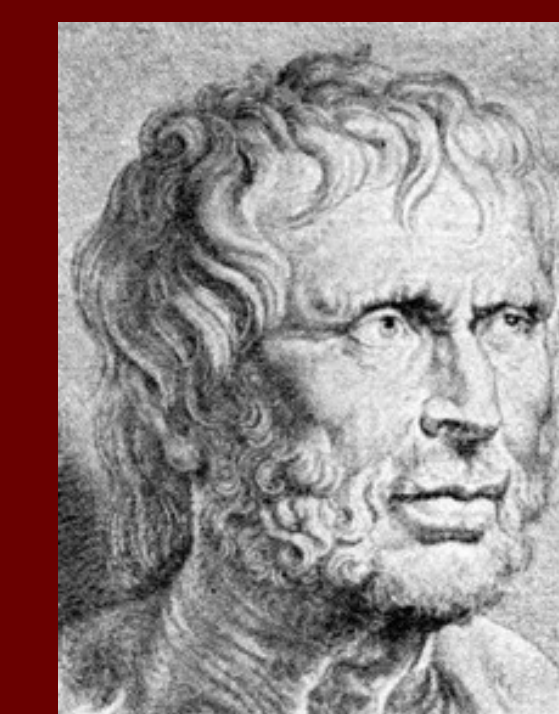


THE MISUSE OF POWER

Bradford G. Campion



Abstract

The present study is from my Honors 201: Interdisciplinary Studies course on a select piece of literature from Classical Rome. During my studies, I took an in-depth look at the life of Seneca, a Roman Stoic philosopher, statesman, dramatist. While reading one of Seneca's writings, "The Pumpkinification of Claudius" I crafted a thesis-driven analysis. Specifically, I discuss the principles of leadership and the misuse of power within large nations. Seneca's work helps provide a framework for expressing the importance of public perception and why public opinion matters so heavily. In a modern age, where a vast range of corruption and abuse takes place at the administration level, it is difficult to define and have just leadership. Throughout my research I attempt to tackle this dilemma and examine the two sides of power, while using "The Pumpkinification of Claudius" as an influential reference. Furthermore, I hope to prove in the process of my research that the meanings found in Classical Roman literature still contain relevance today.

Introduction

Leaders of nations are often found in the crossroads of using the role of power for the greater wellbeing of society or for personal benefit. The humility of one leader to put their people over themselves has proven to be successful in creating a productive, prospering state. On the other hand, corruption occurs with leaders that fall victim to the unlimited control and authority of the position. In Classical Roman history, there are examples of both of these leadership traits. Throughout my research I attempt to examine these two varying paths that Roman Emperors pursued and how their citizens perceived them to better understand leadership.

Seneca The Younger, a Roman stoic philosopher, statesmen and dramatist writes vicariously about the tales of one ruthless leader after his death. In the *Pumpkinification of Claudius*, also known as *Apocolocyntosis*, Seneca announces his overall irritation and frustration towards the Roman Emperors taking advantage of their hierarchal situation. Throughout this political and menippean satire, former Emperor Claudius (10 BC – 54 AD) attempts to achieve godhood in heaven (Atchity, 1997). Seneca portrays this journey as a desperate effort by a flawed, self-obsessed man. Additionally, Seneca uses Octavian Augustus to compare a masterful Roman leader to the flaws in Claudius' reign. In effort to fully understand Seneca's perspective of power, I looked into the context of the Julio-Claudians period and the acts of Roman Emperors like Claudius. My analysis of the *Pumpkinification of Claudius* is aimed at revealing the three major elements of the work: Seneca's motivation to write negatively about Claudius, the corruption and obsession of power by emperors, and lastly, the importance of the public's realistic perception of their ruler.

Materials and Methods

Why Seneca? Why Rome?

In my study, I limited myself to solely using only the written text by Seneca. The translated satire of "The Pumpkinification of Claudius" served as my only real means of research. In this light, I could truly draw focus to the text's literal meanings and its continued relevance today. My small cohort of three classmates also served as a feedback panel for me throughout the process.

The reason behind selecting Seneca the Younger and his specific work is because he offers a unique perspective on leadership. The famous Roman lived throughout the reigns of Augustus, Caligula, and Claudius in the early A.D.'s. All three of these emperors ruled the Roman Empire in vastly different ways. In a sense, Seneca had extensively witnessed the peaks and valleys of Roman leadership. Overall, Seneca's insight depicts the underlining principals of poor leadership and the affect of power.

Rome is still regarded as the largest empire or society to ever exist. The Roman state was immensely complex, filled with a variety of different people and territories over a vast amount of land. Moreover, Roman virtues were of moral strength to conquer and civilize the world. In order to run such a nation effective the leaders and administration must be overwhelmingly competent and reflect the highest virtues. In this case, Rome serves as the perfect model to interpret the factors that go into both leadership and power.



What would increased power and anxiety do to you?

Analysis and Discussion

Public's Perception:

The public's opinion of a leader is vitally important for the society's well being. Throughout my research I've learned that a ruler's true ideology isn't always in the best interest of the people, but that doesn't matter at times. As described by Seneca, Octavian Augustus was extremely egotistic, naming himself Caesar and taking power away from the senate. However, Augustus' actions as emperor to glorify Roman virtues and put the state first, in terms of public amenities is what was perceived by the people. On the other hand, Emperor Claudius was seen as weak because he had a noticeable limp and was terribly deaf. Furthermore, Claudius killed 35 Senators and 221 Roman knights, while also exiling many who threaten his power. This corruption and these killings by Claudius did not reflect the ideal Roman values found in their deep-rooted history, which in turn gave Claudius a negative perception. Whether leaders' views are skewed or not, it is to my understanding that it is essential for a leader to maintain a general public approval. If leaders are able to achieve that accomplishment, then generally the people of said nation will respect their decisions, and their legacy will be of a good ruler after death. Overall, poor or superb leadership is only validated in the eyes of the leader's people and how they truly perceive their ruler.

Only a Figurehead:

In regards to the Seneca's translated title, it's meant to represent that if Claudius were, in fact, a pumpkin, it wouldn't change anyone's opinions or lives other than Claudius'. In my studies, I discovered that citizens are often occupied by their daily life activities and tend to begin disregarding their leader's actions if they are not trusted. The leader of a nation must never become a useless figurehead as Claudius. The support of ones people, along with the utilization of a powerful position, such as that of an emperor, are key components for a rightful leader.

Self-Interest:

Octavian Augustus put the state and his duty before any personal rewards. This level of responsibility and accountability at such a powerful position is ideal for good leadership. I found the most common misuse of power is when an individual attempts to better themselves in status, money, or even gaining more power. Personal self interests often gets the best of people when control is given to them.

References

Atchity, K. (Ed.). (1997). *The classical roman reader*. New York, NY: Henry Holt

Seneca, L. (2003). *Apocolocyntosis*. (T. Garvin, B. Courtney, Trans.) . Salt Lake City, UT: Project Gutenberg. (Original work published 54 AD)