

Mucius Scaevola and the Essence of Manly *Patientia*

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Not long ago, Robert Kaster pointed to the delicacy of the Roman concept of manly *patientia*, the ability to endure hardship and pain. In short, painful suffering can become an unmanly condition. According to the phallic model of Roman masculinity, a man acts and penetrates. Nothing should pierce his surface.¹ There are exceptions to this impenetrability in the military sphere, hedged in and compensated by the high social status of the organization with its own honor code.² The individual sufferer, however, lacks these compensations, and his endurance might easily appear as a loss of face and status. This is particularly true of physical pain inflicted by others, an experience closely connected to the predicament of slaves, who were the ones to be submitted to torture and physical abuse.³ In this paper, I will focus on the Roman embodiment of *patientia*, C. Mucius Cordus Scaevola, and explore how the ambivalence of *patientia* surfaces and is dealt with in different representations of this *exemplum*. These comparative readings will demonstrate that social intricacies shape not only the rhetorical and literary expression in accounts of virtuous behavior but its very conceptualization, also in a philosophical context.⁴

1. The problems with *patientia*: some statistics

The distribution in the relevant chapter (3.3) of Valerius Maximus' collection of *Memorable Deeds and Sayings* is symptomatic of *patientia*'s problematic nature. Whereas twenty-four Roman paragons of fortitude stand against nine external examples, the ratio is inverse for *patientia* with only two Roman ones – Scaevola and an otherwise unknown Pompey, a Scaevola 'light'⁵ – against seven from abroad. Valerius himself explains the shortness of his list with his reluctance to mention the civil wars (3.3.2), but even then the scarcity of

¹ See, e.g., Walters 1997 and Fredrick 2002, with qualifying comments by Williams 2010. For a general tendency to elide the male elite body from discourse because it constitutes a danger to social status, see, e.g., Bartsch 2006; Wildberger 2010.

² See, e.g., Lendon 1997.

³ On physical punishment of a free person as a "symbol of tyranny" and a recurrent concern in Seneca, see Courtil 2014.

⁴ Because of the methodical complications that would exceed the scope of this paper, I will not discuss possible reflections of Scaevola in two characters, Scaeva (on whom see, e.g., Delcourt 1957, p. 179; Barsch 2006, 178), and Murrus (especially 9.832-3; see below n. 42). Also very interesting for the topic at hand, even though no distinction is made between Greek and Roman masculinities, is Conway 2008, ch. 4 on ways in which masculinity is hedged and reinterpreted in accounts of Jesus Christ's crucifixion.

⁵ Pompey burns only a finger. It looks as if a name confusion has happened here. Livy (44.27.11) mentions negotiations of an Illyrian king Gentius with M. Perpena and M. Petilius. For further discussion, see Otto 1912, 320; Combès 1995, 319 n. 12.

examples from other contexts would be remarkable. As Claude Lutsch notes (1988, 35), M. Atilius Regulus' suffering at the hand of the Carthaginians is not narrated in his eulogy in Val. Max. 1.1.14. Such details could not have added to the glory of the man, and were postponed to a more suitable place, to illustrate the cruelty of Rome's enemies (9.2 ext. 1).

A similar dearth of heroic Roman sufferers can be observed in Cicero's second book of the *Tusculanae disputationes* devoted to the question whether physical pain is an evil.⁶ Cicero has Virtue adduce "boys in Sparta, youths in Olympia, and barbarians in the arena" (*Tusc.* 2.46) in her exhortation to endure pain in a manly fashion.⁷ Contrary to his general zest to replace Greek with Roman models, in this book pain-resistant Greeks and barbarians prevail, men from the myths as well as philosophers.⁸ As concerns Romans, only one *exemplum*, that of Marius, is narrated in any detail (35, 53). Decii rushing fearlessly toward the "flashing swords" of the enemy's battle line (59) are mentioned in passing, and the description stops before the fatal clash itself. It is a Greek commander, Epaminondas, who does not wince when feeling the pain of his mortal wound (59). The same picture emerges when we look at collectives: There is only one quick remark that soldiers do not feel their wounds in battle (58) and much more mention of training and exercises that *prepare* them "for wounds" but leave the body's surface unscathed (37-38). As if there was something obscene in describing a free Roman being beaten or having his skin pierced, all detail of actual injuries inflicted is reserved for other contexts, when Cicero speaks about Spartan boys whipped at the altar of Artemis Orthia,⁹ wrestling youths (36), boxers (41), and gladiators, who are characterized with features pointing to their status of slaves, as criminal "outlaws or barbarians" and as willing to serve their masters and please their audience (41).

2. Agency

When praising the fortitude of another M. Atilius, one of the old men expecting their death at the hands of the Gauls sacking the city of Rome (380 BCE), Valerius Maximus concludes: "So manliness (*virtus*) is unable to be seized; it does not know the disgrace of *patientia*;

⁶ On this book, see François Prost's contribution to this volume. On philosophical theories of pain, Prost 2004.

⁷ The thesis to be defended in this passage is: "to stand up to pain and bear it (*toleranter dolorem pati*) is a mark of men who are great-minded and enduring (*patientium*) and defeaters of all that is human" (Cic. *Tusc.* 2.43).

⁸ Eurypylus returning to the ships with a battle wound and deferring treatment to answer Achilles' questions (38-39); Odysseus wounded by the poisoned spear of his son Telegonus (48-50); the proverbial Epicurean sage in the bull of Phalaris (17-18); Zeno of Elea, Anaxarchus of Abdera (52), and the Indian gymnosophist Calanus (52, compare 40 and *SVF* 1.241); Posidonius (61).

⁹ Cic. *Tusc.* 2.34; Plu. *Mor.* 293c.

submitting to fortune it regards as more dismal than any other fate.”¹⁰ This could serve as a motto for Livy’s account of Mucius’ exploit (2.12-13). Livy presents a level-headed, circumspect young man, who is not treated lightly by Fortune¹¹ but able to turn its blows to his advantage with a combination of intelligence and fortitude.¹² Mucius feels indignation at the fact that now that Rome is free, she should be besieged, when no one dared to do so while she was under the Kings (12.2). This emotion leads to action and finally to both his own and his city’s liberation.¹³ He also senses fear: His fear of disgrace if he were to be taken for a deserter leads to the reasonable measure of seeking the Senate’s permission first (12-4-5); his fear of asking who of the two richly clad men on the tribunal is King Porsenna, lest he be recognized as a stranger, motivates his decision to try his luck and just stab one of the two (12.7). In contrast to such reasonable caution, he instils terror even when alone among a hostile crowd and as a captive.¹⁴ Unimpressed by King Porsenna’s menaces,¹⁵ he assumes a threatening role himself and makes the other feel even greater alarm than anger,¹⁶ so much so that he seeks a peace agreement with the Romans (13.1-2). The means by which Mucius achieves this success are both his courageous conduct and an ingenious *ad-hoc* lie, the menace that he, Mucius, would be only the first of three-hundred Roman youths having sworn to try their luck in a similar manner and come, on after the other, to assassinate the enemy king (12.10-11, 15-16).

In addition to these antitheses, which set off Mucius’ mental maturity from his impulsive and gullible opponent, Livy’s narrative is rich in carefully motivated turns and surprises. One of these surprises is Mucius’ lie, which constitutes part of his refusal to behave like a captive. He remains in attack mode throughout, does not surrender the initiative to his captors, and this is

¹⁰ 3.2.7 *capi ergo virtus nescit, patientiae dedecus ignorat, fortunae succumbere omni fato tristius ducit.*

¹¹ 12.4 *fortuna ... urbis*; 12.7 *ibi ... forte; quo temere traxit fortuna facinus; inter tantas fortunae minas.*

¹² Livy’s Mucius lacks the vanity and stealth of his counterpart in Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 5.27-30, and this must be a deliberate modification of the story on Livy’s part since both authors follow the same source, but Dionysius more closely than the Roman author (Ogilvie 1965, p. 263). In Dionysius’ version, Mucius convenes the Senate in order to secure recognition for his deed (27); unlike the more intelligent Mucius in Livy, who takes a calculated risk, he just confuses the scribe with the king (28.2). While Livy omits to tell us how Mucius managed to get into the camp and near the tribunal, Dionysius’ Mucius pretends to be a deserter (27.4, 29.1, or as an Etruscan: 28.1) and creeps up to the scribe as if unarmed (28.3). When interrogated by Porsenna, he negotiates safety from torture in order to obtain an opportunity to tell his lie about the conjuration of Patrician youths (29.2). Porsenna is alarmed, but keeps Mucius under arrest (30.1) and does not negotiate a peace agreement immediately. Plutarch, *Publicola* 17 follows Livius closely. Münzer’s *RE*-article (1933) contains a detailed comparison of the information conveyed in the sources. On Livy’s version of the story, see also Wenzel 1997.

¹³ 12.3 *magno audacique aliquo facinore eam indignitatem vindicandum ratus*; 12.14 *iure belli liberum*; 13.1-2.

¹⁴ 12.8 *qua per trepidam turbam sibi ipse fecerat viam; tum quoque inter tantas fortunae minas metuendus magis quam metuens.* In Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 5.28.3, he is arrested on the spot without any resistance; there is no terrified crowd and no need to wait until reinforcements have been fetched.

¹⁵ 12.12 *minitabundus*; 12.15 *quod minis nequisti.*

¹⁶ 12.12 *ira infensus periculoque conterritus.* This aspect is highlighted in Festus’ version (*Epit.* 1.4): *cum interim – immane dictu – hic interritus, ille trepidaret, tamquam manus regis arderet.*

also the tactic that motivates his exemplary act. He is the one to speak first,¹⁷ and when Porsenna gives orders to torture him to learn more about the mysterious danger the Roman had hinted at, Mucius acts instead of being acted upon.¹⁸ He thus exemplifies what Kaster describes as “aggressive passivity”. *Patientia* of that kind “comes as close to an active role as circumstances allow” and “says not only ‘I am’ but also ‘I choose,’ against experience that seems to threaten existence and nullify choice.”¹⁹ Active initiative serves as a hedge against the loss of social integrity which a free man would incur when passively subjected to torture. Mucius comes away not a humiliated victim but *intactus inviolatusque*, “untouched and unsullied” (12.14), as Porsenna describes it with a phrase that hints at deep humiliation or even sexual transgression.²⁰ In spite of the loss of his hand, Mucius remains pure and, in a sense, unhurt since he was able to maintain control over his own body; no other person was allowed to “touch” it.

The same strategy reoccurs in the second Roman example for *patientia* adduced by Valerius Maximus: Pompey preempts an attempt to torture him by burning a finger and thus elicits similar submission in his opponent to the yielding that Scaevola achieves in Livy’s account (Val. Max. 3.3.2). Contrary to this, the Greek examples in Valerius Maximus demonstrate their *patientia* while actually subjected to torture, some of a grossly disgusting nature. The first of these is similar to the Roman ones as concerns the nature of the pain, but very different in its nuances. A comparison will be instructive: Here too, a male person endures the pain of burning, and the endurance may seem even more praiseworthy since the brave sufferer is still a boy. Serving King Alexander of Macedon at a sacrifice, he does not move to shrug off a piece of burning coal that has fallen on his arm. The boy willingly decides to bear the pain, but this is a far remove from the “aggressive passivity” shown by Mucius and Pompey. The two Romans actively inflict the pain on themselves. The boy submits to a painful situation that has befallen him by chance, and then his suffering is even actively increased by someone else – the King who notices what has happened and deliberately prolongs the ritual to test his attendant, enjoying this display of perseverance. It is not unlikely that the detail was invented in the original account to enhance the valor of the boy, but as we begin to see, it would not have suited Roman sensibilities. It becomes a stock element of the Scaevola-*exemplum* that

¹⁷ In Dion. Hal., Porsenna speaks first, addressing Mucius with offensive words as *μιαρώτατε πάντων ... ἀνθρώπων* (Ant. Rom. 28.4).

¹⁸ In Festus’ *Epitome* (1.4), he is the only one who acts; Porsenna only appears as the one who is frightened (see n. 16).

¹⁹ Kaster 2002, pp. 136, 137. Compare also Barton 2001, p. 40: “A male was transformed into a man by willful expenditure of energy. Above all, a man willed himself to be expendable.” My point here is that not every form of “expenditure” was generative of honor or masculinity in this sense.

²⁰ See, e.g., *OLD* s.v. *uiolo* 2.

Porsenna removes the cause of pain rather than creating it. Yet another detail may be relevant: the coal burns through the skin of the boy, so that even the bystanders notice “the smell of his scorched body.” The bodies of Mucius and Pompey are not penetrated; rather, a limb is parched away and dissolved.

The importance of agency is confirmed also in Augustine’s summary of Livy’s account (*Civ. Dei* 5.18): There, intimidating the king becomes the purpose of Mucius’ self-mutilation, and so the captive inverts the hierarchy between the two parties in this version as well. What is more, when Augustine compares Mucius with a Christian martyr, the paradoxical climax of sacrifice that he constructs conveys the same scale of values. Just as it is worse to have one’s whole body burnt and not just one hand, so it is a greater sacrifice to suffer (*patiens*) the burning at the hands of another instead of actively (*faciens*) inflicting it on oneself.²¹

3. Separation from the body

Paradoxically, the reason why Livy’s Mucius is able to protect his body from debasement is the fact that he himself regards it as a thing of no value. Thrusting his hand into the fire on the altar, he demonstrates to the king “how little worth men assign to their body when they see great glory before their eyes.”²² He burns his hand “as if his mind had become numb” – literally: a stranger – “to his senses.”²³ This paradox can be resolved by distinguishing what I would like to call (i) the ‘social’ or ‘visible body,’ the physical embodiment of the person by which that person is present, and also vulnerable, in a social context, and (ii) the ‘internal body,’ the bodily component of the person as controlled by, and ideally subject to, that person’s mind. Scaevola is willing to sacrifice a part of the latter in order to protect the former from defilement. He does so by giving the external impression through the behavior of his ‘visible body’ (i) that he has mentally separated himself (*alienare*) from his ‘internal body’ (ii), the flesh with its strong sensations.

Another way of protecting the ‘social’ body (i) is to make it invisible. We have already noted the attention paid to the body of the boy in the first external *exemplum* of *patientia* in Valerius Maximus. The description is full of sensual physical detail: the smell of the burning flesh reaches the nostrils (*nares*) of the bystanders. The boy himself strains to keep his arm unmoved and suppresses a groan (*gemitus*) in order not to disturb the sacrifice. All this is

²¹ Augustin. *Civ. Dei* 5.18 *si pro illo non unam manum neque hoc sibi ultro faciens sed persequente aliquo patiens totum flammis corpus inpenderit.*

²² 12.13 *quam vile corpus sit iis qui magnam gloriam vident.*

²³ 12.13 *velut alienato ab sensu [...] animo.*

missing in Livy's narrative: Mucius' body is invisible with the single exception of his right hand. There is an intention to act, to perform a great deed,²⁴ there is a weapon (12.5, 8, 10), and there is the young man as a whole, who might be caught and hindered in his movement,²⁵ surrounded by fire (12.12) or removed from the altar – as a whole, not his body or just his arm with the burning hand (12.13). Just as Mucius' body thus dissolves into action, it is numbed away in the moment of burning.

A similar vanishing of the body can be observed with the practice – and concomitant *topos* – of manly tolerance of the pain caused by surgery of varices. According to Cicero, Marius was the first to undergo this therapy without fixation, thus setting a new standard for the future. This is the characteristic inversion of passive suffering – being bound and cut by a physician – to activity: *Marius* forbids any fixation (*Tusc.* 2.53), *he* institutes a new custom, and *he* offers or does not offer (*praebuit*) his leg for cutting. Those acting on him are completely elided, unnamed and invisible agents hidden behind passive verb forms. Still, Cicero's Marius very clearly does feel pain, so much so that he refuses surgery on the other leg (2.53). Manly activity and elision of the body have reached a new level in Seneca's reference to the same practice one-hundred years later: There, the man who offers his varices for cutting continues to read a book, as if nothing happened to his body at all.²⁶ Absolute composure of the socially relevant, visible body (i), to such a degree that we only see the man in action, thus showcases the degree to which he, as a person, is the master of his internal body (ii).

Yet another step of alienation between body and mind is hinted at when Livy describes the loss of Mucius' right hand as *clades dextrae* (13.1). Even though *clades* can be used in the sense of "destruction," this standard term for a terrible military defeat suggests the idea that the man had prevailed, while his hand was vanquished.²⁷ This idea, that man and hand are almost separate agents, is developed and inverted in later versions of the example (see section 6, below), and also in Valerius Maximus' account. There, the burning of the hand becomes a pointless act of self-castigation. Having conceived a deep dislike for his right hand, Mucius has the useless servant thrown into the fire and suffers, in the sense of "permitting," it to be burned completely.²⁸ Such imagery enhances an agent's control over his inner body (ii) by

²⁴ *Magnum facinus* (12.3, 5; compare also 12.7 *quo temere traxit fortuna facinus*; 12.8 *et facere et pati fortia*).

²⁵ By the Romans, in the imagined scenario that Mucius would be mistaken for a deserter: *deprehensus ... retraheretur* (12.3); by Porsenna's guard: *comprehensum ... retraxissent* (12.8).

²⁶ *Sen. Ep.* 78.18 *ille qui dum varices exsecandas praeberet legere librum perseueravit*.

²⁷ *OLD* s.v. *clades* 3 and 2.

²⁸ *Val. Max.* 3.3.1 *perosus enim, ut credo, dexteram suam quod eius ministerio in caede regis uti nequisset, iniectam foculo exuri passus est*.

displaying its subordination to the person's will. The sufferer becomes the stern master punishing a slave.

It is clear that reduction of historical narrative to a few lines of pointed *exemplum* require omission and simplification.²⁹ Livy's basic plot is retained but stripped of its turns and surprises, such as the consultation of the senate, the confusion of king and scribe, Mucius' menace and lie, and Porsenna's counter-threat of torture. As a result, Mucius no longer has a plausible reason for burning his hand – there is no need to preempt aggression to one's body by another person – and so Valerius invents a new motive: anger at his own failure. The parenthesis *ut credo* that modifies this information suggests that it does not derive from the tradition. Of course, the expression may be a stylistic device, e.g. to underscore the plausibility of a traditional explanation by pretending that it was found through one's own reckoning. However, no other version before Valerius introduces such a motivation,³⁰ and it sits not very well with other aspects of the anecdote, such as the idea that Porsenna is made to forget his own danger – at a point in the narrative when the king has no longer any reason for fear since the assassin is caught – and that Porsenna is made to “turn his own revenge into admiration,” an idea that corresponds to the move from passive suffering to actively seeking pain in order to impress or intimidate to maintain one's status and social integrity, just as we find it in Livius.

4. Spectacle

Another aspect not perfectly integrated with the motif of self-castigation is the spectacular nature of the deed. One reason why Valerius may have omitted the practical effects which Mucius' actions had for Rome in Livy's account may be the fact that he transposed this aspect to the second example, in which Pompey “inflicts on” King Gentius “despair that anything could be learned from him by way of torture and creates in him a great desire to seek the friendship of the Roman people” (3.3.2). As the first and most famous Roman example, Mucius' deed is afforded an even more hallowed meaning, a glorification of hero and fatherland that weighs more than a simple peace treaty. Valerius' Mucius elicits admiration,

²⁹ On Valerius' “spessore poetico,” see e.g. Guerrini 1981 and for his treatment of Livy as a subtext Bloomer 1992, p. 67.

³⁰ Ogilvie 1965, p. 262 interprets the burning as originally a punishment for perjury, but it is unlikely that Valerius would have known that story, if it was ever told about Scaevola in historical times at all. Ogilvie himself points to Hellenistic elements in the known version, which he dates to c. 200 BCE (pp. 262-263). According to Mueller 2002, pp. 125-126, Valerius' presents Mucius' act as a symbolic sacrifice that heals the interrupted ritual.

just like his counterpart in Livy, where Porsenna is “almost thunderstruck by this miracle” (12.13). However, while Livy focuses on the strong emotions and actions that Mucius causes in his human opponent, Valerius points to the timelessness and divinity of virtue. The great glory envisaged by the hero himself in Livy’s version (12.13) is now an objective fact: the “eternal glory” characterizing Scaevola’s name, which he brings back to Rome as a welcome asset together with his own person.³¹ The small altar that happened to be lit nearby in order to provide Mucius with some ready fire in Livy, becomes a full-blown, very special ritual before the attentive eyes of the immortal gods.³²

5. Condensation: Seneca

All elements noted so far – activity, alienation, and spectacle – reoccur enhanced and tightly knit into a consistent model in various versions of the same example in Seneca’s prose works.³³ By this, I do not wish to make any assertion about the dependencies of sources. We can assume that all authors after Livy knew that account, and that Martial had read at least significant portions of Seneca’s works. Whether Seneca knew and used Valerius Maximus’ collection is debated, but need not be decided here.³⁴ We are exploring occurrences of a well-known Roman cultural icon that must have been present to the educated elite in many disguises, and what is of interest for this paper are the elements of that *exemplum* and their significance with a view to Roman social values and conceptions of masculinity.

Mucius is even more of an agent in Seneca than in the previous sources. Whereas he is arrested and moved around in Livy’s account, and still overcome in Valerius Maximus’ narrative (3.3.1 *oppressus*), Seneca’s Mucius stands apparently free with no one holding him. He stops burning his hand only when Porsenna intercedes, but unlike Livy’s Mucius, who is himself removed from the fire, Seneca’s Mucius cannot continue burning himself because Porsenna has *the fire* removed from him. More dignified than Valerius’ Mucius, Seneca’s is a severe general or judge exacting punishment,³⁵ not a slave-owner outraged at his useless servant. In accord with his enhanced activity, his suffering has become “doing” (*facere*).³⁶ In

³¹ Val. Max. 3.3.1 *urbi se cum aeternae gloriae cognomine Scaevolae reddidit*.

³² In Valerius’ version, the gods observe Mucius’ worship (*admotum aris cultum*) and Porsenna is performing a sacrifice when Mucius attacks him, whereas Livy mentions a sacrifice to explain the presence of an open fire.

³³ On the Scaevola-*exemplum* in Seneca, see Heikkinen 1997, especially as concerns its philosophical significance.

³⁴ On the question of Valerius’ sources and reception, see, e.g., Bloomer 1992. He assumes that Seneca knew and used Valerius Maximus’ collection (pp. 64-77).

³⁵ Sen. *Ep.* 24.5 *poenas a se irriti conatus exigentem; facilius Porsina Mucio ignovit [...] quam sibi Mucius; Dial.* 1.3.4 *ipse a se exigit erroris sui poenas*. So also in [Aur. Vict.] *De vir. ill.* 12.3.

³⁶ 24.5 *facere aliquid in illis castris felicius potuit, nihil fortius*.

Ep. 24.5, he “exacts punishment,” does not “remove” a hand, is “more energetic at seizing danger” (*acrior ... ad occupanda pericula*) than cruelty at imposing it. Physical pain becomes a “danger” to be “seized” or “occupied” like a fortress! Here suffering has turned into conquest, the most strenuous of activities available to a Roman man, and similar imagery occurs at *Dial.* 1.3.4: Mucius “presses down (*premit*)³⁷ the fires of his enemies” and “routs (*fugat*) the king”³⁸ with his mutilated hand. In *Ep.* 66.53, “he puts an end to war, unarmed and crippled.” Mucius’ handicapped body thus provides an occasion for demonstrating the superior agency of virtue irrespective of the physical condition of a person. Mastery over the internal body (ii) thus has a social impact by display of the visible body (i) in its mutilation. Similarly, in *Ep.* 98.14, a man becomes an *exemplum* by repelling the “invasion” of pains into his body by turning this into a challenge and victory over Fortune.³⁹ When “pains invade” a man’s “body” he

Seneca also takes up the motif of Fortune from Livy, an idea central to what the philosopher wishes to illustrate with the *exemplum*, namely that nothing bad happens to Mucius, that on the contrary he is able to turn what others would regard as misfortune into a success and a good thing. Mucius is happy (*felix*)⁴⁰ and, by his virtue, in possession of a true good. At *Ep.* 66.51 Porsenna “envies” him for his glory and for this reason orders the fire to be taken away from him (*eripi*). The distinction between the physical body as a part of oneself (ii) and the body as the outward manifestation of the person (i) receives a Stoic interpretation: As part of the person, the ‘inner’ body (ii) is a tool of virtuous agency, one that is disposable for an ulterior reason; the visible ‘social’ body (i) is the form in which virtue acts and makes its exemplarity visible to others.

In Seneca’s versions this double significance of the body creates a double perspective on the spectacle of Mucius’ burning hand.⁴¹ In one perspective, Mucius has such control over his body, is so numbed and alienated from this part of his own, that he is able to “stand” (*Ep.* 24.5 & 66.51 *stetit*) and “watch” (24.5 *spectator*; 66.51 *perspectavit*) his hand “dripping” (*destillans*) from the bones with gruesome detail. The individual standing and watching his own pain seems to have become iconic, if we are to judge from parallels in Lucan and

³⁷ Similarly in *Ep.* 76.20 *inventus est qui flammis manum imponeret*. The hand is not thrust into the fire but placed *upon* it, the movement thus expressing the proper hierarchy: the human acting upon a thing, be it as painful as it may. Conceived as a victory also at *Ep.* 98.12 *ignem Mucius [sc. vicit]*.

³⁸ Similarly on Scaevola’s shield in *Sil. Ital.* 8.389 *effugiens ardentem Porsena dextram*.

³⁹ *Sen. Ep.* 98.14 *Simus inter exempla! [...] ut possimus dolores quocumque modo corpus invaserint perferre et Fortunae dicere: “Cum viro tibi negotium est: quaere quem vincas.”*

⁴⁰ See in particular *Dial.* 1.3.4, and compare also *Benef.* 7.15.2 *et Mucio manus in hostili ara relicta instar occisi Porsinae fuit, et semper contra fortunam luctata virtus etiam citra effectum propositi operis enituit*.

⁴¹ Heikkinen 1997, 67, who contrasts Mucius’ gaze with that of Porsenna.

Martial.⁴² In Seneca's accounts, such internal focalization is a device for evaluating apparent evils and training how to face them in future (*praemeditatio futurorum malorum*).⁴³ The reader shares Mucius' gaze, becomes the *exemplum* himself, and thus prepares for being numb against pain and despising his viler part⁴⁴ just as bravely as this model. It is by his ability to look down upon a part of his internal body (ii) and assess it as the indifferent it is that Mucius achieves both internal greatness (*magnitudo animi*) and the glory earned by the display of his social body (i).⁴⁵ From that second perspective of an outside witness, both Mucius and the reader also stand as admirers of the act, the spectacle of virtue visibly asserting its agency by full control over the person as manifest in a bodily posture.⁴⁶

Displaying one's body to the gaze of others was an ambivalent affair in Rome. Carlin A. Barton, for example, notes:⁴⁷

A tension, a dilemma for the person of honor in ancient Rome had ever been the need to display oneself to others while simultaneously preserving an inviolate and protected sphere, the source and power of one's will, the *animus* [...].

One hedge the philosopher can add to those already mentioned is, accordingly, to reduce the bodily nature of *patientia* and enhance the spiritual, intellectual nature of the mind as the person's core. Here, again, we see how the discourses of Stoicism and of masculinity unite within a *dispositif* of elite manliness. Intellect is superior to physical strength: Seneca's reading patient outperforms even a Marius with his display of intellectual engagement (see p. 2). Mucius too will be outperformed if the progressor, the student on his way to wisdom, has learned his lessons. In *Ep.* 24.5, a somewhat stolid, uneducated youth draws "only" on "soldierly strength" (*militari tantum robore*) for his self-punishment; Lucilius will be much better "equipped with" reasoned argument and "precepts against death and pain."⁴⁸ In the

⁴² See Lucan 9.832f. with Wick's 2004 commentary on the passage, and for Martial, the next section, below. A particularly thorough discussion of spectacle and gaze, also in the sphere of Imperial philosophy, is Bartsch 2006. Yet another type of gaze is introduced by Plutarch in a version otherwise very similar to Livy's account. There, Mucius stares down Porsenna: "Holding his right hand [over the fire] while his flesh was burning, he stood looking at Porsinna with a bold and invincible expression" until the king surrenders and, as a symbol of his defeat, gives Mucius back his sword (*Publicola* 17.4; followed by Zonaras 7.12, vol. 1 p. 122 Dindorf).

⁴³ Edwards 1999 underscores the degree to which visual imagination is employed by Seneca to evoke, and treat, pain-related fear. My focus of interest differs from hers in that I am interested not in the imaginings of pain and torture as, e.g., in *Ep.* 14, but in the representations of men actually having pain violently inflicted on them.

⁴⁴ Sen. *Ep.* 66.51 *hostium flammaramque contemptor*.

⁴⁵ Compare also Sen. *Controv.* 8.4 *Non aliud Scaevolae Mucio cognomen dedit et capto contra Porsennan regem libertatem reliquit quam vilitas sui*.

⁴⁶ On this kind of witnessing, and self-witnessing, see Wildberger 2014 with further references.

⁴⁷ Barton 2001, p. 133; see also, e.g., Bartsch 2006, pp. 183-216. Edwards 1999 explores how Seneca negotiates this borderline in the *Epistulae morales*.

⁴⁸ Different from my reading, Heikkinen 1997 assumes that Mucius is assimilated to a "a common man by stating that Mucius was learned only as a soldier" (p. 71).

same way, Cicero assumes that “a learned and wise man” (*doctus vir sapiensque*) will disregard physical pain just as easily as a veteran soldier (*Tusc.* 2.39). Cicero’s interlocutor in that dialogue, or any other Roman man “born for glory,” will be superior to a lowly gladiator: He will strengthen his mind with mental training and reasoning (*meditatione et ratione*) instead of just the physical hardships that prepare a gladiator for the arena.⁴⁹

6. Dispersal: Martial

A spectacle, and at the same time punishment, in a more literal sense happens in Martial’s epigrams. Here we encounter performing criminals, unfree bodies, not philosophers. Two of the epigrams (8.30 and 10.25) comment on a staging of Scaevola’s deed, in which a convict was forced to represent the Roman hero. A third one (1.21) describes the *exemplum* without an explicit reference to such a punishment at the public games. This third epigram shares central features of the versions in Seneca: the contempt of fire, the glory and greater success because of failure, the emphatic use of the verb *facere* (in line 8). However, there are also new elements: Where Seneca’s Mucius is able to stand and watch his burning hand, Martial’s Porsenna is unable to bear the sight (3) and cannot watch (6) the hand that Mucius can burn. Most strikingly, Mucius’ multi-levelled but concentrated and self-asserting agency is lost. It disperses into different agents, first the hand itself that, so to speak, throws itself onto the pyre (1-2), then Porsenna, who “snatches the man” (no longer the hand) “from the flames and tells him to leave” (3-4). As a third agent, Mucius proves himself capable of burning the hand (5-6), whereas in the last distich the focus is again on the hand itself and the respective fame it could have achieved with or without failing in its original purpose (7-8).

It is uncertain whether this epigram was inspired by the same event as the other two,⁵⁰ but the loss of an agent and the concomitant loss in dignity are clear signs that Martial refers to the public spectacle. It is also instructive to see how the loss of agency and dignity is incurred, namely by making the hand the main agent of the poem. With a body-part acting itself and standing for the whole person, the relation so constitutive for a person’s integrity is inverted. Here the internal body (ii) has become the self endowed with volition, and the mind-body hierarchy is overturned. It is no longer possible to split off the body or have the mind, and so

⁴⁹ Cic. *Tusc.* 2.41. Physical training (*consuetudo, exercitatio*) are discussed in the preceding sections, while the mental training is described beginning from § 42.

⁵⁰ Citroni 1975, p. 76 on Mart. 1.21.

the real man, assume supremacy over it.⁵¹ This mirrors the fact that in the spectacle of an individual suffering some painful experience at public games, the outwardly visible social body (i) does no longer belong to the agent, but to the public and its gaze.⁵²

The same effect obtains even more clearly in epigram 8.30, which juxtaposes humiliation and praise. Here, the victim serves to entertain and enhance the glory of the emperor and is not quite allowed to become more than “a hand.” What once was the greatest possible glory has now become a spectacle in the Emperor’s games (1-2). The hand we encounter is even more active than the one in 1.21: it “holds the flames and enjoys the punishment” (3), is itself strong (4 *fortis*). Whereas Livy’s Mucius prevails upon a king thunderstruck (12.13 *attonitus*) by Mucius’ miraculous deed, here it is the hand that “rules like a king” (4 *regnat*) – but only over a thing, the fire, which is itself “thunderstruck” (4) by what the hand is doing in it. Again we have the gaze that Seneca attributed to Mucius, and now it is the criminal himself (5 *ipse*) who lovingly watches “the noble funeral of his right hand” (5) – only to vanish again and give way for acting and desiring hands. The right hand “feasts” (6 *pascitur*) on the fire and if the “punishment” had not been taken away, the left hand too would have penetrated (*in ... ire*) the already “worn-out hearth” (8 *lassos ... focos*). The person thus vanishes behind the body and the visible deed, to such a degree that it becomes difficult to say whether the one against whose will (*nolet*) the fire is removed is the hand or the man. The same ambiguity continues in the last distich, where Martial declares that he does not care what the convict (?) or the hand (?) had done before (9 *quid fecerit ante*). In the end, Martial is only interested in the hand he has seen, not in the person, whether good or bad. Paradoxically, “aggressive passivity” now contributes to effacing the person. The intensity of visible movement of the social body (i) and the attribution of agency to the inner body (ii) constitute a role reversal between inner body (ii) and mind, and thus a lack of will and mental control in the person. That the emphasis on the hand and thus the loss of the hedges around an agent’s dignity is deliberate can be gleaned from a comparison with the third epigram (10.25). Here Martial contradicts his original praise and deflates the heroism, which in this case would clearly be the heroism of the punished man himself. A Mucius, a masculine subject still ambiguously “watched” (*spectatus*) – looked at by the spectators but also proven and found good⁵³ – at the morning games, “placed his own limbs upon the hearth” (1-2) – with the same downward movement that already characterized the hero in one of Seneca’s descriptions (n. 37).

⁵¹ Compare also *Anthologia Latina* 155, where *una ... dextra* (6) constitutes something of a climax to “one single man.”

⁵² On this kind of penetrative, humiliating gazing, see Bartsch 2006, especially p. 162.

⁵³ *OLD* s.v. *spectatus* 2: “[of persons, their lives, etc.] of observed merit or worth, distinguished.”

However, while this act is gradually unmasked as a form of cowardice, a show enforced by the threat of greater pain, namely being burnt alive in a *tunica molesta* (5-6), the man apparently so “*patiens*, hard and brave” becomes “the kind of⁵⁴ heart you’d expect in rabble from Abdera” (4). He dissolves into an anonymous plurality of “chest” (*pectora*) and a common crowd (*plebis*). Nor are body and mind clearly distinguished but blend in that body part which is also the seat of the mind. Paradoxically, in this case, inaction, refusing to perform, would have been true agency (6), and so the poor convict’s choice to do as he was told elicits the poet’s scorn. The glory earned by the social body (i) in its visible performance is debunked by revealing base concern for the inner body (ii) that drives the observed behavior.

7. Hedges and the physio-psychology of pain

What I hope to have shown so far is that there are specific patterns of hedging what were face-endangering aspects of pain inflicted through artificial injury even if tolerated bravely⁵⁵ and that these hedges are closely related to a concept of masculinity as constituted by agency and impenetrability. We have also seen that these patterns can be observed in a particularly rich, emphatic, and at the same time focused fashion in Seneca’s versions of the Scaevola-*exemplum*. I wish to close this paper with a few remarks on the psychology underlying these hedges, i.e. the way in which Seneca and other philosophers imagined pain as a phenomenon pertaining to the inner body (ii) and the person as a whole.

With regard to pain, Seneca writes (*Ep.* 71.27):

I do not set apart the sage from other human beings, nor do I remove pains from him as if he were some block of stone closed to any feeling (*nullum sensum admittente*). I remember that he is composed of two parts: One is irrational, and it is this one which is bitten and burnt, and hurts. The other is rational: this one has unshakeable beliefs, is intrepid and indomitable.

Similarly, Cicero distinguishes (*Tusc.* 2.47)

in the minds of almost all humans something that is by nature soft, submissive, humble, somehow forceless and flaccid

⁵⁴ The plural *pectora* here seems to point to a typical attitude.

⁵⁵ Another, much longer paper could be written about tolerating pain caused by illness. See Edwards 1999 on this topic in Seneca.

and on the other hand

reason, the Lady and Queen of everything, who by straining and proceeding further becomes perfected virtue.

Usually, Cicero's distinction is read as a testimony for psychological dualism,⁵⁶ while readers of Seneca waver between taking the passage as a reference to dualism or just as a distinction between body and soul.⁵⁷ For the question at hand, it is of no fundamental import whether that weak element is a part of the soul susceptible to feeling bodily pain or the body itself as that part of the human in which feelings of pain occur. The internal body (i) is a construct, and similarly the different possible interpretations of the passages quoted here point to a certain fuzziness in the concept of "body" rather than any assumed physiological difference. For obviously, Seneca's "body," if the body is the referent at *Ep.* 71,27, is an entity with sensations and thus endowed with some kind of sensory function itself. The alternative reading would understand Seneca as talking about the body *plus* "the features of the soul which are bound to it."⁵⁸ What is important is that both Cicero and Seneca contrast a weak and vulnerable part of the whole person with reason.

Reason itself is not affected like the weak part, according to Seneca, at least not in a sage, when it has been perfected. In the same way, Cicero states about manliness (*virtus*), which is perfected reason (*Tusc.* 2.47-48):

A man must take care that it is this one which commands that other part of the soul, which should obey. "And how?" you will ask. Like a master [gives orders] to his slave or like a general to his soldier or a father to his son.

The separation of person and inner body (ii) that we observed in the various accounts of the *Scaevola-exemplum* thus reoccurs framed as a relation between a weaker and a stronger part of the person, with the stronger part clearly identified as reason or the rational mind. An impact on the body, or the weaker part, cannot impinge on a healthy, well-developed reason. Containing the bitings, burnings and hurts of the weaker part appears as self-control and provides reason with agency so that it can control others and the situation as well.

Just as a slave belongs to his master, not someone else, and a soldier may obey only his own general, and a son only his own father, the weaker part should follow the lead of the strong

⁵⁶ See, e.g., Pohlenz's commentary on the passage: "C. will Plato Rep. 430e wiedergeben [...]." Pohlenz also points to Panaetius as the source of Cic. *Off.* 1.101. The idea of progress and perfection of virtue is Stoic. Sceptical, as concerns the ascription of a dualist psychology to Panaetius is Prost 2002.

⁵⁷ See, e.g., Inwood 2007, 197 *ad loc.*

⁵⁸ Inwood 2007, p. 197.

part and not submit to the control of anyone else. The philosophers do not imagine the person in pain being split into a body shaken by its suffering while reason looks down on it, serene and unperturbed, from a higher sphere. The body is protected and stabilized too whenever reason is able to fully assume its natural role. It will harden the body through physical training (e.g. *Tusc.* 2.36) but also strengthen the weaker part of the mind together with the strong one's training and reasoning (*Tusc.* 2.41). Whether it is tension (τόνος) or a particularly tightly knit coherence that leads to "strength of mind" (*robur animi*), the perfectly rational mind not only becomes impenetrable itself, repelling the darts of Fortune from its surface; at least to a degree, it also communicates this impenetrability to the whole philosophically educated man.

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