, *Nero*.

<sup>17</sup> Carlos Henrique Ferreira Camargo and Hélio Afonso Ghizoni Teive, "Searching for Neurological Diseases in the Julio-Claudian Dynasty of the Roman Empire," *Arquivos De Neuro-Psiquiatria* 76, no. 1 (2018): 53-57.

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<sup>18</sup> Pliny, “Book XXX,” in *Pliny: Natural History*.

<sup>19</sup> Georgios Andrikopoulos, “Nero,” in *Magic and the Roman Emperors*, (PhD. diss., University of Exeter, 2009), 55-64.

<sup>20</sup> See subsection V in Pliny, “Book XXX,” in *Pliny: Natural History*.

<sup>21</sup> Suetonius, *Nero*.

<sup>22</sup> Susan Sorek, “The Biographers: Plutarch and Suetonius,” in *Ancient Historians: A Student Handbook*, (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2012), 159-173.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> B.H. Warmington, “Introduction,” in *Suetonius: Nero*, (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1997), viii.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> B.H. Warmington, “Introduction,” in *Suetonius: Nero*, ix.

<sup>28</sup> B.H. Warmington, “Introduction,” in *Suetonius: Nero*, xiii.

<sup>29</sup> “What is Psychosis?” *National Institute of Mental Health*, accessed March 21, 2020, <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/schizophrenia/index.shtml>.

<sup>30</sup> “Phases of Psychosis,” *Yale School of Medicine*, accessed March 21, 2020, <https://medicine.yale.edu/psychiatry/step/psychosis/phasis/>.

<sup>31</sup> “Schizophrenia,” *National Institute of Mental Health*, accessed March 21, 2020, <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/schizophrenia/index.shtml>.

<sup>32</sup> Thomas Insel, “Rethinking Schizophrenia,” *Nature* 468 (2010): 187-193.

<sup>33</sup> Abigail Powers and others, “Childhood Trauma, PTSD, and Psychosis: Findings from a Highly Traumatized, Minority Sample,” *Childhood Abuse & Neglect* 58 (2016): 111-118.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Suetonius, *Nero* 6.1-2, trans. J.C. Rolfe.

<sup>36</sup> Suetonius, *Nero* 6.1-2, trans. J.C. Rolfe, ed. Cayce Walker to better reflect translation of *equiti*.

<sup>37</sup> See Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus, “Caligula,” *Suetonius*, Vol. I, trans. J. C. Rolfe, Loeb Classical Library. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914). For Caligula committing incest with his sisters, see p. 452 and for information on Caligula feeding criminals to animals and forcing parents to watch their children’s execution see p. 458-460.

<sup>38</sup> Suetonius, *Nero* 6.3-4.

<sup>39</sup> Suetonius, *Nero* 6.4.

<sup>40</sup> Suetonius, *Nero* 6.3-4.

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<sup>41</sup> Suetonius, *Nero* 10.2, trans. J.C. Rolfe.

<sup>42</sup> Suetonius, *Nero* 34.1, trans. J.C. Rolfe.

<sup>43</sup> Michael D. De Bellis, "The Biological Effects of Childhood Trauma," *Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics of North America* 23, no. 2 (2014): 185-222.

<sup>44</sup> Suetonius, *Nero* 30.1.

<sup>45</sup> "Phases of Psychosis," *Yale School of Medicine*.

<sup>46</sup> Alan Meaden and David Hacker, *Problematic and Risk Behaviors in Psychosis* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 80-82.

<sup>47</sup> Suetonius, *Nero* 33.2-3.

<sup>48</sup> Alan Meaden and David Hacker, *Problematic and Risk Behaviors in Psychosis*.

<sup>49</sup> Suetonius, *Nero* 20.3.

<sup>50</sup> See Suetonius 24 for more information on Nero's chariot racing and Suetonius 22 for more information on Nero's actions as a theatrical performer.

<sup>51</sup> Suetonius, *Nero* 23.2-3.

<sup>52</sup> Suetonius, *Nero* 23.3, trans. J.C. Rolfe.

<sup>53</sup> Suetonius, *Nero*.

<sup>54</sup> Suetonius, *Nero* 26.1.

<sup>55</sup> Suetonius, *Nero* 28.1.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> Suetonius, *Nero* 29.1, trans. J.C. Rolfe.

<sup>59</sup> Suetonius, *Nero* 34.1-5.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> Suetonius, *Nero* 35.1-2.

<sup>62</sup> Suetonius, *Nero* 35.5.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> Suetonius, *Nero* 21.3, trans. J.C. Rolfe.

<sup>65</sup> Edward Champlin, "Nero Reconsidered."

<sup>66</sup> Richard McIlwaine Frazer, "Nero the Singing Animal," *Arethusa* 4, no. 2 (1971): 215-218.

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<sup>67</sup> Ruth Scodel, *An Introduction to Greek Tragedy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Suetonius, *Nero* 34.4, trans. J.C. Rolfe.

<sup>70</sup> Rosie Wyles, "The Reception and Performance of Euripides' Herakles: Reasoning Madness," *Hermathena*, no. 187 (2009).

<sup>71</sup> Suetonius, *Nero* 40.4-41.2.

<sup>72</sup> *Lexico*, "Delusion," accessed March 23, 2020, <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/delusion>. For a more detailed definition, see the APA Dictionary of Psychology.

<sup>73</sup> Suetonius, *Nero* 42.1, trans. J.C. Rolfe.

<sup>74</sup> Suetonius, *Nero* 43.1-2, trans. J.C. Rolfe.

<sup>75</sup> Suetonius, *Nero* 43.2.

<sup>76</sup> Suetonius, *Nero* 44.1-2.

<sup>77</sup> Suetonius, *Nero* 47.3.

<sup>78</sup> Suetonius, *Nero* 48.3-4.

<sup>79</sup> Stanly H. Rauh, "Cato at Utica: The Emergence of a Roman Suicide Tradition," *American Journal of Philology* 139, no. 1 (2018): 59-91.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Suetonius, *Nero*.

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### **Autobiography**

I, Cayce Walker, was born in South Carolina to Jennifer and Larry Walker in 1999. Soon thereafter, I moved to a little city, Hopewell, Virginia where I have lived ever since. I had the opportunity to attend Maggie L. Walker Governor's School for Government and International Studies to complete my high-school diploma. It was at this school that I was first introduced into the classical world when I began taking Latin under Mr. Ross, my role model. I graduated high-school after taking Latin for only two years and decided to pursue the field to become a Latin teacher, following in Mr. Ross' footsteps. This decision is what lead me to apply to and attend the University of Mary Washington where I am currently pursuing my bachelor's degree in Classical Studies (Latin) and my master's degree in Pre-K12 Education.