



# The Announcement: Tacitus' Dialogus De Oratoribus as the Prelude to His Annales

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The Announcement:

Tacitus' *Dialogus de Oratoribus* as the Prelude to His *Annales*

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A Thesis in the Field of Classical Civilizations

for the Degree of Master of Liberal Arts in Extension Studies

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## Abstract

This paper investigates the chronological, contextual, and literary placement of the *Dialogus de Oratoribus*, a work by the Roman historian Tacitus. The work is atypical for this author, and scholars tend to situate it amongst his earlier works, the *Agricola* and *Germania*, both written shortly after the death of the emperor Domitian in 96 CE. Why did Tacitus write a dialogue on the merits and decline of public oratory, deliberately modeled on Cicero, and give it a dramatic date of 75 CE, six years into the “happy” reign of the emperor Vespasian? What is the significance of the characters and their positions? Why does the debate end not only without resolution, but even with a flourish of contradictions?

This study uses the letters of Pliny the Younger to establish a call-and-response between the two authors and thereby establish a *terminus post quem* for the *Dialogus* of 108-109, or contemporary to Book 9 of Pliny’s *Epistulae*. Tacitus’ use of Ciceronian intertext, referents, and historical context helps to situate the *Dialogus* in theme and tone as closer to the mature disillusionment of the *Annales*.

The *Dialogus*’ character of Vipstanus Messalla not only acts as a bridge from Tacitus’ *Histories* to the *Dialogus*, but, more importantly, by his kinship with one of the most infamous delatores (imperial prosecutorial informants), Messalla acts as a bridge between the *Dialogus* and the *Annales*; both works share an atmosphere of menace and fear attendant upon acts of speech.

Lastly, this paper examines Tacitus' concern with his own literary placement and the *gloria* that only the written word can achieve. Does this glory come only with risking one's life to speak the truth? The trial of the historian Cremutius Cordus, in *Annales* 4, speaks to that concern, and the speech of Cremutius in the senate triggers a comparison with the historian's depiction in an early work by Annaeus Seneca, his *Consolatio ad Marciam*, a "letter" written to Cremutius' daughter. Seneca is a pivotal figure in the Neronian hexad of the *Annales*, and his name is strangely absent from the various catalogues of authors and orators in the *Dialogus*. Curiatius Maternus of the *Dialogus*, a tragedian, the man who announces that his *Thyestes* will say whatever his *Cato* has left out, acts as a metonym for tragedy and champion of the written word and thus connects the *Dialogus* to the *Annales* further. His literary relationship to Seneca, a tragedian and Stoic philosopher, tutor and victim of the emperor Nero, becomes increasingly clear and compelling if one examines *Annales* 14 as a tragedy with close parallels to the praetexta *Octavia* and Seneca's *Oedipus*.

A look at the suicide scenes and last words of Seneca, the poet Lucan (nephew of Seneca), the author Petronius, and Thrasea Paetus, the Stoic and biographer of Cato, will close the study. Throughout, a close look at diction, semantics, and other narratological devices will work to establish a strong connection between the *Dialogus* and the *Annales* and thus cement the *Dialogus*' placement as not only the penultimate work of Tacitus, but an announcement for his upcoming grand finale, the *Annales*.

‘Is it your opinion, Winston, that the past has real existence?’

— George Orwell, *1984*.

## Dedication

This paper is dedicated to all who speak truth to power, especially when Big Brother is watching.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Professor Richard F. Thomas for rekindling the student in me. His enthusiasm for sharing not only the joy but the relevance of the Roman authors continues to inspire me to try to do the same for my students. I would also like to thank, most belatedly, Professor Richard Tarrant for taking the time to read Tacitus with me as an undergraduate; while I recognized it as exceptional then, it was a privilege that I have come to appreciate more and more. And I cannot leave out two good friends, Professor Heather Cox Richardson and Jonathan M. Myers, for offering their unflagging support and editorial expertise. *Maximas vobis gratias ago.*



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## Chapter I

### Introduction

Walter Benjamin, Thesis IX

*Mein Flügel ist zum Schwung bereit,  
ich kehrte gern zurück,  
denn blieb ich auch lebendige Zeit,  
ich hätte wenig Glück.*

(My wing is ready for flight,  
I would like to turn back. If I stayed timeless time,  
I would have little luck.)

Gerhard Scholem, 'Gruss vom Angelus'

A Klee painting named 'Angelus Novus' shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing in from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such a violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Random House, 1968), 259-260.

Michel Foucault, in his essay, “What Is an Author?” asserts that an author’s name, once he has gained renown, no longer signifies the writer as a person, but his corpus and oeuvre, his written remains. To alter the corpus by addition or deletion, or to rearrange its member parts, to change the signified, does more to shake an author’s identity than the discovery of a pseudonym. But what if that person behind the corpus himself changes? Does his work not then reflect that change and therefore return the authorial name to its owner?

The name Tacitus over time has come to come to signify not just his corpus, but all that the word “Tacitean” embodies: sententious, elliptical, ironic, cynical, caustic, syntactically difficult and dense. His name serves as a byword for complexity and ambiguity, his difficulty inseparable from his appeal. Perhaps no other Latin author presents his reader with more dissonance and less assurance. But such were the times, and such were the *mores*. Though the term conjures a complexity of content and presentation, it too narrowly defines both man and corpus. A distance of nearly 2000 years can fossilize a process into a moment, a frieze into a metope. The Tacitus of the *Agricola*, written in 98 CE, the dawn of what he hoped was a new era, may have been the same person as the man who wrote the *Annales* twenty years later, but those twenty years changed the man and his writing. For scholars to read his previous espousal of *moderatio* — a self-justification of his own degree of implication under Domitian — into his final work is to deny him the growth that maturity and experience bring.

Disillusionment with the immutable flaws inherent in the imperial system radicalized Tacitus; it made him, a senator of considerable prestige, risk severe disfavor from a

new emperor by abandoning his long-trumpeted promise to write of the happy present and instead delving into the cankerous past of the Julio-Claudians. I believe that he did this to hold up a mirror, to deny that a good emperor can remain thus. I am not the first to propose that this work sets out to criticize the imperial system, but I believe also that he used his *Dialogus de Oratoribus*, his least “Tacitean” work, to announce his intentions. The general consensus among scholars is to place this work before the *Histories*, if not earlier. I intend, through an approach that combines historiography, rhetoric, and narratology, to demonstrate that the *Dialogus* belongs with the *Annales* as an exemplum of Tacitus at his most mature. As the *Dialogus*’ Maternus says:

Leges quid Maternus sibi debuerit, et adgnosces quae audisti. Quod si qua omisit Cato, sequenti recitatione Thyestes dicet. (*Dialogus* 3)

You will read what Maternus has owed to himself, and you will recognize what you have heard. But if the *Cato* has left anything out, the *Thyestes* will say it in my next recitation.

For four of Tacitus’ works, there is little dispute as to the date of their publication or their relative order. The *Agricola* and the *Germania* came shortly after the death of Domitian, during a time of heady promise reminiscent of the first days of Vespasian’s reign; criticism of Domitian was not only condoned, but expected. Tacitus mixed his encomium for his father-in-law with searing indictments of senatorial servility and frightening despotism, yet still he pointed to a brighter future under the new regime. The *Germania* was an exercise in ethnography, an idealized reflection on simpler times, focusing on a land and people known for its robust and unspoiled character.

No one knows the exact date for the publication of the *Histories* (much of it lost), which covers the period from the middle of the Year of Four Emperors to the death of Domitian, though there is general agreement that it came out in the first decade of the second century, under Trajan. Like the *Agricola*, the *Histories*, too, favors the current regime with praise and a promise to enshrine its weal in writing. The *Annales*, his true masterpiece on the Julio-Claudian period, was published close to the author's death ca. 120. By this time, the author knew better than to hope for history not to repeat itself. He knew as well that, though censorship may harm the writer, the writing itself endures.<sup>2</sup>

So where does this leave his fifth work, the *Dialogus de Oratoribus*? On the surface, it is nothing like any of his other works, neither in style nor in subject. As its title would indicate, the work follows a Ciceronian model. For that reason, it was long assumed to have been perhaps his earliest work, reflecting an author not yet secure in his own style. More recently, scholars have recognized the Ciceronian style as an aberration deliberately employed to fit the topic, and have thus looked elsewhere for clues as to its date. Two of the most prominent studies, one by C.E. Murgia and the other by Brink, closely examine the intertext with Pliny — perhaps too closely — and, though they are not in agreement (Murgia places it pre-*Agricola*, Brink just prior to Pliny's *Panegyricus*), both refuse to allow it to cross much beyond the threshold into the second century, dismissing biographical clues as somehow passé in the world of scholarship. Although Brink

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<sup>2</sup> Although Dylan Sailor, in *Writing and Empire* (2008) argues, particularly in Chapter 5, that Tacitus was plagued by anxiety as to whether his own work would last, I will argue otherwise in my discussion on Crematius Cordus.



acknowledges that the *tone* of a work provides insight into its relative placement,<sup>3</sup> to him tone must yield to intertext. I intend to argue otherwise.

Walter Benjamin tells us, in his “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” that “every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably” (Thesis V).<sup>4</sup> In the *Dialogus*, Tacitus chose orators from the relatively benign reign of Vespasian to give witness to the vitiating effects of the Principate itself, to voice his own disaffection, even in the relatively benign reign of Trajan. The oratory that is their craft becomes his tool, as it will be in his *Annales*; the *Dialogus* served as his warm-up. Having lived under Nero (as a boy) and Domitian, Tacitus chose to go back to the kernel of his discontent and its germination. In both works, Tacitus used the past, going back as far as the rise of Augustus (and the death of Cicero) to make precisely Benjamin’s point. Or, as Faulkner’s Quentin Compson says, sitting in his *cubiculum* at Harvard, “The past isn’t dead. It isn’t even past!”

To situate the *Dialogus* any earlier than post- or perhaps during *Histories* is to ignore the progressive disillusionment of the author and its impact on his writing. To divorce the work from its subversive voice is to devalue it. Stylistically and thematically, in content and tone, the *Dialogus* belongs with the *Annales*.

## Background

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<sup>3</sup> Charles O. Brink, “Can Tacitus’ *Dialogus* Be Dated? Evidence and Historical Conclusions,” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 96 (1994): 268.

<sup>4</sup> Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 255. His Thesis VI is also *apropos*, and uses language Tacitus would appreciate: “To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it ‘the way it really was’ (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a *memory as it flashes* up at a moment of danger. ... The danger concerns both the content of the tradition and its receivers. The same threat hangs over both: that of becoming a tool of the ruling classes. In every area the attempt made must be made anew to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it. ... Only that historian will have the gift of *fanning the spark* of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he wins. And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious.”

Gaius (or Publius) Cornelius Tacitus was born ca. 55 CE, probably in what is now southern France. Midway through the reign of Domitian, he achieved the office of Praetor and helped to organize the Secular Games in 88 as a *quindecimvir sacris faciundis*. By the time Tacitus wrote the *Agricola*, Rome was coming out from under the pervasive fear generated by Domitian, last of the Flavian emperors. Tacitus wrote not only to bring honor to his late father-in-law, who had been denied recognition and possibly persecuted under Domitian, but also to validate his own course of *moderatio* under the despot.

With Domitian's death, it was now safe to condemn Domitian openly, and Tacitus roundly did so. Turning on a defunct and reviled emperor was not an uncommon way to ingratiate oneself to his successor, especially when that successor had enacted a *damnatio memoriae* of his predecessor. But Tacitus had risen and prospered under Domitian's favor: it is likely that it was Domitian who, prior to his assassination, had appointed Tacitus suffect consul for the year 97. Tacitus had had to walk the line between being compliant and being complicit. Thus, in his *Agricola*, Tacitus used the example of his father-in-law, Gn. Iulius Agricola, to communicate that it was not only possible, but also preferable to serve under an oppressive regime honorably than to expose oneself to persecution due to excessive and reckless *libertas*, or outspokenness. This is far removed from the Tacitus who wrote the *Annales* nearly twenty years later.

The new emperor, Nerva (r. 96-98), had been chosen by the senate immediately upon Domitian's assassination, and Tacitus had reason to hope he would inaugurate a new era in which the empire would be governed by just and able rulers, those Tacitus deemed *capax imperi* (amply able to rule). Nerva broke the tradition of dynastic succession, and the senate embraced the aged (sixty-five), childless Princeps, both because and

in spite of his years of service under the emperors from Nero through Domitian. Recognizing that the Roman army had been staunchly loyal to Domitian, Nerva adopted Trajan, a province-born and highly successful general, as heir to ensure the cooperation of the military and a smooth succession. Though not the senate's choice, Trajan seemed a both logical and capable selection.

Tacitus continued to advance in his career while writing his first two monographs. After he served as suffect consul under Nerva, in 97, we have a few glimpses of his public life. He gave the funeral oration of a prominent Roman senator and war hero (also in 97), he, together with Pliny the Younger, prosecuted a corrupt provincial governor in 100. He gained prestige and renown for his oratory, according to Pliny's letters. He asked Pliny for his eye-witness accounts of the eruption of Vesuvius for his own *Histories*, which Pliny predicted would bring him eternal fame:

Auguror nec me fallit augurium, historias tuas immortales futuras; quo magis illis — ingenue fatebor — inseri cupio. Nam si esse nobis curae solet ut facies nostra ab optimo quoque artifice exprimatur, nonne debemus optare, ut operibus nostris similis tui scriptor praedicatorque contingat? Demonstratio ergo quamquam tuam fugere non possit, cum sit in publicis actis, demonstro tamen quo magis credas, iucundum mihi futurum si factum meum, cuius gratia periculo crevit, tuo ingenio tuo testimonio ornaveris. (*Epistulae* 7.33.1)

I predict — nor does my prediction fail me — that your histories will be immortal; because of which — I confess openly — I all the more desire to be inserted in them. For if we are accustomed to take care to see that our face is etched out by the best artist, then should we not also choose that a writer and publisher like you put his touches on our works? Therefore I am pointing out to you — although it can not have escaped your keen attention, since it *is* in the public records, nonetheless I point it out that you may more believe how pleasurable it will be to me if you bedeck my deed, which due to its attendant danger has grown, with your

talent and your testimony.

Trajan appointed Tacitus governor of Asia, the most prestigious of such appointments, for 112-113, several years after he had published his *Histories*. Tacitus remained a prominent orator and public figure, an insider. We do not have many references to his public appearances, but those we do have attest to his rank and recognition, and Pliny's assiduous efforts to remain connected to him give further testimony to Tacitus' standing (as they do to the gap between the two men in intellectual ability).

While writing the *Histories*, Tacitus had to examine closely not only the chaotic "year of four emperors," but also the course of events during the reigns of the three Flavians. Vespasian generally gets high marks from historians, but closer inspection uncovers less sanguine aspects of his rule, including brutal censorship and a pattern of volatile favoritism. The fact that even Vespasian's once-promising dynasty ended with a despot like Domitian may have prompted Tacitus to question his belief that what Rome needed was a good emperor and that such could be reliably found. Perhaps the fault lay within the model of principate. By the time Tacitus had completed the *Histories*, Trajan was fully entrenched in his position and devoted most of his energies to a massive building program (Trajan's Forum, Trajan's baths, etc.) and costly military campaigns, such as the two in Dacia. The Princeps removed two more provinces from senatorial control. The senate, now irretrievably enfeebled, was also not up to the task of taking power back and governing effectively. There was no palatable solution that might lead to a balance of power. Tacitus went back on his promise to write of the "happy" present and instead

looked further back to the genesis of the flawed system, the early years of the Principate. The flaws were intrinsic to and intertwined with the Principate itself. Tiberius or Vespasian or Trajan — it made no difference.

It is no accident that Tacitus sets the dramatic date for the *Dialogus* at 75 CE, six years into the reign of Vespasian and in the midst of an off-stage battle in the senate between two of the historical figures mentioned in the *Dialogus* — a battle recorded in detail by Tacitus in his *Histories*. The references, both to the year and the confrontation, function both proleptically and analeptically: the audience knows the eventual outcome for both parties and knows it, in part, because of the author's account in his *Histories*; both parties came to grief by falling out of favor with the Princeps.

The *Dialogus* sets the stage for the *Annales*. Not only does it presage the writing of a tragedy, but the work can be read as a literary history;<sup>5</sup> its overt debt to Cicero's *de Oratore*, *Orator*, and *Brutus* brings to mind what Cicero wrote about *eloquentia* and the historian, especially in the first work. The Greeks and Romans considered history a branch of literature, not a social science. Although the *Dialogus* does not discuss history *per se*, it does put forth a history of both rhetoric and literature; it discusses rhetoric in the context of the conflict between the contemporary *utilitas* of oratory vs. the enduring *gloria* of literature. It also presents, as a given, that the primary function of rhetoric, the power to persuade, no longer mattered in the senate, since the senate had lost its primary function as a deliberative body. These are truths of central importance in the *Annales*, more so than in his previous works. Tacitus, through his *Dialogus*, was announcing that

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<sup>5</sup> David S. Levene, "Tacitus' *Dialogus* as Literary History," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 134.1 (2004): 157-200.

he realized the best and most far-reaching use of his considerable *eloquentia* was to persuade with his pen, to write history. He accomplished this not only through the central character of Curiatius Maternus, orator-turned-tragedian, but also through the presentation and discussion of literary context.

As Marcus Antonius Orator says in *De Oratore*:

videtisne, *quantum munus* sit oratoris historia? Haud scio an flumine orationis et varietate maximum; neque eam reperio usquam separatim instructam rhetorum praeceptis; sita sunt enim ante oculos. Nam quis nescit primam esse historiae legem, ne quid falsi dicere audeat? Deinde ne quid veri non audeat? Ne quae suspicio gratiae sit in scribendo? Ne quae simultatis? Haec scilicet fundamenta nota sunt omnibus, ipsa autem ex aedificatio posita est *in rebus et verbis*... Vult etiam ...de consiliis significari quid scriptor probet et in rebus gestis declarari non solum quid actum aut dictum sit, sed etiam quo modo. (*De Oratore* 2.62-64)

Do you not see how much history is the duty of an orator? I hardly know whether the flow or variety of the speech is greatest; nor do I ever find it taught separately in the precepts of rhetoricians — for they are always placed before our eyes. Who does not know that it is the first law of history that one dare not say something false? The next that one not dare *not* say what is true? That there not be any suspicion of influence or favor in the writing? Or of any grudge? These are the foundations known to all; moreover, its very structure has been placed on both the affairs and words ... [History] wants also that it be signified, with regard to designs, what the writer approves, and that it be made clear, with regard to deeds, not only what was done or said, but even how.

As Tacitus, in a digression near the end of Book 3 of the *Annales*, states:

*praecipuum munus* annalium reor ne virtutes sileantur utque pravis dictis factisque ex posteritate et infamia metus sit. (*Ann.* 3.65)

The chief task of these annals, I think, is that *virtutes* not be silenced and that infamy amongst posterity be a deterrent from wicked deeds and words.

Tacitus found, after writing the *Agricola* and the *Histories*, that the best way to accomplish this lay in Marcus Antonius' second precept: that he *not dare not* to say what was true. The art was in the presentation of that truth, and that went far beyond chronicling *facta*. He focused his *studium* on portraying the *natura* of the agents of the *acta*, the *facta*, the *res gestae*, and through his ability to turn these agents into actants, he laid bare the real truth about his own times.

When Tacitus wrote, as part of his *discursus* on history just before the trial of the historian Cremutius Cordus:

utque familiae ipsae iam extinctae sint, reperies qui ob similitudinem morum aliena malefacta sibi obiectari putent. etiam gloria ac virtus infensos habet, ut nimis ex propinquo diversa arguens. (Ann. 4.33)

And so, even though it may be that the families themselves are now extinct, *you* will find those who, on account of the similarities of character, think that the evil deeds of others are being hurled at themselves; even glory and *virtus* have enemies, as presenting contrasts at too close a range.

he intended for us to recognize ourselves in the “you” in “you will find.” He was directing us, too, to note both the similarities and the contrasts with the *res et verba* of his own day and to alert future generations to the potential for more of the same. This is the *munus* of his repurposed *eloquentia*.

In the *Annales*, through conceits that pointed to a fictionality, the author made truths more permanent. The annalistic format, the usually — but not always — prosaic accounts of foreign affairs and domestic food supply serve as both cover and punctuation in a timeless drama, a tragedy.<sup>6</sup> The sets he constructs — from bedrooms (*passim*), to a

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<sup>6</sup> For an excellent discussion of the *Annales* as tragedy, see Francesca Santoro L’Hoir, *Tragedy, Rhetoric, and the Historiography of Tacitus’ Annales* (Ann Arbor, 2006). Specific citations will follow.

bone-strewn, ghastly swamp scene in the Teutoberger Forest (1.61), to a carnivalesque distortion of nature for a party devoted to most unnatural behavior (15.57) — place the reader in the audience as spectator, not just witness. He directs dramatic scenes: funeral processions (*passim*), a general facing down his mutinous troops (1.34-35), poison-laden banquets (*passim*), “staged” ship-wrecks (14.5), scenes in the senate chamber at once farcical and menacing (*passim*), a pupil betraying his master by beating him at his own game (14.55), a *vir militaris* boldly, unequivocally, and uniquely calling out his commander (15.57), the Princeps himself on a literal stage (13-14, *passim*), and all those suicide scenes ... of authors.

Tacitus revels in foils and contrasts: Agrippina *Maior Minorque* (Tacitus even tells us that one of his sources concerning the elder’s death was the daughter’s memoirs<sup>7</sup> — another instance of *prolepsis*), Octavia and Poppaea, Seneca and Burrus, Thrasea Pae-tus and Petronius. a disguised Germanicus vs. a disguised Nero. And all act as *personae* in a tragedy. Then there are the self-consciously literary devices — the intermittent reminders of the narrator’s direct relationship with his audience, the semantic threads, shifts, and feints, the letters, the speeches, the dialogue that alternates between direct and indirect discourse. Indirect discourse has always allowed an author a great deal of discretion and subjective rewording; in the *Annales* Tacitus increasingly employs direct speech to liberate himself further from convention. To quote Andrew Laird:

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<sup>7</sup> Tacitus, *Annales* 4.53, “At Agrippina pervicax irae et morbo corporis implicata, cum viseret eam Caesar, profusis diu ac per silentium lacrimis, mox invidiam et preces orditur: subveniret solitudini, daret maritum; habilem adhuc inventam sibi neque aliud probis quam ex matrimonio solacium; esse in civitate, \* \* \* Germanici coniugem ac liberos eius recipere dignarentur. sed Caesar non ignarus quantum ex re publica peteretur, ne tamen offensionis aut metus manifestus foret sine responso quamquam instantem reliquit. id ego, a scriptoribus annalium non traditum, repperi in commentariis Agrippinae filiae quae Neronis principis mater vitam suam et casus suorum posteris memoravit.”



When direct discourse is used, the time it takes to recount that speech on the narrative plane appears to become synchronized with the actual time it would take for that speech to be uttered in the world of the story.... A voice other than the narrator's appears to take over and to confront us directly with the world of the story, and sometimes even to put us in it.<sup>8</sup>

The very choice to alternate between direct and indirect allows the reader to recognize the author behind the narrator, manipulating the action from behind the scene. Tacitus also not infrequently chooses "mimetic" indirect discourse, a ruse that gives the effect of direct, the same convergence of time frame, but not *quite* the same shift in focalization: the reader is conscious of the narrator as author. These shifts in discourse from indirect to direct to mimetic all "entail a change of what the story means to its audience — not least where its ethical effects are concerned."<sup>9</sup> This is *inventio* at its finest; by the end of the *Annales*, we know the Julio-Claudians. We can look back and compare them to the House of Atreus; we can look forward to *principes* to come. We have seen them cannibalize themselves, ignoring the chorus. As Plato says, "Isn't everything that is said by storytellers or poets a narrative of past or present or future?"<sup>10</sup>

When looking at the *Annales* as a literary departure from his previous two historical works, when viewing it as a tragedy, the *Dialogus* comes into focus as its launchpad. It presents as a Ciceronian dialogue, but one that both expounds and inverts the precepts of its model. Tacitus thereby alerts his audience to his ruse. The contradictions and lack of resolution force us to examine the characters and their words more closely, to review

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<sup>8</sup> Andrew Laird, *Powers of Expression, Expressions of Power: Speech Presentation in Latin Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1999), 90.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* 57

<sup>10</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 392 d2

and re-read not so much to see which argument prevails, but to question the underlying reasons for the inconsistencies. Was it really about the decline of oratory? Was it about the relative merits of oratory vs. literature? Why does the topic change when Messalla enters? What purpose did the literary history serve? Is it the need for exercising one's *eloquentia* through oratory that has diminished under the Principate, or is it the ability to do so without risk? Is it about the perils of both authorship and censorship?

When key concept-words like *libertas* have shifted their meanings from virtue to vice (from “liberty” to “license”), when *virtus* itself, that bulwark of the Republic, has been replaced by servile *pietas*, Tacitus could best fight back as an author by exposing one fiction — meretricious verbiage — through the truth of another fiction, the honest fiction of literature.<sup>11</sup> He learned that the way *not* to leave the truth *unsaid* was to present it with the verisimilitude of fiction. What Hayden White wrote, regarding the distinction between history and fiction, squares nicely with Tacitus' approach:

[It is] based on the presumption of ontological differences between their respective referents, real and imaginary, in favor of stressing their common aspect as semiological apparatuses that produce meanings by the systematic substitution of signifieds (conceptual contents) for the extra-discursive entities that serve as their referents. In these semiological theories of discourse, narrative is revealed to be a particularly effective system of discursive meaning production by which individuals can be taught to live a distinctively “imaginary relation to their real conditions of existence.”

To conceive of narrative discourse in this way permits us to account for its universality as a cultural fact and for the interest that dominant social

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<sup>11</sup> My definitions and discussion of the concept-words *libertas*, *virtus*, and *pietas* can be found in the appendix. In general, Emperors from Augustus onward sought to vitiate the resonance of words dear to the Republic, to de-fang the “*libertas!*” shouted by Brutus and the other conspirators as they burst out of the Theater of Pompey. *Pietas* itself leaves the household shrine to serve the Emperor as inseparable from the trinity of gods, family, and Rome.

groups have not only in controlling what will pass for the authoritative myths of a given cultural formation but also in assuring the belief that social reality itself can be both lived and realistically comprehended as a story.<sup>12</sup>

The *Agricola* and the *Histories* have their literary aspects, too: descriptions, digressions, and speeches, but they tend to follow the path prescribed by Cicero and others for historical writing, set pieces à la Livy. The *Dialogus* served as his entry into a new fictional mode where speech moves action, generates consecution, and characters function as vehicles more than historical figures. The setting, Maternus' *cubiculum* (bedroom), is a deliberate departure from Cicero's outdoor garden into an interior, confined setting. The Ciceronian intertext enhances the menace, thanks to the reader's familiarity not only with the fates of the characters in both dialogues (this and *De Oratore*), but also that of Cicero himself.

The characters within the *Dialogus*, as in the dialogues of Cicero and Plato, are historical figures selected for their contextual significance, but they also can be seen as actants for Tacitus and as embodying a single metonym for multivalency. In brief:<sup>13</sup>

- Tacitus' move backwards in time from his *Histories* to the *Annales*, from the Flavians to the Julio-Claudians, mirrors that of the character of Maternus, who turns from his *Cato* to write a *Thyestes*. He may also have been the author of the *Octavia*, a work that bears a striking resemblance to *Annales* 14 and shares with that book intertext with Seneca's *Oedipus*.<sup>14</sup> He may act as a metonym for Seneca, a key player

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<sup>12</sup> Hayden White, introduction to *The Content of the Form* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins 1987), x.

<sup>13</sup> Details to come in following sections.

<sup>14</sup> Harold Mattingly, "The Domitius of Curiatius Maternus," *The Classical Review* 9.2 (1959):106.

in the Neronian Books. Maternus' first speech defends the *gloria* and *voluptas* of poetry and condemns, in politically inflammatory language, the *lucrosa sanguinitas* ("wealth-soaked bloodiness") of current oratory; his second speech offers an about-face as he praises the current, calm reign of one and its consequent lack of need for the weaponry of oratory. The arrival of Messalla triggers his move to *dissimulatio*, a key theme of the *Annales*.

- The character of Aper defends the *utilitas*, *gloria*, and *iucunditas* of contemporary oratory against both poetry and the *rubigine infectum* ("rust-impaired") older style with poetic eloquence that belies his devil's advocacy. He also serves both to pinpoint and to universalize the time-frame: he uses two reviled *delatores* (informant/prosecutors) as exemplars of the power and benefits of modern-day *eloquentia*, and he refers to an ongoing clash between one of them, Eprius Marcellus, and the Stoic Helvidius Priscus. Not only was this a battle, as mentioned above, that Tacitus detailed in *Histories* 4, but Helvidius Priscus himself figures importantly in other ways: he connects us to the Stoic Thrasea Paeta, his father-in-law, a major character in the Neronian books of the *Annales*. Eprius Marcellus was one of two *delatores* who denounced Thrasea Paetus and Helvidius Priscus in the senate (*Annales* 16), sealing the fate of the former and sending the latter into exile, providing us with a prequel to the events in *Histories* 4. Eprius Marcellus succeeds in getting Helvidius Priscus exiled and executed, only to suffer the same fate himself, under the same emperor. Also, the younger Helvidius Priscus was a good friend of both Tacitus and Pliny; *he* is con-

demned to death under Domitian, and posthumously denounced by Aquilius Regulus, the half-brother of Messalla.<sup>15</sup> Plus ça change.

- Vipstanus Messalla, the third debater, who enters mid-way through and changes the direction of the debate, represents, through his kinship with another one of the most notorious *delatores* of the day, the the pervasive menace and danger of exercising *libertas* in a principate;<sup>16</sup> he is also the only one present who has a role in the *Histories*, where he defends that same *delator* in the senate. That episode, in turn, becomes a trigger to a reprise of the fight between Eprius Marcellus and Helvidius Priscus towards the close of *Histories* 4.

### Tone

In terms of tone, both the *Dialogus* and the *Annales* employ irony to a far greater extent than his other three works. They are both works of complete disillusionment. The effects of working on his *Histories* and the unpromising transition from Trajan to Hadrian combined to shatter any hope of an imperial government where the senatorial class would be more than ornamental. Tacitus no longer had reason to hope that a senator would be liberated from a choice between servility and persecution. He desired to be neither complicit nor compliant, but he also realized that the only mode of dissidence with lasting value was his writing. An author dies, but his authority outlasts his context. As the interlocutors in the *Dialogus* debate the merits of those in their cannon, as one author after

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<sup>15</sup> Regulus also successfully prosecuted the Stoic Arulenus Rusticus, friend and biographer of Thræsea, and present at his final council in *Annales* 16.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Strunk, ““Offending the Powerful: Tacitus’ *Dialogus de Oratoribus* and Safe Criticism,” *Mnemosyne* 63 (2010): 241-67.

another must commit suicide in the *Annales*, the audience can juxtapose the names of authors with the names of emperors and judge for themselves their relative weights in both reputation and lasting fame. Augustus had published his *Res Gestae* on bronze tablets placed throughout the empire, but Tacitus could quote Horace, dead since 8 BCE, “Exegi monumentum aere perennius.”<sup>17</sup>

At the end of the opening paragraph of his *Histories*, Tacitus had promised to write next about the current, happier time:

quod si vita suppetet, *principatum* divi Nervae et *imperium* Traiani, uberioriorem securioremque materiam, senectuti seposui, *rara* temporum felicitate ubi sentire uae velis et quae sentias dicere licet. (*Histories* 1.1)

But if my life suffices, I will reserve for my old age the principate of the divine Nerva and the rule of Trajan, richer and safer material of exceptional happiness of times when it is permitted to feel what you wish and say what you feel.

By the time Tacitus wrote the *Annales*, he didn’t even pretend to hold out such a promise. The difference between Nerva and Trajan, between *principatum* and *imperium*, the very *raritas* of temporal felicity presaged ill. Though he must mask his authorial intent, it was time for him to write his *Thyestes*.

I propose Tacitus went back in time to speak the truth about the present. It was a deliberate and provocative signal that it was not a time, as he had claimed in the prologue to his *Histories*, when it was “safe to feel what you wish and say what you feel.” The ironies and lack of resolution in the *Dialogus* indicate that the imperial system itself was corrupt, that even an emperor who is *sapientissimus et unus* (*Dialogus* 41) was above all

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<sup>17</sup> Horace, *Odes* III.30.

*unus*.<sup>18</sup> Tacitus may have held out hope under Nerva that the adoptive succession would provide the solution to the ills of dynastic succession, but by the end of Trajan's reign, with Hadrian taking over under dubious circumstances, even that hope was had been bankrupted. The senate had become an echo chamber, where the only voice heard was that of the princeps, even if it came from the mouths of senators.

Although the Neronian books of the *Annales*, particularly Books 4 and 14, will receive my closest attention, I will also draw upon key sections of several of the other books to tie the *Dialogus* to Tacitus' final *opus*. I will use selected close readings from the Tiberian hexad to highlight the author's literary concern with his characters' psychology, his unmasking of dissimulation, and his stance on the immortality of the written word vs. the ephemerality of propaganda and censorship. The opening of the extant portion of Book XI connects to the *Dialogus* in several ways, amongst them by introducing Nero (as an ephebe in a performance of *Troy*) as Domitius and playing with the assonance between Domitius and Domitian. I will use a few of the extant speeches in his *Histories* to highlight the shift in the purpose of direct discourse and rhetoric in the *Annales*.

I will be discussing other Roman authors, both those Tacitus uses as characters in these two works and those whom he emulates: the historians — Livy, Sallust, and Cremutius Cordus, Cicero, Seneca, Lucan, and Petronius. Pliny the Younger, too, has a role to play: not only was he Tacitus' friend and pen-pal, but his letters provide valuable political and historical context. His letters and the *Panegyricus* may also have been the butt of Tacitus' mordant wit in both the *Dialogus* and the *Annales*.

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<sup>18</sup> "Wisest and one."

### Seneca and Tragedy

Seneca in particular, as Stoic philosopher, tragedian, and ultimate insider (he was Nero's tutor and adviser), merits close examination. He is one of the central figures in the Neronian books, his rise and fall threaded throughout. He is morally ambiguous. He and Nero have the only paired speeches in direct discourse outside of the *Dialogus*. His suicide scene in the *Annales* provides a testament not only to the chilling realities of losing imperial favor, but also to the immortality of the written word.

The *Annales* reads like a series of tragedies, as each Princeps, in turn, succumbs to his inner demons. Tacitus spends far more time than in his earlier works on psychological portraits of the characters, and the role of speeches is to move the plot forward.<sup>19</sup> There is more direct discourse than in the *Histories*. The women are multi-dimensional and often nefarious. Many scenes seem "staged," in interior, domestic settings. The tragedian Seneca is himself a character in this drama, and Book 14 of the *Annales* mirrors the tragedy *Octavia*, a tragedy in which Seneca plays a large role and which has significant intertext with Seneca's tragedy *Oedipus* — intertext shared with Book 14.

The *Dialogus*, set midway through Vespasian's reign, centers on the orator/tragedian Maternus, who has written a politically dangerous tragedy on the Republican hero Cato. (He may also have been the author of the *Octavia* — more on that to follow.) His friends, also orators, come to urge him to scrap or at least temper his *Cato*, to make it less offensive to the emperor and his henchmen. Maternus announces that he is retiring from

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public speaking to pursue poetry, specifically tragedy, and that his next tragedy is already in the works — a *Thyestes*. Anyone who knows the history of the Julio-Claudians knows the parallels between that dynasty and the House of Atreus, but, more importantly, the play was seen as emphatically anti-imperialist.<sup>20</sup> Thrasea Paetus wrote a biography of *Cato*, Seneca a *Thyestes*. The forced suicides of both men are prominently scripted into the Neronian books of the *Annales*.

Seneca, along with Stoic martyr Thrasea Paetus, gets no mention whatsoever in the *Dialogus*. Tacitus relies upon his audience to hear Seneca shouting in the vacuum. The following excerpt from Book III of the *Annales* gives an indication of the role of the unsaid in Tacitus:

Et Iunia sexagesimo quarto post Philippensem aciem anno supremum diem explevit, Catone avunculo genita, C. Cassii uxor, M. Bruti soro. Testamentum eius multo apud vulgum rumore fuit, quia in magnis opibus cum ferme cunctos proceres cum honore nominavisset Caesarem omisit. quod civiliter acceptum neque prohibuit quo minus laudatione pro rostris ceterisque sollemnibus funus cohonestaretur. viginti clarissimarum familiarum imagines antelatae sunt, Manlii, Quinctii, aliaque eiusdem nobilitatis nomina. sed praefulgebant Cassius atque Brutus eo ipso quod effigies eorum non visebantur. (*Annales* III.76)

And Junia, in the sixty-fourth year after the Battle of Philippi, lived out her last day, born with Cato as her uncle, the wife of Gaius Cassius [Longinus], the sister of Marcus [Iunius] Brutus. Her will was the subject of much gossip among the masses, because, with all her great wealth, although she had named almost all of leading citizens with honor, she had left out Caesar [Tiberius]. Which he, in turn, accepted affably [lit: as becomes a citizen], nor did he prevent a proper funeral by which she would be honored with a panegyric before the rostra and all of the other solemnities. Twenty *imagines* of the most distinguished families were carried in front [of the procession], the Marii, the Quinctii, and other names of the

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<sup>20</sup> A. J. Boyle, *Roman Tragedy* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 233.

same noble rank. But Cassius and Brutus outshone them all by the very fact that their images were not seen.

(Tacitus uses this scene to close Book III. Book IV, the book that contains the death of Agrippina the Elder and trial of the historian Cremutius Cordus, is seen by most Tacitean scholars as the most pivotal in the Tiberian hexad.)

Both men may be conspicuously absent in the *Dialogus*' debates, but their fates hang over the discussion through more than the fact that Seneca penned a *Thyestes* and Thræsea a life of Cato: there is also professed danger to Maternus and the menace to be inferred from the references to two infamous *delatores* as exempla and the literal presence of the stepbrother of another. The fact that Tacitus chose a dramatic date some 30 years in the past ensured that his audience knew the fates of all parties. The way Tacitus stages the *Dialogus*, the interiority of it, combined with Maternus' reckless decision to write tragedies, specifically a *Cato* to be followed by a *Thyestes*, points to the staging of the *Annales* as a tragedy: the Julio-Claudians give the House of Atreus more than a run for its money. The *Histories* can be seen as the *Cato*: risky but no *Thyestes*.

The dramatic date of the *Dialogus*, 75 CE, falls during the "happy" time of Vespasian, just as Tacitus' earlier works fell in the brief but promising *principatum* of Nerva and early in Trajan's *imperium*. The unstated obvious is that Domitian followed Vespasian and Titus. Hadrian followed Nerva and Trajan. Our view of Hadrian tends to overlook his dubious, inauspicious ascendancy and ruthless elimination of the four consulars at the start of his reign. Vespasian had felt the need to eliminate rivals, and throughout his reign there were instances similar to when he sentenced the senator and Stoic philosopher

Helvidius Priscus to death for his outspokenness in the year 75. Both works rely upon an audience that would have the benefit of foreknowledge of past events.

Not only the function of rhetoric itself, but also the reversals, contradictions, and doublespeak within the *Dialogus* find purchase in Tiberius' duplicity and dissembling (Books I-VI), the menace and hypocrisy of Nero's Senecan *clementia*, and the author's own use of polysemous vocabulary and wordplay throughout the *Annales*. Tacitus' reliance on antithetical epigrams to expose the hijacking and inversion of language and morals mirrors the antithetical format of a Platonic/Ciceronian dialogue. The *Dialogus* served as a warm-up as well as an announcement.

## Chapter II

### Pliny and the Argument against an Early Date

#### General Overview

The general consensus amongst scholars has been that the *Dialogus* belongs with the earlier works of Tacitus' oeuvre. This consensus has been arrived at largely by examining the younger Pliny's *Panegyricus* and his correspondence with the historian for clues. In this chapter, I hope to prove that previous scholarship has examined these texts too closely and therefore suffers from myopia. If one pans out from the examined text to view both the textual and historical context, not to mention the relative talent of the two men, an entirely different view emerges.

#### A Bit about the *Dialogus*

Why did Tacitus write the *Dialogus*, different as it is from his other prose works? The pretext is a literary commonplace, an answer to a request. Fabius Justus, consul suffectus in 102 (a position Tacitus had held in 97), has asked Tacitus (*saepe me requiris*. 1.1) why the current age is *deserta* and *orbata* of outstanding orators and oratory. Tacitus, in response, vividly "recalls" a contentious debate held amongst the oratorical masters of his youth — the *ingenia tum celeberrima fori nostri*: one Curiatius Maternus and Tacitus' own mentors, Marcus Aper and Iulius Secundus.

This debate, held in the home of Maternus, first weighs the merits of oratory vs. poetry, and then proceeds as to the causes of oratory's decline. Aper presents the case for

the supremacy of oratory, and the obligation upon the able to practice it for the public good. Maternus defends poetry and assails the practitioners of *delatio*. A newcomer arrives, the orator Vipstanus Messalla, and the direction changes. Messalla and Aper argue the old versus new styles of oratory, and Messalla expounds on the causes of the decline. Maternus ends by claiming that the glory days of oratory belonged to the chaos of the Late Republic, and were superfluous during these halcyon days of Vespasian. Tacitus is a mute witness, *admodum iuvenis*, while Secundus serves as a facilitator. Though the reader begins with the general sense that Tacitus is of one mind with Fabius Justus, the *Dialogus* provides more contradictions than conclusions. But, throughout, it serves up a great deal of substance in terms of literary criticism and the connection between literature and its political setting. The work abounds not only with literary allusions, but also with humor, sardonic on the surface, ironic when examined more closely.

#### Previous Scholarship Regarding the Date of the *Dialogus*

Much Tacitean scholarship stands on the shoulders of Ronald Syme; his 1958 work, *Tacitus*, shows up in every bibliography, and is cited multiple times. Syme places the *Dialogus* before the *Histories*, after Tacitus' final prosecution with Pliny against Marius Priscus in CE 100. However, Syme also considers the possibility that treating the time period and figures of his youth prompted Tacitus to write the *Dialogus* in response:

When Tacitus ... came to narrate the reign of Vespasian (*Hist.* IV-VI) he was back among the scenes and friends of his youth... Above all, the great orators and ministers of state, Eprius Marcellus and Vibius Crispus, shar-

pened the contrast with the speakers in the early years of Trajan and with the present condition of public eloquence. The *Dialogus* can perhaps be regarded as a by-product of the *Histories*.<sup>21</sup>

I find this possibility more of a probability. By focusing on tone, characterization, and thematic content, I intend to demonstrate that this work reflects an author whose skepticism has fully ripened into irony, whose disdain is tempered by detachment. The Tacitus of the *Dialogus* is the Tacitus of the *Annales*.

C.O. Brink, in his article “Can Tacitus’ *Dialogus* Be Dated? Evidence and Historical Conclusions” (1994), claims that Tacitus composed the *Dialogus* near the turn of the century, prior to Pliny’s delivery of his *Panegyricus* to Trajan. He concedes, both up front and in conclusion, that making any claim is necessarily speculative, considering the quality and quantity of what must suffice for evidence.<sup>22</sup> In the course of his argument, he discusses C.E. Murgia’s (1980) assertion of an earlier date (under Nerva, possibly pre-*Agricola*), based on phraseological parallels between Tacitus and Pliny, Tacitus and Cicero; he contends that Murgia’s evidence of textual allusiveness is not compelling:

I have sought to argue that he [Murgia] overestimated the evidential value of similarities in vocabulary and phrasing — parallels rather than direct influences. It is my impression that he has pressed unduly hard a few passages which would be unlikely to carry the intended load even in a modern literature ...<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Ronald Syme, *Tacitus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958), 672-673, as found in Brink, “Date,” 269 n. 52.

<sup>22</sup> Brink, “Date,” 251: “The evidence for dating Tacitus’ writings is disconcertingly weak, and weakest of all for the *Dialogus de oratoribus*.” See also n. 32, p. 264: “In ancient literatures, where preservation is notoriously fragmentary, the evidence is always in danger of being too small,” p. 274, “Murgia has tended to overestimate the cogency of stylistic parallels which stand in no necessary, sometimes even no probable, relation to each other.” and, p. 275: “The *Dialogus* can be dated up to a point. A date of AD 98-103 is indicated although, being based on linguistic arguments in a literature fragmentarily preserved, it is not impregnably strong, and remains uncomfortably wide.”

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* 264.

Brink argues cogently that allusions to and parallels with Cicero are not effective dating tools, not an indication of an unsure author; after all, everyone read Cicero, and probably often.<sup>24</sup> He then reviews and dismisses Murgia's selection of Pliny *Ep.* 1.6.2. *Non est quod contemnas hoc studendi genus; mirum est ut animus agitatione motuque corporis excitetur* ("It is not this type of striving that you despise; the wonder is that the spirit is aroused by the stirring and motion of the body"), and Tacitus at *Dialogus* 36.1: *magna eloquentia, sicut flamma, materia alitur et motibus excitatur et urendo clarescit* ("great eloquence, as a flame, is nourished by material and is aroused by movement and grows brighter by burning"),<sup>25</sup> as tenuous evidence for an early date, largely by pointing out numerous other instances — in Horace, Ovid, and Seneca Rhetor, amongst others — where flame imagery is used, and by focusing on the incongruity of the two contexts.

I do, however, have trouble with Brink's assertion that, "while there is a certain similarity between Ovid's *mota face* and Tacitus' *motibus incitatus*, there is no close similarity of diction, situation, and even image as a whole."<sup>26</sup> One may compare, for example, Ovid's *Amores* 1.2, 1.11-12: *vidi ego iactatas mota face crescere flammam/ et vidi nullo concutiente mori* ("I have seen flames grow, buffeted by a torch moved/ and I have seen them die with none shaking"), not only with the aforementioned *Dial.* 36.1, but also 39.5: *ut frigidissimos quoque oratores ipsa certantis populi studia excitare et incendere*

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid. 254, "Even assuming that one of Cicero's rhetorical works was the source of a given passage, we simply do not know at what time, on what occasion, and how often Tacitus had read it. The workings of memory, or the use of notes, make the process of composing a much more flexible thing than is suggested by the apparent tie-up of one or two passages with Tacitus' smaller writings."

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. 255-263.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. 257.

*potuerint* (“so that the very zeal of the contesting populace was able to arouse and inflame even the coldest orators”), and 40.1: *contiones assiduae... quantum ardorem ingeniis, quas oratoribus faces admovebant* (“the continuous assemblies ... brought such great ardor to the talents, such torches to the orators”). Tacitus thus connects poetry to oratory by the heat of passion. He will continue to use the metaphor of fire in his *Annales*, smoldering until it literally erupts in 64 CE.

Brink agrees with Murgia regarding the parallels between Pliny *Ep.* 9.10:

Itaque poemata quiescunt, quae tu **inter nemora et lucos** commodissime *perfici* putas. Oratiunculam unam alteram retractavi; quamquam id genus operis inamabile inamoenum, magisque laboribus ruris quam *voluptatibus* simile. Vale.

Therefore the poems rest, which you think are accomplished most readily amongst the woods and groves. I have reworked one other speechlet; although that type of task is unloveable and unpleasant more like the toils of the countryside than its pleasures.

and *Dialogus* 9.6 (Aper),

adice quod poetis, si modo dignum aliquid elaborare et *efficere* velint, relinquenda conversatio amicorum et iucunditas urbis, deserenda cetera officia utque ipsi dicunt, **in nemora et lucos**, id est in solitudinem secedendum est...

and throw in that poets, should they wish to work out and accomplish anything worthy, must desert the conversation of friends and the joy of the city and all other duties, and, as they say, withdraw to the groves and woods that is to solitude.

and 12.1 (Maternus):

**Nemora vero et luci** et secretum ipsum, quod Aper increpabat, tantam mihi adferunt *voluptatem*, ut inter praecipuos carminum fructus numerem.



Indeed the woods and groves and that very seclusion, which Aper assails, bring me such great pleasure that I number them amongst the chief enjoyments of poetry.

(I have bold-faced the parallels in question, italicized my own.) Murgia claimed that these parallels did not necessarily support a later date, because the chronology of the letters themselves was in doubt. Brink finds Murgia's 1985 article on the chronology of Pliny's letters persuasive, and not an *ex post facto* defense of his 1980 article that placed the *Dialogus* first amongst the works of Tacitus. Yet he also determines that Pliny does allude here to Tacitus, and not vice-versa, not conceding a later date.

However, Murgia also makes the point that both *Epp.* 1.6 and 9.10 concern hunting *apri*, the only two letters to do so.<sup>27</sup> Ronald Syme believed that all of Pliny's letters, regardless of date of composition, were published no earlier than 105.<sup>28</sup> Book 9, at *Ep.* 9.10, which mentions **both** *nemora et lucos, and apri*, would have been published in 108-109. If one views *Ep.* 1.6, his first letter concerning *apri*, in conjunction with *Ep.* 1.5's diatribe against the delator Regulus (discussed in a later section on Messalla<sup>29</sup>), then a call-and-response appears, beginning with *Ep.* 1. A brief synopsis is given below, with expansion following.

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<sup>27</sup> Charles E. Murgia, "Pliny's Letters and the Dialogus," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 89 (1985): 180.

<sup>28</sup> Murgia, "Pliny's Letters," 191-192, n. 41.

<sup>29</sup> In that section I will discuss why I believe Tacitus wrote *Histories* 4 before the *Dialogus*.

### Pliny and Tacitus: Call-and-Response

*Ep.* 2.11 details, in glowing terms, Pliny's prosecution, together with Tacitus, of the corrupt governor Marius Priscus, which took place in 100, the same year as Pliny's *Panegyricus* (both will be discussed further on). This prosecution, with its consequent, rather toothless sentence, marked the last known time that Tacitus engaged in senatorial oratory. In Book 4 of his *Histories*, Tacitus described two episodes, both in 75, where the "righteous" side in senatorial debate lost, both involving Helvidius Priscus and Eprurius Marcellus, one concerning also Regulus and Messalla (to be discussed in the section on Messalla). Pliny writes several letters concerning Regulus: his successful delation of Arulenus Rusticus, his gratuitous post-mortem oration against Herennius Senecio, and other items more snarky than substantive. *Ep.* 6.2 concerns the death of Regulus, which likely occurred in either 105 or 106; the two Vesuvius letters to Tacitus in *Epp.* 6 concern events in 79, so we know that Tacitus by then would have a reason to be sending Pliny his own work, at the very least as an act of courtesy. Several letters in *Epp.* 7 find echoes in the *Dialogus*, and *Ep.* 7.33 to Tacitus directly mentions Tacitus' *Histories*. *Ep.* 8.7, also to Tacitus, discusses a teacher-student relationship and makes a joking reference to Tacitus seeking revenge with the pen. *Ep.* 9.10, as mentioned, brings back the topic of hunting, specifically boars (*apri*), as well as poetry and *nemora et lucos*. His final published letter to Tacitus, *Ep.* 9.13, strikes a conciliatory tone, and a wish to be borne out of the "shadows and silence," and into posterity. Thus, *nemora et lucos* cannot be taken as conclusive for dating purposes, even as a doublet.

The Prosecution of Marius Priscus by Pliny and Tacitus: *Ep.* 2.11

When Pliny first recited the *Panegyricus*, in 100, Trajan had only recently returned to Rome, two years after gaining the throne. As Brink states, he may have been in a particularly indulgent frame of mind.<sup>30</sup> Yet, over all, as Syme stated in regards to Trajan, “Towards oratory, the military emperor showed no sympathy or encouragement. It was not needed any more.”<sup>31</sup> 100 was the same year that saw Tacitus, with Pliny’s assistance, brilliantly prosecute Marius Priscus, only to have his conviction made a mockery by a toothless punishment.<sup>32</sup> Pliny thought that speech to be a crowning glory,<sup>33</sup> but Tacitus makes no mention of it nor is there any record of Tacitus pleading a case ever again.

In fact, reading the entirety of Pliny’s account of the case to Maturus Arrianus in *Ep.* 2.11 reveals just how differently Tacitus would have perceived it. Marius Priscus had, as proconsul, accepted huge bribes not only for the usual petty wheel-greasing, but for imprisoning and even executing political and personal enemies who had committed no crimes. Pliny wrote this letter after the trial, but before his consulship and the *Panegyricus*. Trajan had not even entered Rome as emperor until 99 CE. Generously excerpted, here is the letter, italics my own:

Solet esse gaudio tibi, si quid acti est in senatu *dignum ordine illo*.  
Quamvis enim quietis amore secesseris, insidet tamen animo tuo *maiestas*

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid. 276.

<sup>31</sup> Syme, *Tacitus*, 230.

<sup>32</sup> Roland Mayer, “Ipsa Verba: Tacitus’ Verbatim Quotations,” *Acting with Words : Communication, Rhetorical Performance and Performative Acts in Latin Literature*, ed. Therese Fuhrer and Damien Nelis (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag, 2010), 8.

<sup>33</sup> Pliny, *Ep.* 2.11.1

*tis* publicae cura. Accipe ergo quod per hos dies actum est, personae claritate famosum, severitate exempli salubre, rei magnitudine aeternum. Marius Priscus accusantibus Afris quibus pro consule praefuit, ommissa defensione iudices petiit. Ego et Cornelius Tacitus, adesse provincialibus iussi, existimavimus *fidei nostrae* convenire notum senatui facere excessisse Priscum immanitate et saevitia crimina quibus dari iudices possent, cum ob innocentes condemnandos, interficiendos etiam, pecunias accepisset. Respondit Fronto Cadius deprecatusque est, ne quid ultra repetundarum legem quaereretur, omniaque actionis suae *vela* vir movendarum lacrimarum peritissimus quodam *velut vento miserationis implevit*. Magna contentio, magni utrimque clamores aliis cognitionem senatus lege conclusam, aliis liberam solutamque dicentibus, quantumque admisisset reus, tantum vindicandum. Novissime consul designatus Iulius Ferox, vir rectus et sanctus, Mario quidem iudices interim censuit dandos, evocandos autem quibus diceretur innocentium poenas vendidisse. Quae sententia non praevaluit modo, sed omnino post tantas dissensiones fuit sola frequens, adnotatumque experimentis, quod favor et misericordia acres et vehementes primos impetus habent, paulatim consilio et ratione *quasi restincta* considunt. Unde evenit ut, quod multi clamore permixto tuentur, nemo tacentibus ceteris dicere velit; patescit enim, cum separaris a turba, contemplatio rerum quae turba teguntur. (Ep. 2.10.1-7)

It is accustomed to bring joy to you, if anything is done in the senate *worthy of that body*. for although you have withdrawn [from public life] out of your love of quiet, there resides nevertheless in your spirit a care for the *dignity* of the state. So receive what has been done during these days — much talked of because of the renown of the personage/defendant, salubrious because of the harshness of the example made, and eternal because of the importance of the matter. Marius Priscus, with the Africans, whom he served as proconsul, accusing him, sought judges, having abandoned his defense. I and Cornelius Tacitus, ordered to be there on behalf of the provincials, reckoned that it befitted *our trust* to make known to the senate that Priscus, due to the enormity and cruelty, had exceeded the charges for which judges could be assigned, since he had accepted bribes to condemn the innocent, kill them even. Cadius Fronto responded and pleaded that nothing beyond the law regarding extortion be sought, and that man, most experienced at eliciting tears, *filled all the sails* of his action *as though with a certain wind of pity*. Great was the controversy, great the shouts, from some that the inquiry of the senate was confined by law, from others that it was free and loose, and for as much as the defendant had admitted he should be punished. Julius Ferox, only just named consul designate, a man upright and righteous, argued that judges should be assigned to Marius, and moreover that those to whom it was said he had sold penalties

against innocent must be summoned. Which opinion not only prevailed, but it alone was widely held after so much dissension. And it has been noted through experience that favorable disposition and compassion carry the initial sharp and vehement attacks, but little by little they subside, *as though extinguished*, by deliberation and reasoning. And so it happens that that which many maintain amidst the tumultuous clamor, no one wishes to say with the rest silent. For attentive consideration of matters which are clouded by a crowd become clear when you are separated from that crowd.

Two points stand out in this beginning section: Pliny considered this matter *dignum ordine illo*. Would Tacitus have agreed? Note also the inclusive *-mus* in *existimavimus*, and the *fidei nostrae*; it relieves him of the perhaps less self-aggrandizing responsibility of stating who spoke first, while tying himself closely to Tacitus. And would Tacitus have so jejune and jarringly mixed such a weighty matter with the sail simile, an incongruous and inept attempt at humor? Tacitus might have used irony, but he would not have attempted humor in this description, whether or not he found the affair as a whole *dignum*— but the *Dialogus*' Aper might have. Tacitus, too, in contrast to Pliny, would likely have made comments diminishing the importance of what he was relating, as he did in *Annales* 4.32, the beginning of his digression on history:

Pleraque eorum quae rettuli quaeque referam parva forsitan et levia memoratu videri non nescius sum: sed nemo annalis nostros cum scriptura eorum contenderit qui veteres populi Romani res composuere...nobis in arto et inglorius labor.

I am not unaware that most of what I have related and shall relate seems small perhaps and trifling to recount; but no one will set my annales against the writings of those who recorded the deeds of the Roman people of old... my task is constrained and inglorious.

Moving ahead past the appearance of two witnesses and the adjournment to a third day, Pliny arrives at the most important, and most lengthy, part of the letter — his own performance:

Dilata res est in proximum senatum, cuius ipse *conspectus augustissimus* fuit. Princeps praesidebat - erat enim consul - ad hoc Ianuarius mensis cum cetera tum praecipue senatorum frequentia celeberrimus; praeterea causae *amplitudo* auctaque dilatione exspectatio et fama, insitumque mortalibus studium magna et inusitata noscendi, omnes undique excitaverat. Imaginare quae *sollicitudo nobis*, qui *metus*, quibus super tanta re in illo coetu praesente Caesare dicendum erat. Equidem in senatu non semel egi, quin immo nusquam audiri benignius soleo: tunc me tamen ut nova omnia novo metu permovebant. Obversabatur praeter illa quae supra dixi causae difficultas: stabat modo consularis, modo septemvir epulonum, iam neutrum. Erat ergo perquam onerosum accusare damnatum, quem ut premebat atrocitas criminis, ita quasi peractae damnationis miseratio tuebatur. Utcumque tamen animum cogitationemque collegi, coepi dicere non minore audientium assensu quam sollicitudine mea. Dixi horis paene quinque; nam duodecim clepsydris, quas spatiosissimas acceperam, sunt additae quattuor. Adeo illa ipsa, quae dura et adversa dicturo videbantur, secunda dicenti fuerunt. Caesar quidem tantum mihi studium, tantam etiam curam - nimium est enim dicere sollicitudinem - praestitit, ut libertum meum post me stantem saepius admoneret voci laterique consulerem, cum me vehementius putaret intendi, quam gracilitas mea perpeti posset. (Ep. 2.11.10-15)

The matter was put off to the next convening of the senate, the very sight of which was most majestic. The Princeps was presiding — he was consul, after all — add to this it being January, the month most crowded in general and particularly in the flocking of senators. Beyond that, the *grandeur* of the case, the expectations and rumors amplified by the delay, the innate zeal amongst mortals for knowing great and unusual matters, had aroused everyone everywhere. Imagine our anxiety, the fear for those who have to speak on such a great matter in that assembly with Caesar present! Certainly I have spoken in the senate not just once, indeed I am accustomed to be heard nowhere more kindly: still at that moment everything as if new was roiling me as with some new fear. And beyond those things which I mentioned above, the difficulty of the case was swirling before me: there stood a man just recently of consular rank, just recently a septemvir of the feasts, now neither. It was therefore exceedingly burdensome to prosecute

the condemned man, whom, as much as the atrocity of the charge was pressing upon him, a pity as if for the previous conviction was watching over. Being as that may, I nonetheless collected my courage and thoughts and began to speak, the approval of the audience being no less than their anxiety on my behalf. I spoke for nearly five hours, for four waterclocks were added to the twelve very generous ones which I had already received. Thus all those very things which had seemed tough and against me were favorable to me as I spoke. Indeed Caesar showed me such great eagerness, even such care—it would be too much to say anxiety—that he quite often advised the freedman standing behind me that I should be mindful of my voice and chest, since he thought I was being strained more violently than my delicate constitution could endure.

Again, Pliny builds up the case and thereby his role. *Amplitudo* seems an odd word choice for a criminal case, even one involving a man of formerly consular rank; proconsular corruption cases, too, were tediously frequent since at least the time of Verres. The emphasis on the Princeps presiding, and the attendant fear, is oddly downplayed both by the *erat enim consul*, and the accompanying self-regard in *super tanta re* and the *nusquam audiri benignius soleo*, with its reassuring *quin immo*. For Tacitus, the fact that the Princeps had decided to be present and preside on that day would have been of primary concern because of the fear it instilled; Pliny's need to gather his courage would have been more important than his ability to do so. And would Tacitus have felt sympathy for the defendant and gone to such great lengths to explain why? I enjoy imagining Tacitus reading this letter upon its publication for many reasons, but perhaps most when I get to the part about Trajan's *curam* for Pliny's *gracilitas* when he goes on for over five hours! Tacitus can be deliberately obscure, but he is never obtuse.

Postero die dixit pro Mario Salvius Liberalis, vir subtilis dispositus acer disertus; in illa vero causa omnes artes suas protulit. Respondit Cornelius

Tacitus eloquentissime et, quod eximium orationi eius inest, σεμνῶς.  
(2.11.17)

On the following day, on behalf of Marius [Priscus], Salvius Liberalis spoke, a man subtle, methodical, sharp, skillful; indeed he brought forth all of his skills in that case. Cornelius Tacitus responded most eloquently, and, as is distinctive to his oratory, σεμνῶς [Greek for “stately, majestic].

So much for Tacitus, though perhaps he would have preferred it thus. Pliny then relates how the consul-elect proposed that Priscus pay the amount he received as bribe into the public treasury, and be sent into exile, and at the end (2.11.19), he adds: *quod ego et Tacitus iniuncta advocacione diligenter et fortiter functi essemus, arbitrari senatum ita nos fecisse ut dignum mandatis partibus fuerit* (“because I and Tacitus had performed our enjoined advocacy conscientiously and bravely, the senate thought that we had done as was worthy of the roles assigned to us).”

Then another senator proposes a much lighter sentence, and Pliny describes the back and forth of the factions, with many at first preferring the lighter sentence, but in the end, when the senators had to take a count by crossing to one side of the room or another, they thought better and went over to the side of the consul-elect, the more judicious move. The proponent of rejected proposal complained of abandonment, especially by the very same Regulus who comes up in the *Dialogus*, twenty-five years earlier (by its dramatic date):

praecipue de Regulo questus est, qui se in sententia quam ipse dictaverat deseruisset. Est alioqui Regulo tam mobile ingenium, ut plurimum audeat plurimum timeat.  
(2.11.22)

He chiefly complained about Regulus, who had deserted him in the very opinion which he himself had dictated. Regulus in general has such a changeable mind that he dares overmuch and fears as much.



Regulus in general comes in for some of Pliny's harshest criticism in his letters, yet when he dies four years later, Pliny bemoans the fact that granting of adequate time to speakers died with him — they were thereafter reduced to two or one or even one-half a water clock!!!<sup>34</sup> Pliny ends his letter with a request for more banal news of the countryside, “You have your urban affairs, write of rural ones in turn. What little trees, what of your vineyards, your most delicious sheep?”

*Ep.* 2.11 serves to point out that, though the two men may have been on friendly terms, they differed significantly in self-portrayal, oratorical style, and perspective on the status of the senate under Trajan. Though Trajan was newly in Rome, he did little during his reign to grant the senate real power — in fact, he found their oversight of the provinces so inept that he “privatized” the running of two of them. As for the fate of Marius Priscus, it was laughably lenient, considering the vile nature of his crime and the fact that the one surviving man who had done the bribing suffered a harsher exile. Pliny seems to offer no hint that the outcome displeased him. Thus this trial may actually may have served as a wedge, to some degree, between Tacitus and Pliny as their two views towards oratory, and the Principate, diverged.

Does the coincidence of the Priscus prosecution, the delivery and then publication of the *Panegyricus*, and the consulship (102) of the *Dialogus*' addressee, Fabius Justus, amount to a closed case for dating the *Dialogus*? Again, I do not think so. If Tacitus were

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<sup>34</sup> Pliny, *Ep.* 6.2 .5: *Ideo fas est non numquam eum quaerere. Nam, postquam obiit ille, increbruit passim et invaluit consuetudo binas vel singulas clepsydras, interdum etiam dimidias et dandi et petendi.* (“And so it is proper to miss him sometimes. For, after that man died, the custom of seeking and granting but two or one or even, from time to time, half- waterclocks became stringer and more frequent”).

actually dedicating his work to Fabius, then he would be going against form not to mention the consulship.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, though Fabius is addressed, there is no mention of any dedication. The excuse of a request is a literary commonplace. Similarly, one might have expected a direct reference to the *Dialogus* in Pliny's letters, as he does with the *Histories* (*Ep.* 7.33). Then there is the matter of *Ep.* 7.20, which Murgia uses in a puzzling fashion — he believes Pliny is referring to the *Dialogus*, but as a *second* edition.<sup>36</sup> I find this hard to believe, given that *Ep.* 7.33 expressly mentions the *Histories* and Pliny's wish to be inserted in them. It is far more likely that Pliny would wish to record, in timely fashion, his contribution to the *Histories* than any to the *Dialogus*; I believe it would have been hard for him not to recognize he was being lampooned therein! (Unless Pliny still thought, as in *Ep.* 2.11, that Trajan was showing solicitude for his frail health when the Emperor tried to get him to rest after speaking for five straight hours ....)

### The *Panegyricus*

Brink, after politely combatting Murgia, focuses in on Pliny's *Panegyricus* as a *terminus ante quem*, drawing, in particular, on two sets of parallel passages where I think he has the direction of allusion wrong. Brink makes much of the parallels between the *Dialogus* and Pliny's *Panegyricus*, which was first recited around 100 and published, after some polishing, in around 102. In each instance, he not only believes the parallels are actual allusions, but that Pliny is alluding to Tacitus, and not vice-versa. (Roland Mayer

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<sup>35</sup> Brink, "*Dialogus* Date," 270.

<sup>36</sup> Murgia, "Pliny's Letters and the *Dialogus*," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 89 (1985):171-206.

agrees.<sup>37</sup>) His arguments require a myopic look at the passages involved as well as a narrow interpretation of the relationship between the two authors.

No one would applaud the *Panegyricus* for its brevity or its bravery. This over-the-top encomium to Trajan as the ideal *princeps*, first recited before the Emperor in 100, was later again recited over a three-day period, after some further polishing. Pliny was quite pleased with it and himself, and believed that Trajan felt likewise.<sup>38</sup> Tacitus may have been a master at masking his true opinions, but to imagine him sharing Pliny's enthusiasm here stretches beyond credulity. One can easily read Maternus' closing remarks regarding the *sapientissimus et unus* ( about which more later) as a poke at Pliny. And lengthy speeches come in for ridicule in both sides of the debate in the *Dialogus*. Why would Pliny make *any* references to the *Dialogus* in his *Panegyricus*?

In the first instance of allusion, Brink finds this passage from *Pan.* 3 to be persuasive:

Animadverto enim, etiam deos ipsos non tam *accuratis* adorantium precibus, quam innocentia et sanctitate, laetari; *gratioremque* existimari, qui delubris eorum puram castamque mentem, quam qui *meditatum* carmen intulerit. (italics my own)

For I notice that even the gods themselves rejoice not so much in the carefully-wrought prayed of those pleading as in innocence and sanctity; they judge more pleasing those who bear a pure and chaste mind to their shrines than those who bear contrived song.

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<sup>37</sup> Roland Mayer, ed. *Tacitus: Dialogus de Oratoribus*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001):23; see also Betty Radice, "Pliny and the 'Panegyricus,'" *Greece & Rome*, Second Series, 15.2 (Oct., 1968): 166-172.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* 23, n. 65.

He believes that the *meditatum carmen* is a direct reference to Tacitus' *meditatam ... orationem* at *Dialogus* 6.5<sup>39</sup> Scrutinizing the immediate context of the Tacitean reference, one can see the parallels are clear and strong:

Vulgata dicentium gaudia et imperitorum quoque oculis exposita percenseo: Ila [gaudia] secretiora et tantum ipsis *orantibus* nota maiora sunt. Sive *accuratam meditatamque profert orationem*, est quoddam sicut ipsius dictionis, ita gaudii pondus et constantia; sive novam et recentem curam non sine aliqua trepidatione animi *attulerit*, ipsa sollicitudo commendat eventum et lenocinatur voluptati. Sed extemporalis audaciae atque ipsius temeritatis vel praecipua iucunditas est; nam [in] ingenio quoque, *sicut in agro*, quamquam grata sint quae] diu serantur atque elaborentur, *gratiora* tamen quae *sua sponte* nascuntur. (6.5-6)

I am now examining the joys of speakers displayed to the eyes of even the unskilled: those more hidden, known only to the pleaders themselves, are greater. If he proffers a carefully-wrought, contrived speech, there is a certain weight and constancy of the joy, as of the very delivery; or if he brings forth a new and fresh [speech], not without some trepidation of spirit, the very worry of it makes the outcome agreeable and promotes pleasure. The chief delight is of the extemporaneous boldness and its very recklessness. For in talent also, as in a field, although those things are pleasing which are sown and long toiled over, more pleasing nevertheless are those things which arise/are born of their own free will.

But what is Tacitus saying here? While Pliny, with dubious self-deprecation, is claiming the gods (and by extension the *princeps*) prefer virtue and innocence over composed tribute, Tacitus' Aper is weighing the *gaudia* of rehearsed versus spontaneous oratory. Aper finds neither variety lacking, but ultimately relishes the spontaneous more (*praecipua iucunditas*). Thus far, it would not be altogether odd for Pliny to use this, purely as a tribute to his friend in an important speech (though in a speech of such length and obvious care it is humorous). Brink himself finds Pliny's effort less apt than

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<sup>39</sup> Brink, "*Dialogus* Date," 266.

Tacitus',<sup>40</sup> but that is less likely to be due to a strained effort at allusion than it is to Tacitus' greater *ingenium*. Yet if we pan out, it is odd indeed. *Dialogus* 6 is Aper's "panegyricus" to the *voluptates* of oratory ("Ad voluptatem oratoriae eloquentiae transeo..."): *voluptas* is used four times, *gaudium* three, *iucunditas* twice. Tacitus subverts Pliny's "innocentia et sanctitate" and "puram castamque mentem," with "ingenuo animo" and "voluptates honestas." Those "honest" pleasures include thronging groupies from all walks of life, including the *locupletes* (wealthy) and *potentes*. If you want a close parallel in both tone and diction, then Nero's opening remarks to Seneca at *Annales* 14.55 are more compelling:

quod *meditatae orationi* tuae statim occurram, id primum tui *muneris* habeo, qui me non tantum praevisa, sed subita expedire docuisti.

I hold this chief among your gifts, that I can meet your prepared speech immediately, you who have taught me not only to hold forth with not only foreseen words, but even extemporaneous speech.

Panning out farther to section 8, Aper introduces his two models, Eprius Marcellus and Vibius Crispus, *neuter moribus egregius* ('neither outstanding in regards to their morals'). Using them he delivers what he believes to be the ultimate *gaudium* of the orator:

*principes* fori, nunc *principes in Caesaris amicitia* agunt feruntque cuncta atque *ab ipso principe* cum quadam reverentia diliguntur, quia Vepasianus, venerabilis senex et patientissimus veri, bene intellegit [et] ceteros quidem amicos suos iis niti, quae *ab ipso acceperint* quaeque ipsi accumulare et in alios congerere promptum sit, Marcellum autem et Crispum attulisse *ad amicitiam suam quod non a principe acceperint nec accipi possit*.

(*Dialogus* 8.3)

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid. 267.

The foremost of the forum, now foremost in Caesar's friendship they do and deliver everything and are chosen by that foremost one himself [the Princeps] with a certain reverence, because Vespasian, a venerable old man and most forbearing of the truth, well understands that the rest of his friends rely on those things which they receive from him and which it is easy for him to collect and amass for others while Marcellus and Crispus have brought to their friendship that which they cannot receive from the Princeps nor can it be received.

Pliny was not one to stick his neck out. Would he have alluded, in a speech in praise of Trajan, to a passage in Tacitus that concludes with an inversion of the power relationship between two infamous *delatores* and the *princeps*? Hard to believe. I think it is more likely that Tacitus is having some fun at his friend's expense. And the doublet *venerabilis senex et patientissimus veri* comes across as rather back-handedly encomiastic, yet couched in Plinian style. A good princeps is one who is "most forbearing" of the truth.

In that light, if one were to go to the end of the *Dialogus*, where Maternus resurrects the spontaneous growth metaphor with a startling twist, one could take Maternus' closing remarks as a less than gentle jibe at Pliny. These remarks, which come as part of Maternus' tirade against *licentia*, and by implication, on behalf of *dominatio*, will come under closer scrutiny later.<sup>41</sup> If Tacitus is intending an ironic reading here, note the echo not just of Aper but of the *Panegyricus*: sicut *indomitus* ager habet quasdam herbas *laetiores* (*Dialogus* 40.4).

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<sup>41</sup> See also *Annales* 14.55, Nero to Seneca: "Quod meditatae orationi tuae statim occurram, id primum tui muneris habeo, qui me non tantum praevisa sed subita expedire docuisti." A.J. Woodman, in his article, "Aliena facundia," in *Form and Function in Roman Oratory*, D.H. Berry and Andrew Erskine, ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 306, uses this quote when discussing Seneca's role in the *Annales*, but I find it to be further evidence of a close tie between the *Dialogus* and the *Annales*.

Pliny's *Ep.* III.18 (notably not addressed to Tacitus!), where he boastfully recounts the writing and delivery of his *Panegyricus*, gives further credence to the idea that Tacitus drew on Pliny, and not *vice-versa*:

Cepi autem non mediocrem *voluptatem* quod hunc librum cum amicis recitare voluissem, non per codicillos, non per libellos, sed 'si commodum' et 'si valde vacaret' admoniti - numquam porro aut valde vacat Romae aut *commodum est audire* recitantem -, foedissimis insuper tempestatibus per biduum convenerunt, cumque modestia mea finem recitationi facere voluisset, ut adicerem tertium diem exegerunt. Mihi hunc honorem habitum putem an studiis? *studiis malo, quae prope extincta refoventur ... non quia eloquentius quam prius, sed quia liberius ideoque etiam libentius scribitur*. Accedet ergo hoc quoque laudibus principis nostri, quod *res antea tam invisita quam falsa, nunc ut vera ita amabilis facta est*. Sed ego *cum studium audientium tum iudicium mire probavi: animadverti enim severissima quaeque vel maxime satisfacere ... hac severitate aurium laetor*. Omnes enim, qui placendi causa scribunt, qualia placere viderint scribent. Ac mihi quidem confido in hoc genere materiae *laetioris stili constare rationem, cum ea potius quae pressius et astrictius, quam illa quae hilarius et quasi exsultantius scripsi, possint videri accersita et inducta ...* Habes acta mea tridui; quibus cognitis volui tantum te *voluptatis* absentem et studiorum nomine et meo capere, quantum *praesens percipere potuisses*.  
Vale. (*Ep.* 3.18.4-11)<sup>42</sup>

I have taken not moderate joy, because I had wanted to recite this book amongst my friends, advised not through hand-written invitations or pamphlets, but rather “if it is convenient,” and “if indeed you have any time” —though in fact no one ever has free time in Rome nor is it ever convenient to hear a recitation. The weather, furthermore, was hideous, but they came for two straight days, and when my modesty would have wished to put an end to my reciting, they insisted that I add a third day. Am I to think that this is an honor to me or to oratorical studies in general? I prefer to the studies, which, nearly extinguished, are being nurtured once more ... [People are willing to listen to a *laudatio* now] not because it is written more eloquently than before, but because it is written more freely and thus more pleasingly. This, too, will render praises to our Princeps, because that which was earlier hated and false has now become as popular as it is true. But I approve as remarkable both the zeal and the judgement of the listen-

<sup>42</sup> Betty Radice, “Pliny and the Panegyricus,” *Greece & Rome* 15.2 (1968):171, makes reference to the *hilarius et quasi exsultantius*, as well as the *laetiores stili*. It seems to me that the entire letter provides evidence that Tacitus wrote the *Dialogus* after the *Panegyricus*.

ers, for I noticed that the most austere remarks gave the greatest satisfaction... I rejoice in the austerity of the ears .... All who write to please write what they have seen as pleasing. And for me I trust that my reasoning — of a more abundant and cheerful style in this type of topic [of oration] — stands, since it could seem more contrived and forced, had I written it in a more compressed and constrained manner, rather than in a more happy and and boisterous one .... You have my actions of the last three days. I wanted you, being absent, to take as much pleasure in knowing them as you could have captured yourself — both for the sake of the discipline and on my behalf — had you been present.

The parallels here (italics my own) will become even clearer when Maternus' final speech comes under closer examination.

I also take issue with Brink's next piece of text "evidence." Brink states:

The resemblance between the next instances obtrudes and is indeed very specific. *Dial.* 13.2 "surrexit (in theatro) uniuersus (populus) et forte praesentem spectantemque Vergilium ueneratus est ut quasi Augustum;" *Pan.* 54.2 "in uenerationem tui (sc. Traiani) theatra ipsa consurgunt," and probably *Pan.* 56.8 (where no *theatra* are involved) "te ... ipsum praesentem audientem." Tacitus' priority is indicated strongly. For, as Bruère (165) states, it is hard to see why, *per contra*, Tacitus should have been instigated to recount the Virgilian anecdote by two passages of Pliny, neither of which adverted to Virgil.<sup>43</sup>

First, as to why Tacitus should choose here to "recount the Virgilian anecdote," I think it ties in strongly with what Maternus is communicating: that the poet is equal to the Emperor in adulation (*Vergilium ueneratus est quasi Augustum*). Tacitus may also be asserting, looking back thirty or more years later, that history repeats itself. Where better to allude to the *Panegyricus*? Where worse for Pliny to allude to Tacitus? Zooming back in on *Dialogus* 6, what I find more puzzling is that Brink *et al.* do not see that Maternus him-

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<sup>43</sup> Brink, "Dialogus Date," 267-8.



self is here reworking that very part of Aper's speech that came in for such close examination earlier. Before deliberating on the *meditatam orationem* versus the *novam et recentem*, Aper has this to say, *Quae in iudiciis veneratio! Quod illud gaudium consurgendi adsistendique inter tacentis et in unum conversos!* ("What reverence amongst the judges. What a joy of rising and standing amid those silent, all turned towards him alone!") (6.4).

This constitutes just one of the many unresolved contradictions within the work: the *unum* here is, of course, the *orator*, not the poet, certainly not the *princeps*. Aper's remarks here bear closer resemblance than Maternus' at 13.2. Both of these instances rely on a quote that is actually a response from Maternus to something Aper said earlier in the text, creating an echo effect. Pliny would *not* have alluded to either original comment in his encomium. *Immo vero*, through Aper, Tacitus is playing with Pliny's tendency to project.

The *Panegyricus* should be taken not merely as a *terminus post quem*, which would place the *Dialogus* at no earlier than 102 (coincidentally the year of Fabius Iustus' consulship), but as a *terminus multo post quem*. I find an even later date to be more likely, both on thematic grounds and judging by tone.

Moreover, the pre-*Histories* Tacitus, the Tacitus who wrote of his plans to recount the "happy" days of Nerva and Trajan, still practiced *moderatio*; circumspect as he then was, Tacitus would not have set about making fun of Pliny immediately post-*Panegyricus*, lest it be taken as an anti-imperial response by the *potentes* and subjected to *prava interpretatio*. However, by the time Tacitus writes the *Annales*, he feels safe to expose the

practice of *actiones gratiarum* as *fictae* — *summa facundia nec minore adulatione servilia* (“with utmost eloquence nor less servile adulation”) in Book 14.<sup>44</sup>

### *Epp. 7*

*Epp. 7* provides a great deal of material to which one could see the *Dialogus* as a response. Pliny addresses *Ep. 7.2* to Fabius (?) Iustus. Although it is not entirely certain that it is the same addressee as in the *Dialogus*, the subject matter is germane and would certainly make Tacitus’ opening remarks, and many of Aper’s, appear to be a more than mild ribbing:

Quemadmodum congruit, ut simul et affirmes te assiduis occupationibus impediri, et scripta nostra desideres, quae vix ab otiosis impetrare aliquid perituri temporis possunt?

How has it happened that you at the same time assert that you are hindered by constant duties and desire (to have) my written copies (of my speeches?), which scarcely are able to beg *any* otherwise wasted time from men who have plenty?

Tacitus opens the *Dialogus* with:

Saepe ex me requiris, Iuste Fabi, cur ... nostra potissimum aetas deserta et laude eloquentiae orbata vix nomen ipsum oratoris retineat. (*Dial.* 1.1)

You often ask of me, Fabius Iustus, why our age above all is so bereft and deprived in the praise of eloquence that it scarcely holds onto the very name of orator.

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<sup>44</sup> *Annales* 16.2: *ac forte quinquennale ludicrum secundo lustro celebrabatur, ab oratoribusque praecipua materia in laudem principis adsumpta est. non enim solitas tantum fruges nec confusum metallis aurum gigni, sed nova ubertate provenire terram et obvias opes deferre deos, quaeque alia summa facundia nec minore adulatione servilia fingeant, securi de facilitate credentis.* (“[A]nd by chance the quinquennial games were being celebrated in a second offering, and principal materials for praise of the emperor were taken up by the orators, that not only were there the usual harvests being birthed, and the metals fused with gold, but the earth was coming forth with an unaccustomed abundance, and the gods were delivering riches in our paths, and they fashioned other such things with the utmost eloquence nor less servile adulation, secure in the ease of [the emperor’s] credulity.”)

And Aper makes fun of the poet Bassus, who has to beg friends to come hear him and then pay to rent a space and seats.

*Ep. 7.4* concerns Pliny's efforts at poetry, and how well-received they have been.

*Ep. 7.9* also touches on the merits of poetry, and how even the best orators engage in both the reading and the composing of verse. In *Ep. 7.12*, Pliny has sent a friend a short speech (*libellum*) that has been requested, remarking that he is certain his addressee will find it *tumidius*, and so he has also provided an edited, *pressius et exilius*, version — worse in his own estimation, but *vestro tamen iudicio rectius*.

Midway through *Epp. 7* comes *Ep. 7.17*: a lengthy, querulous letter, wherein Pliny feels hurt surprise at his detractors. He feels the need to justify his practice of giving recitations of speeches he had already delivered, but was editing for publication. He claims it should be no different from other recitations, such as poetry and tragedies, even history:

A quibus libenter requisierim, cur concedant — si concedunt tamen — historiam debere recitari, quae non ostentationi sed fidei veritatis componitur;

From whom I would gladly ask why they concede — if, in fact they do concede — that history ought to be recited, which is composed not for idle show, but for credence and truth.

He goes on at great length about his process of recitation, editing, further recitation, etc, until he is satisfied that his published work will be well-received.<sup>45</sup> His addressee be-

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<sup>45</sup> He cites the tragedian Pomponius Secundus as an example of appealing to the audience to help him edit; cf. *Dial. 13*, where Maternus contrasts the tragedian with *delator* Domitius Afer, immediately prior to vilifying Vibius Crispus and Eprius Marcellus.

comes interlocutor, interposing questions and comments: *Supervacuum est recitare quae dixeris...Sed difficile est ut oratio dum recitatur satisfiat* (“It is superfluous to recite what you have already said ... but it is hard for a speech to satisfy as it is being recited”). Pliny offers his own justifications, a window into a narcissistic personality. But his real purpose does come out: *Nec vero ego dum recito laudari, sed dum legor cupio* (“nor do I wish to be praised while I recite, but while I am being read”). He is aiming at posterity.<sup>46</sup>

*Ep. 7.20, to Tacitus*

*Ep. 7.20, to Tacitus*, details Pliny’s reading of a “book” by Tacitus, and his hopes for their future reputations to be paired as equals. The letter prior makes much of his ties to the family of Helvidius Priscus and to Herennius Senecio. Murgia sees many parallels in 7.20 in diction with the *Dialogus*, including the pairing, *O iucundas, o pulchras vices* in 7.20.2 and *Dial. 5.4*, and later at *Dial. 9.3, pulchri quidem et iucundi*.<sup>47</sup> However, since he has ruled out a later date for the *Dialogus*, Murgia’s point is to say that the evidence of Tacitus’ influence on Pliny is weak here, since Pliny had already used the pair in *Ep. 2.3.8*. These two adjectives most likely came together frequently, but if Pliny in particular was apt to join them, then all the more reason to think that Tacitus is here borrowing from Pliny.

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<sup>46</sup> One wonders what he would feel today, knowing his letters survived, but of his speeches only his *Panegyricus*; Tacitus, in *Ann. 16.2* speaks derisively of such *laudationes*: *quaeque alia summa facundia nec minore adulatione servilia fingeant, securi de facilitate credentis* (“they fashioned these and other such, of utmost eloquence, nor less of servile flattery, free from anxiety, due to the [Princep’s] inclination to believe”). And how would Pliny have felt, knowing that *Epp. 10*, his correspondence with Trajan, had been edited and published by someone else, perhaps even Tacitus himself? In those letters, he comes across as a highly attentive administrator, and highly deferential.

<sup>47</sup> Murgia, “Pliny’s Letters,” 185.

Murgia cites several more instances, such as, *studia fovere*, at 7.20.3 and *studium poeticae ...fovet*, at *Dial.* 5.3, but claims the resemblance is not “close enough to indicate by itself direct indebtedness.”<sup>48</sup> He further admits:

[T]he quantity of the resemblances is suspicious, as is the concentration of the *Dialogus*'s similarities within its first ten chapters. In fact 5.3, 5.4, 7.3, and 10.5 all fall within the first speech of Aper, in which Aper rebukes Maternus for abandoning oratory. To estimate the possibility that chance might produce so many resemblances between a letter of Pliny and ten chapters of the *Dialogus*, consider that in the entire tenth book of the letters, addressed to Trajan, not a single notable resemblance to the *Dialogus* has been detected by myself or others.<sup>49</sup>

If one is open to accepting a *later* date for the *Dialogus*, this is not a problem — quite the contrary. But looking only at intertext and shared collocations can make it difficult to see more obvious connections in content. Tacitus is appealing to his audience to see the humor in putting Pliny's words in the mouth of Aper, given the combination of Pliny's avowed disdain for *delatores* and identification with the Stoic opposition. At a deeper level, Tacitus is asking his audience to use the intertext to see through the layers of discourse, to note that the truth often lies in what has not been said, or in inverting what has.

Though we only have one side of the epistolary dynamic (which in itself speaks volumes), here it is difficult not to perceive the imbalance in the relationship: Pliny striving to be Tacitus' equal, even more to be remembered as such, and Tacitus being indulgent, if not patronizing. The letter in its entirety, not read merely for intertext, best reveals the relationship:

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid. 186.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. 187.

*Ep. 7.20*

Librum tuum legi et, quam diligentissime potui, adnotavi quae commutanda, quae eximenda arbitrarer. Nam et ego verum dicere assuevi, et tu libenter audire. Neque enim ulli patientius reprehenduntur, quam qui maxime laudari merentur. Nunc a te librum meum cum adnotationibus tuis exspecto. O iucundas, o pulchras vices! Quam me delectat quod, si qua posteris cura nostri, usquequaque narrabitur, qua concordia simplicitate fide vixerimus! Erit rarum et insigne, duos homines aetate dignitate propemodum aequales, non nullius in litteris nominis — cogor enim de te quoque parcius dicere, quia de me simul dico —, alterum alterius studia fovisse. Equidem adulescentulus, cum iam tu fama gloriaque floreres, te sequi, tibi 'longo sed proximus intervallo' et esse et haberi concupiscebam. Et erant multa clarissima ingenia; sed tu mihi — ita similitudo naturae ferebat — maxime imitabilis, maxime imitandus videbaris. Quo magis gaudeo, quod si quis de studiis sermo, una nominamur, quod de te loquentibus statim occurro. Nec desunt qui utrique nostrum praeferantur. Sed nos, nihil interest mea quo loco, iungimur; nam mihi primus, qui a te proximus. Quin etiam in testamentis debes adnotasse: nisi quis forte alter utri nostrum amicissimus, eadem legata et quidem pariter accipimus. Quae omnia huc spectant, ut invicem ardentius diligamus, cum tot vinculis nos studia mores fama, suprema denique hominum iudicia constringant. Vale.

I have read your book, and, as diligently as I could, I have noted what I thought needed to be changed, what removed. For I have become accustomed to tell the truth, and you to freely hear it. For none are criticized more patiently than those who most greatly deserve to be praised. Now I await my book from you, with your remarks. O such pleasing, such fine exchanges! How it delights me, if there is any concern for us in posterity, wherever it may get told, that we have lived in such harmony, candor, trust! It will be rare and notable that two men nearly equal in age and rank, not of no reputation literarily — I am compelled to speak rather sparingly, since I speak of me at the same time — have nurtured each the other's endeavors. Indeed when I was a wee youth, when you were already flourishing in reputation and glory, I so longed to follow you and to be and be considered "closest," to you, "but at a long interval." Indeed there were many very distinguished talents then, but you seemed to me — thus was the similarity of our nature — most imitable and most to be imitated. I am all the more happy, that if in any conversation regarding [literary] endeavors, we are named together, that I come up when others are talking about you. Those who may be preferred to each to us are not lacking. But we — it matters not in what order — are connected. For to me the first place is that next from you. Surely you ought to have noticed even in wills, if per

chance anyone is particularly friendly to either of us, we receive the same legacies equally. All these things show that we should cherish one another more ardently, since our endeavors, morals, reputation, and finally the judgement of our fellow men bind us together by so many bonds.

I would suggest this letter reflects that Tacitus had sent Pliny his manuscript concerning the eruption of Vesuvius and Pliny the Elder's demise. Pliny had sent Tacitus two lengthy letters on the subject, at Tacitus' request; a copy of the relevant manuscript would be an expected courtesy. Is it only hindsight that makes this reader feel that Pliny presumes a bit much in this letter, that his lack of self-awareness is at times laughable? Pliny is remembered largely because of his letters, letters that he took the care to collect, edit, publish. His *Panegyricus* is the only *laudatio* to come down to us in its entirety — but we have the expanded and revised version that Pliny himself published two years after he delivered it. By the time Pliny writes his later letters, he must have begun to realize that his oratory was not the road to eternal *gloria*. His letters are wonderful to read for many reasons, and we are lucky to have them, but he is no Cicero, he is no Tacitus. His side of the exchanges with Tacitus often contain banter and *lepos*, but the letters themselves are fashioned with an eye to posterity, to portray himself next to Tacitus both literally and literarily, and thus the Tacitus portrayed therein is perhaps also a character of Pliny's fashioning.<sup>50</sup> Tacitus would have been able to read the published versions, of course, but are we really to believe that others so closely associated the two men? Pliny may be pleading for Tacitus to “cherish him more ardently,” but, alas, Tacitus never bothered to

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<sup>50</sup> Ilaria Marchesi, *The Art of Pliny's Letters: A Poetics of Allusion in the Private Correspondence*. (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 112-113.

publish *his* letters. Pliny would have to find himself positioned more obliquely in the historian's writings.

*Epp.* 7 (cont.)

*Ep.* 7.29 is addressed to a certain Montanus, perhaps the senator who attacks Regulus so eloquently in *Histories* 4. This letter discusses a monument to Pallas, the notorious freedman of Claudius, who had inordinate influence over Agrippina Minor and was finally executed under Nero in 63. He is definitely a character of note in the later books of the *Annales*, though he makes his first entrance in the Tiberian hexad.

*Ep.* 7.30 finds Pliny complaining about how busy he is, with little time for reading or writing, which provides him with an excuse for hilariously transparent false-modesty: his reading only makes him realize how poorly he writes, despite the fact that his addressee appears to have compared his speech in vindication of Helvidius Priscus the Younger with a famous speech of Demosthenes. Given that Pliny gave that speech (discussed in great detail in *Ep.* 9.13) in 97, when Helvidius had been dead already four years, Domitian only recently, it seems odd that his addressee would bring up a speech from at least eight years prior — unless Pliny wanted to remind posterity, and Tacitus, of that particular speech and his connection to Helvidius Priscus.

*Ep.* 7.31 sings the praises of the poet Annius Bassus, the same poet Aper damns with faint praise in his first speech. Interestingly, two of the collocations mentioned by Murgia concern Bassus:



et Saleius Bassus et quisquis alius studium poeticae et carminum gloriam  
fovet. (Dial.5)

and:

hi enim Basso domi nascuntur, pulchri quidem et iucundi. (Dial. 9)

The first comes in the section of Aper's speech where he slights Bassus by saying that, since he was no good as an orator, it was ok for him to write his poetry, whereas Maternus, as a fine orator, was duty-bound to use his skill according to precepts similar to those attributed to Thrasea Paetus in *Ep.* 6.29. The second leads into Aper's cutting remarks about how hard it was for Bassus to get anyone to come to a recitation, referenced above re: *Ep.* 7.2.

In *Ep.* 7.33, the last of the book, Pliny augurs the eternal fame of Tacitus' *Histories* and his consequent desire to be inserted in them; he then recounts an episode where he prosecuted Baebius Massa for corruption as governor in Baetica in the Senate with the Stoic Herennius Senecio, outspoken opponent of Domitian and biographer of Helvidius Priscus. Pliny plays up his own role and the notice it garnered, without mentioning that Senecio himself was eventually convicted of *maiestas* in 93, for many of the same reasons as Helvidius Priscus' father-in-law, Thrasea Paetus. *Ep.* 7. 33 closes with Pliny repeating his request to be included in Tacitus' *opus*:

Haec, utcumque se habent, notiora clariora maiora tu facies; quamquam non exigo ut excedas actae rei modum. Nam nec historia debet egredi veritatem, et honeste factis veritas sufficit. Vale.

However these events are considered, you will make them more famous, more brilliant, more important — although I am not driving you to exceed the bounds of the matter. For history ought not to depart from the truth, and the truth itself suffices for honorable deeds. Farewell.

*Epp.* 8.7 and 9.10 — a Response to the *Dialogus*?

Following *Epp.* 7, perhaps, comes Tacitus' riposte, the *Dialogus*. The character of Messalla overtly comports with Quintilian/Plinian doctrine; Marcus Aper, advocating what and who would seem heretical and distasteful to Pliny, seems to make use of Pliny's voice as found in his letters. This may explain *Ep.* 8.7, to Tacitus, which closes with Pliny stating that he will all the more happily review Tacitus' latest "book," given that he himself has nothing to send back upon which Tacitus might take his revenge.

When using Pliny's letters to date the *Dialogus*, some scholars have felt that the reference to the teacher-pupil dynamic in *Ep.* 8.7 points to matters of rhetoric, not literature. Even if it were conclusive, that still would point to a date well into Tacitus' work on the *Histories*, if not post-publication, and there is no reason to suspect a second edition of the *Dialogus* existed. Ilaria Marchesi finds this to be another example of Pliny inverting the relationship, despite the self-deprecatory tone.<sup>51</sup> Perhaps. He does choose — if not fabricate — his intertext from Tacitus' request, and he feels it necessary to insert the *sic enim scribis*. It is certainly another instance of Pliny wanting posterity to know that Tacitus looked to him for editorial guidance.

Neque ut magistro magister neque ut discipulo discipulus — sic enim scribis —, sed ut discipulo magister — nam tu magister, ego contra; atque adeo tu in scholam revocas, ego adhuc Saturnalia extendo — librum misisti. Num potui longius hyperbaton facere, atque hoc ipso probare eum esse me qui non modo magister tuus, sed ne discipulus quidem debeam dici? Sumam tamen personam magistri, exseramque in librum tuum ius quod dedisti, eo liberius quod nihil ex me interim missurus sum tibi in quo te ulciscaris. Vale. (8.7)

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid. 113

Neither as teacher to teacher nor as student to student — for thus you write — but as a teacher to a student — for you are the teacher, I the opposite; and to the point that you are calling [me] back to school, I am extending my Saturnalia — you have sent me a book. I could not have made a longer hyperbaton, could I, and thereby prove that not only ought I not to be said to be your teacher, but not even your student? Nevertheless, I will assume the *persona* of teacher, and I will make use of the authority which you have given me over your book, the more freely because in the meantime I am intending to send you nothing of mine upon which you might take your revenge. Farewell.

What I most enjoy is the last line. Pliny may be talking of revenge in jest, but it has the ring of a sting to it. Perhaps Pliny has found Tacitus' "revenge" in the barbs of the *Dialogus*, if not in his side of the correspondence.

In *Ep.* 9.10, the combination of the subject matter and the intertext — hunting and poetry, Diana and Minerva, woods and groves — strongly suggest that Pliny is responding to Tacitus, and not the other way around. Thus, the *earliest* that Tacitus would have composed the *Dialogus* would be while he writing his *Histories* and not before. Two other letters from Book 9, *Epp.* 9.13 (immediately prior to his last to Tacitus) and 9.27, which I will discuss later, point to a possibility that the *Dialogus* may have come even later.

I believe that both authors are also alluding to earlier poets with the doublet *nemora* and *lucos/luci*. Vergil pairs them in *Eclogue* 8, l. 85, and *Georgics* 2. l. 120-122. Tibullus, who, like Vergil, was a victim of the land confiscations during the civil war between Octavian and Marc Antony, combines them in an image evocative of Nero's unnatural commandeering of nature prior to the Great Fire in *Annales* XV:

quidve domus prodest Phrygiis innixa columnis,  
 Taenare sive tuis, sive Caryste tuis,  
 et *nemora* in domibus sacros imitantia *lucos*  
 aurataeque trabes marmoreumque solum?

Tibullus III, 3.15

What profit is there that my home rests on Phrygian columns,  
 or your Taenarian or your Carystian,  
 or in my homes gilded beams and marble floor  
 imitating the woods and sacred groves.

So why, then, does this instance of allusion not fall under Brink's earlier rubric posited for allusions to Cicero?<sup>52</sup> One can well imagine, regardless of the debate on the chronology of Pliny's letters, that both men read poetry extensively, particularly Vergil, and shared their thoughts with some frequency. Thus, both *Ep.* 9.10 and the passages in the *Dialogus* could be part of an ongoing thread between the two. Pliny took care to publish eleven of his letters to Tacitus<sup>53</sup>, consciously insuring that his *fama* would attach to Tacitus' *gloria*. Tacitus took no such care, but, judging by the playful tone of *Epp.* 9.10 and 1.6 (*Ridebis, et licet rideas.*), and the frankness of *Ep.* 7.33 (*Auguror nec me fallit augurium, historias tuas immortales futuras; quo magis illis — ingenue fatebor — inseri cupio*),<sup>54</sup> there was much banter on both sides.

Brink also discusses the date of the *Dialogus* in terms of tone, style, and political history. On tone, he agrees with F. Klingner:

The *Dialogus*, he writes, exhibits none of the feeling of elation at seeing the end of oppression and the start of a new age, emotions that

<sup>52</sup> See p. 23, n.19.

<sup>53</sup> Ronald Syme, "The Friend of Tacitus." *The Journal of Roman Studies* 47.1/2 (1957): 131

<sup>54</sup> "You will laugh, and laugh you may." "I prophesize, not does my prophesy fail me, that your Histories will be immortal; therefore I all the more wish — I will speak frankly — to be inserted in them."

characterize the introductory part of *Agricola* so memorably. Nor, on the other hand, does it impart the burning emotion of anger that appears as a concomitant in the same work. Compared with the *Agricola*, the *Dialogus* is unemotional, sceptical, a work of mature judgement.<sup>55</sup>

Both Klingner and Syme placed the *Dialogus* near the *Historiae*,<sup>56</sup> but I find even the *Historiae* too hopeful, containing as it does the promise to write of current, happier times.<sup>57</sup> Brink then backs away from historical associations, stating:

The *Dialogus* is no tract for the times. It pursues no thesis, single or composite, nor does it answer a particular question, not even very fully the question posed at the outset. It pursues a number of theses as far as they add up to describing the historical setting and the conditions of oratory at the dramatic date and, by implication perhaps, beyond that date.<sup>58</sup>

“By implication, *perhaps*”? What did Tacitus ever write that had no bearing on his time? Were the *Annales* a simple history, unrelated to the *gestalt* of the Principate? Tacitus has Fabius asking his question in the here and now, and his question is a “why,” not an “if.” Why does Tacitus feel it necessary to go back to 75 CE? What similarities resound from Maternus’ *cubiculum*, where he sits working resolutely on a tragedy that has offended the *potentes*, to the *tablinum* of Tacitus, who sits working on ...? Although even a careful reading of the *Dialogus* points to an author enjoying himself, he seems to be doing so at an intentional remove: the overall tone is one of irony (self-censorship?), he is *iuvenis admodum*, in the reign of Vespasian, he offers no opinion in his own voice, he models

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<sup>55</sup> Brink, “*Dialogus Date*,” 268, n. 51 “Tacitus” in *Die Antike* 8 (1932): 64, reprinted in *Römische Geisteswelt* (1961) 506-507.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.* 269, and earlier in this paper, n. 2.

<sup>57</sup> Tacitus *Historiae* 1.1, “quod si vita suppeditet, principatum divi Nervae et imperium Traiani, uberiorem securioremque materiam, senectuti seposui, rara temporum felicitate ubi sentire quae velis et quae sentias dicere licet.”

<sup>58</sup> Brink, “*Dialogus Date*,” 276.

Cicero, and his speakers contradict each other and themselves, with the result that no clear conclusion can be reached.

*Ep. 9.7*

Christopher Whitton, in his excellent article on Pliny's exquisite placement of Tacitus in his *Letters*,<sup>59</sup> sees the tantalizing possibility of a reference to Tacitus in *Ep. 9.27*, but believes it to be in relation to his *Histories*. By examining both its content and intratextual context, a different connection emerges. Pliny's final published letter to Tacitus comes at 9.14, following an account in the preceding letter of Pliny's own heroic stance in the senate immediately following Domitian's fall. Whitton states that this was the pattern — a letter laudatory of its author, followed by one to Tacitus, to enhance the likelihood of the former being read, no doubt. *Nihil ipse tibi plaudis, et ego nihil magis ex fide quam de te scribo* ("You yourself never applaud yourself, and as for me, I never write with more confidence than when I write about you"), it begins. (Having read through dozens of Pliny's letters, this statement requires more credulity than I can muster.) But the real point of the letter is to state that he, along with Tacitus, deserves to be remembered by posterity, if not for his genius (he wouldn't want to boast), then at least for *studio et labore et reverentia posterorum* (industry, hard work, and respect for those who follow). A final salute to his friend.

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<sup>59</sup> Christopher Whitton, "Let us tread our path together: Tacitus and the Younger Pliny," in *A Companion to Tacitus*, ed. Victoria Pagan (Malden: Blackwell, 2012), 364.

*Ep.* 9.27

But then there is *Ep.* 9.27, which follows a lengthy letter on oratory, *Ep.* 9.26, a defense of his own rather florid style: *Debet enim orator erigi, attolli, interdum etiam effervescere efferrī* (“For an orator ought to be aroused, to be lifted, from time to time even brought to boil over”). Copious metaphors follow, including one used by Maternus.

Compare:

Nec nunc ego me his similia aut dixisse aut posse dicere puto — non ita insanio —, sed hoc intellegi volo, laxandos esse *eloquentiae frenos*, nec angustissimo gyro ingeniorum impetus refringendos. (*Ep.* 9. 26)

Not that I now think that I have said things similar to these or that I am able to say such — I am not that insane — but I want this to be understood: the reins of eloquence must be loosened, and the force of genius must not not be checked by the narrowest circuit.

with:

Quae etsi nunc aptior est [ita erit], eloquentiam tamen illud forum magis exercebat, in quo nemo intra paucissimas horas perorare cogebatur et liberae comperendinationes erant et modum in dicendo sibi quisque sumebat et numerus neque dierum neque patronorum finiebatur. primus haec tertio consulatu Cn. Pompeius adstrinxit imposuitque veluti *frenos eloquentiae*...  
(*Dial.* 38)

And even if they (for form and custom of the new courts) are now more suitable, nevertheless that Forum [of old] trained eloquence better, in which no one was forced to complete a speech within so few hours and deferrals were freely given and each chose for himself the style of speaking and the number was limited neither for the days or the advocates. Gnaeus Pompeius, in his third consulship, was the first to restrict and place, as it were, reins on eloquence.

Pliny, after citing Cicero, then launches into multiple quotes from Demosthenes, one after the other, in the original Greek, mounting a display of abundant erudition. He closes with

a request for an audience with his accuser, to *et de illis et de his coram exigere* (“to deliberate about both the past and these times openly”). The topic is germane to the *Dialogus*; the context there is Maternus declaring that, effectively speaking, oratory died with the Republic.

Out of context, it is worth noting in passing, but the next letter brings the context to the fore.

C. PLINIUS PATERNO SUO S.

Quanta potestas, quanta dignitas, quanta maiestas, quantum denique numen sit historiae, cum frequenter alias tum proxime sensi. Recitaverat quidam verissimum librum, partemque eius in alium diem reservaverat. Ecce amici cuiusdam orantes obsecrantesque, ne reliqua recitaret. Tantus audiendi quae fecerint pudor, quibus nullus faciendi quae audire erubescunt. Et ille quidem praestitit quod rogabatur — sinebat fides — ; liber tamen ut factum ipsum manet manebit legeturque semper, tanto magis quia non statim. Incitantur enim homines ad noscenda quae differuntur. Vale. (*Ep.* 9.27)

I have felt, both frequently at other times and most recently, how great the power, how great the worthiness, how great the grandeur, indeed how great the divine authority that history has. A certain man had recited a most truthful book, and had saved part of it for another day. And voilà, friends of this man come begging and pleading that he not recite the rest. So great is the shame of hearing what they have done, to whom their is no shame in doing what they blush to hear of. And he indeed complied with what was asked — he allowed for their good faith; but remains as a done deed and will remain and will always be read, all the more because not right away. For men are spurred on to know what is withheld. Farewell.

How can this not have to do with Tacitus, the *Dialogus*, and the *Annales*? Maternus had just recited a *Cato*, a recitation which prompted his friends to come to beg him to retract or tame what he had written. He confounds them by vowing to write a *Thyestes* next. The *Thyestes* was a known ante-imperialist trope. And Maternus goes on to defend the lasting



*gloria* of poetry. Poetry, specifically tragedy, works here as a metonym for history in general, fully contiguous to the *Annales* in particular.

But why the remark about people ashamed to hear of what they have done where the shame of doing is absent? Had it been the *Histories*, then there would have been the possibility of hearing what they literally had done, most likely under Domitian. Certainly possible. But criticizing Domitian and his reign had by then been standard practice for a while. The *Annales*, however, held universal truths, behavioral referents, and Pliny's comment forms a *sententia*, characteristic rather than factual. As Tacitus wrote, in his discursus on history at *Annales* 4.33:

utque familiae ipsae iam extinctae sint, reperies qui ob similitudinem morum aliena malefacta sibi obiectari putent. etiam gloria ac virtus infensos habet, ut nimis ex propinquo diversa arguens.

And so, even though it may be that the families themselves are now extinct, you will find those who, on account of the similarities of character, think that the evil deeds of others are being hurled at themselves; even glory and *virtus* have enemies, as presenting contrasts at too close a range.

The first hexad of the *Annales* provides multiple *sententiae* and exemplars of senators vying with each other in servility; it is not all about Tiberius' mastery of *simulatio* and *dissimulatio*, nor his slide into despotism and depravity. And perhaps several in the audience Pliny mentions represented the *potentes*, just as in *Dial. 2: Nam postero die quam Curiatius Maternus Catonem recitaverat, cum offendisse potentium animos dicetur*.<sup>60</sup> It is unclear whether Pliny, in *Ep. 9.27*, is talking about the merely compliant or those implicated in the practice of *prava interpretatio*, the *delatores* themselves. It is

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<sup>60</sup> "For on the day after Curiatius Maternus had recited his *Cato*, when he was said to have offended the minds of the powerful."

doubtful that Trajan himself, being more concerned with building programs and foreign conquests, would have bothered to attend a literary function at this point in his reign, but perhaps he, too, like Tiberius, had *auris superbas et offensioni proniores* (“ears haughty and too quick to offense”).

It is highly likely that Pliny is referring to Tacitus in *Ep.* 9.27, and possible that it is part of the *Annales* that Tacitus had recited. The *Histories* would have already been completed by then, since most sources point to a publication date of around 109 CE for Book 9 of the *Epistulae*, 108 for the *Histories*. Pliny may have chosen not to mention Tacitus by name to make his audience pay closer attention, having learned that trick from Tacitus. Contemporary audiences would perhaps have recognized the actual event, the author, and its aftermath, but, since Pliny took the time to edit and publish his letters, he had future audiences in mind, and his own *gloria* as a writer.

Any reader of both *Ep.* 9.27 and the *Dialogus* would immediately think of Maternus polishing his *Cato*, planning his *Thyestes*, of his friends anxious for his safety. Pliny may have been hoping to place himself literarily within the *Annales*, having done so literally with the *Histories*;<sup>61</sup> it may be a wish to generalize from a specific, or it may have been Pliny’s attempt at Tacitean ironic wordplay — discussing the lasting *auctoritas* of history while remaining silent (*tacitus*) as to the *auctor*. In any case, Pliny did want his reader to know that he believed the book to be *verissimus*, and he did not include himself amongst those who asked the author not to continue. Though we will never know for cer-

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<sup>61</sup> Pliny’s two letters to Tacitus on the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius, *Epp.* 6.16 and 6.20, bear witness to his contribution.

tain, this letter generates at least the possibility that the episode recounted in the letter prompted Tacitus to write his *Dialogus*.

Although Tacitus never bothered to publish his side of the correspondence, and was silent regarding his friend in his extant works, there was an ongoing literary dialogue between the two men; the intertext worked both ways, and intertext is an elevated form of dialogue, one in which the reader is invited to participate. The intertext extends the message beyond the addressee, be it Plinius Paternus or Fabius Iustus, to the superaddressee, the reader. As a final example in this dialogue between Pliny and Tacitus, I offer an excerpt from the Neronian hexad, written at least five years after Pliny's death, but a tribute ... perhaps. In Book 15, as the Pisonian conspiracy was collapsing, Nero demands, in indirect discourse, to know why Subrius Flavus, a *vir militaris*, joined the conspiracy against his emperor. Tacitus not only grants the soldier direct speech in response, but claims to give us the man's *ipsa verba*, thus freeing the author from all rhetorical restraint and endowing his speech with a perlocutionary force:<sup>62</sup>

"oderam te," inquit. "nec quisquam tibi fidelior militum fuit, dum amari meruisti: odisse coepi, postquam parricida matris et uxoris, auriga et histrio et incendiarius extitisti." ipsa *rettuli* verba, quia non, ut Senecae, vulgata erant, nec minus nosci decebat militaris viri sensus incomptos et validos. nihil in illa coniuratione gravius auribus Neronis accidisse constitit, qui ut *faciendis* sceleribus promptus, ita *audiendi* quae *faceret* insolens erat. (15.57)

"I hated you," he said, "nor was anyone of your soldiers more faithful to you while you deserved to be loved; I began to hate after you proved yourself to be the murderer of your mother and your wife, a charioteer and a

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<sup>62</sup> Roland Mayer, "Ipsa Verba," 140: "Verbatim quotations may prove to be a valuable license, which releases the narrator from the obligations imposed by rhetorical theory upon the genre .... for a brief moment the historian breaks through the homogenous texture of his narrative and allows the reader a glimpse of the reality which he records."

mime and an arsonist.” *I* have reported his very words, because they were not, unlike Seneca’s, published, nor was it less fitting that the unpolished and robust feelings of a common soldier be known. Nothing in that conspiracy fell more heavily upon the ears of Nero who, as ready as he was to commit crimes, was quite unaccustomed to hear of what he did.

Tacitus has taken Pliny’s [t]antus audiendi quae fecerint pudor, quibus nullus faciendi quae audire erubescunt, and added layers, but left enough similarity to recognize the intertext (qui ut **faciendis** sceleribus promptus, ita **audiendi** quae **faceret** insolens erat). A tribute of sorts, but one that reflects the differences between the two men. Tacitus has chosen to take Pliny’s finely-wrought *sententia*, with its balanced *audiendi/fecerint* vs. *faciendis/audire*, its colorful *erubescunt*, and fashioned a vignette where, before he reworks the maxim, he constructs a context of contrast: Subrius Flavus, a common soldier, speaks his *sensus*, “feelings,” that are *incomptos et validos*, “unpolished and robust;” although he is addressing Nero (already Subrius’ opposite), Tacitus decides to bring in Seneca, reminding us in first person of his authorial decision, his own proairetic moment, back at *Ann.* 15. 63,<sup>63</sup> not to report the courtier/author’s final words, since they had been published. Only because they had been published? The implication here is that Seneca’s words were not *incompti*, and therefore, given the prominent placement of the adjective, neither were they *validi*. This is a character judgement. The Soldier tells the unvarnished truth; the Insider does not — Seneca’s words would have been *compti et invalidi*.

Tacitus goes further by contrasting *vulgata* with *nosci decebat*. *Vulgata* here is used to mean “published,” but it has the general sense of “made common(ly known),” as

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<sup>63</sup> “et novissimo quoque momento suppeditante eloquentia advocatis scriptoribus pleraque tradidit, quae in vulgus edita eius verbis invertere supersedeo.”

in *vulgus*, the common crowd. Not quite as meretricious as *comptus* might imply, but also not necessarily reliable — for instance, *vulgata* is often paired with *fama* or *rumor*. Tacitus could have chosen *edita*, a more neutral and less ambiguous word. *Nosci decebat*, “it was fitting to be(come) known,” on the other hand, confers moral approbation. *Nosco* — “to come to know, to learn.” Not *scio* — “to have the knowledge, to know.” *Decet*, the impersonal, denoting not so much the obligation of necessity but that of what is right, that which brings *decus*, moral honor. This excerpt clearly does Seneca no favors, yet it is also an allusion to Pliny’s *Epistulae*. Was Tacitus signaling that Pliny’s *Epistulae*, *vulgata* as they were, and definitely *compti*, were unreliable, untrustworthy? Pliny had no recourse to any further *ultio* for this last piece of their dialogue.

### Chapter III

#### Cicero as Contextual Link between the *Dialogus* and the *Annales*

##### Why Cicero?

When Tacitus decided to write the *Dialogus*, he chose to do so using an overtly Ciceronian model, replete with Ciceronian allusions and intertext. Why? Was it simply because Cicero presented an obvious foil to achieve the ostensible purpose of the piece: to debate the reasons for the decline in contemporary oratory? Did he, in fact, believe that oratory had declined? Tacitus himself stood securely at the top rung of contemporary oratory. His Marcus Aper delivers witty, barbed, and salient critiques of the Republic's premier orator; he effectively punctures a great figure who was prone to coming across as a windbag. So perhaps Cicero's significance lies elsewhere. An examination of the historical context surrounding Cicero's models coupled with oblique references to contemporary parallels — viewed parallaxically from both the dramatic date of the *Dialogus* as well as the time surrounding its composition — reveals a more subtle and complex motive. What seems a transparent choice becomes a subterfuge for a more opaque purpose.

##### Overview

Christopher Van den Berg argues that the lack of resolution in the *Dialogus* was part of the rhetorical exercise, that the *Dialogus* was a genuine and successful attempt at a rhetorical showpiece, replete with paired speeches, inherent and unresolved contradic-

tions, both inter- and intratexts, and flourishes aplenty.<sup>64</sup> Van den Berg casts it as an elegant disquisition on *eloquentia* in Tacitus' day, more of an answer to Quintilian than anything political or subversive. I argue that the lack of resolution, the many contradictions, leave Tacitus free to insert his genuine judgements at will with little or no risk of consequence, yet with a decent guarantee that they will outlast the Principate; if there is one surety in all of Tacitus' works, it is that he believed that the written word endured.

The intentional obfuscation at once demands that the reader examine closely and points to an author who, one could argue, feels the need for both *simulatio* and *dissimulatio*. The intertexts function as subtext, with the author fully expecting his reader make the connection and understand the significance, a process Umberto Eco would call "abduction."<sup>65</sup> The self-conscious literariness, the trope of Ciceronian dialogue, the sign-posts of fictionality, alert the reader to seek a transcending and coherent truth.

Many have identified Maternus with Tacitus. This has been one of the grounds for an early date: Tacitus is announcing his retirement from public oratory. Although there is no record of Tacitus speaking after the souring experience prosecuting Priscus, the great orator did not retire from public life after 100. On the contrary, the fact that he served as proconsul in Asia in 112 argues for his full participation — Asia was a plum assignment, a reward. Also, given that he wrote both the *Agricola* and the *Germania* prior to 100, there is no reason to assume that he needed to retire to write the *Histories*, which came out prior to his proconsulship. As mentioned earlier, the *Agricola* and the *Histories* con-

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<sup>64</sup> Christopher Van den Berg. "Intratext, Declamation and Dramatic Argument in Tacitus' *Dialogus de Oratoribus*." *Classical Quarterly* 64 (2014): 298-315.

<sup>65</sup> Umberto Eco, "The Theory of Signs and the Role of the Reader," *Bulletin of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 1 (1981): 44

tain both a programmatic *recusatio* and a promise, never fulfilled, to write about the happy times under the current regime(s). The *Annales* has none such, and all we have of promise in the *Dialogus* is the summation of Maternus' final speech in a jarring revision, if not perversion, of the character first found sitting at his desk, defiant in the face of impending *prava interpretatio*.

It is a mistake to identify any one speaker in the *Dialogus* with Tacitus; he intentionally makes it problematic to do so. Yet there are continuous threads woven throughout all of the contradictions: the attention to placement within literary history, censorship and the relationship between political climate and literature, the endurance of the written word. There are also many parallels with the *Annales*, both textual and thematic. Tacitus in each is choosing a period at a sufficiently safe remove to reflect on contemporary reality. In both works, the author is engaging in interlocution in the only way left — on the page.

In discussing “interlocution” I would like to refer to the work of Jean-François Lyotard, who relates the gradations between the capacity and the legitimacy of interlocutions in terms of the republic vs. the *demos*, though an authoritarian regime, through its appropriation and subversion of language, similarly reduces speech to homogeneous signals.

“(T)he distinguishing characteristic of interlocution is the relation of simultaneous similarity and disparity introduced between the speakers. The instances *I* and *you* cannot merge, since while the one speaks the other speaks no longer or not yet. *I* and *you* are deictics, and as such are correlated with now, and now designates the present of speech. From it, the temporality of past and future unfold. But relative to the capacity to speak, which by definition is not confined to the present but extends to every



possible interlocution, *I* and *you* are alike.... Interlocution thus implies that human beings cannot, as animals can, merge into a community based on signals. They do so only when the impossibility of interlocution reduces them to that meager resource. In theory, the human *we* does not precede but results from interlocution...This is the principle of the Greek *politeia* or the modern republic. The citizen is the human individual whose right to address others is recognized by those others ... the alterity implicit in civic interlocution.<sup>66</sup>

The characters in the *Dialogus* present interlocution outright, if ironically, between the brief proem and the final *discessimus* — the first person representing the author’s only legitimate interlocution: that between Tacitus the announcer and the alterity recognized in the reader, present or future. But civic interlocution is under attack throughout, both in Maternus’ opening salvo and in his recantation upon the arrival of Messalla.

The *Annales* dispenses with true dialogue altogether, while making use of oratory. Any precursor or rejoinder to *oratio recta* comes as *oratio obliqua*; the only exception to this is the set of paired speeches between Seneca and Nero, which I will examine later. Interlocution between author and reader can be achieved only by reading closely to penetrate the narrative construct, and by accepting the coexistence of a multiplicity of meanings. Some contend that this is why Tacitus made his work so difficult to read — it disallows a superficial reading.<sup>67</sup> An exploration of *Annales* scholarship looking at the use of irony, oratory, the theme of literature in general and tragedy in particular, combined with a deeper look at the *Dialogus*, will strengthen the connection between the two works.

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<sup>66</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, “The Other’s Rights,” in *On Human Rights: The Oxford Amnesty Lectures*, Stephen Shute and Susan Hurley, ed. (New York: Basic Books, 1993):138-139.

<sup>67</sup> Dylan Sailor, in *Writing and Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), discusses the construct of the narrator in Tacitus at length, and Ellen O’Gorman, in *Irony and Misreading in the Annals of Tacitus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), treats Tacitean difficulty and multiplicity of meaning as purposeful and protective. Both will be cited more specifically later.

### In the Cubiculum of Maternus

As Tacitus opens the *Dialogus* proper with the occasion for the ensuing debates, he sets up juxtapositions that are meant to hold throughout the work:

Nam postero die quam *Curatius Maternus Catonem* recitaverat, cum offendisse *potentium animos* diceretur, tamquam in *eo tragoediae argumento sui oblitus* tantum *Catonem* cogitasset, eaque de re per urbem *frequens sermo* haberetur, venerunt ad eum Marcus Aper et Iulius Secundus, *celeberrima tum ingenia* fori nostri, **quos ego utrosque** non modo in iudiciis studiose audiebam, sed domi quoque et in publico adsectabar mira studiorum cupiditate et quodam ardore iuvenili, ut fabulas quoque eorum et disputationes et *arcana semotae dictionis* penitus exciperem. (*Dial.* 2)

For on the day after Curatius Maternus had recited his *Cato*, since he was said to have offended the minds of the powerful, just as if, having forgotten himself in the theme of that tragedy, he had thought only of Cato, and conversations regarding this matter were constantly being held throughout the city, there came to him Marcus Aper and Iulius Secundus, at that time the most celebrated talents of our Forum, both of whom I not only used to listen to eagerly in court, but also at home, and I would follow them about in public out of a wondrous zeal for my studies and a certain youthful ardor, so that I would take in deeply their chatter and debates and the secret matters of their private utterances.

There seems to be no need to introduce Maternus or his *Cato*. One can assume they were both still known at the time Tacitus was writing, just as Cicero's interlocutors and their works and fates would have been known to his audience. Tacitus, by placing Maternus with *Cato* and interposing his youthful self between two of the most celebrated orators of the day in the context of a *tirocinium fori*, provides his audience with a personal *ethos* from which to proceed; having Maternus forget himself in the *argumento* of that tragedy, citing the *frequens sermo* about his offending the "animos potentium" as the pretext for his friends' visit, referring to the *arcana semotae dictio* — this all contributes to an at-

mosphere of impending menace, of fear, made even more oppressive due to the claustrophobic setting of Maternus' cubiculum. The *penitus exciperem* serves as the author's advice to his audience as well — "Pay close attention." Although words for fear appear seldom in this dialogue, they appear solely before the entrance of Messalla, and the sense of fear both undergirds the abrupt change of topic upon Messalla's entrance and informs the audience's interpretation of Maternus' *peroratio*. Fear is the sensation that undergirds the *Annales* in its entirety.<sup>68</sup>

Aper and Secundus (accompanied by the silent author) enter the bedroom of Maternus and catch him red-handed, *quem pridie recitaverat librum inter manus habentem deprehedimus* ("holding the book he had recited the day before in his hands"). Secundus cuts to the chase: does the chatter of the *malignorum* not frighten him at all, or at least so he might love the offenses of *tui Catonis* less? Could he take away the material that might fall prey to *pravae interpretationi*? There seems to be no question that offense has been taken, that their friend is in danger. Maternus, in his first *riposte* to their request that he rework and publish a work *non quidem meliorem, sed tamen securiorem*, (*Dial.* 3)<sup>69</sup> first makes it clear he will do no such thing; his friends will recognize what Maternus owes to himself. Then he goes one step further with the announcement that he is at work on a *Thyestes*, a work that will say whatever has been left unsaid in his *Cato*.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Looking ahead to my discussion of Maternus, Seneca, and the *Annales*, I point out that *metus* and its variants come up twenty times in Book 1, nineteen in Book 2, thirteen in Book 3, fourteen in Book 4, nineteen in Book 6, fourteen in Book 12, fourteen in Book 13, sixteen in Book 14 (Seneca's downfall), eighteen in Book 15 (Seneca's demise), twenty-one times in the *Octavia*, and twenty-one times in Seneca's *Oedipus*. Yet, when it comes to Book 16 and Thrasea Paetus, merely five times (granted Book 16 gets cut off in section 35).

<sup>69</sup> Notice how Tacitus lets the *non quidem meliorem* go unchallenged as a consequence of being *securiorem*.

Quod si qua omisit Cato, sequenti recitatione Thyestes dicet; hanc enim tragoediam disposui iam et intra me ipse formavi. Atque ideo maturare libri huius editionem festino, ut dimissa priore cura novae cogitationi toto pectore incumbam. (Dial. 3)

But whatever Cato has left out, Thyestes will say in a following recitation; for I myself have already arranged this tragedy and formulated it within myself. And thus I am hastening the publication of this book [Cato], so that with my previous care out of the way I can apply myself whole-heartedly to this new project.

The *Cato* was just a warm-up, and the reference to *securiorem* deliberate trigger to recall an earlier promise made by Tacitus at *Histories* 1.1 — promise he is now breaking:

quod si vita suppeditet, principatum divi Nervae et imperium Traiani, uberiorem *securioremque* materiam, senectuti seposui, rara temporum felicitate ubi sentire quae velis et quae sentias dicere licet. (*Histories* 1.1.)

But if my lifetime should suffice, I have put aside for my old age the principate of the deified Nerva and the command of Trajan, richer and safer material, due to the rare felicity of the times when it is permitted to feel what you want and to say what you feel.

In the *Dialogus*, Tacitus, literally present at this occasion, is using Maternus here to announce *his* next work, his masterpiece, the *Annales*. He is breaking his earlier promise; the new work will not be *securior* — *uberior*, perhaps, but not *securior*. Maternus' new tragedy, a *Thyestes*, to which he plans to devote his *totum pectus*, had built-in anti-imperial credentials, a step beyond glorifying a martyr to the Republican cause. The parallels between the Julio-Claudians and the House of Atreus would have been hard to miss; actual cannibalism may have been lacking, but family dinners were not safe affairs. The other tragedian to write a *Thyestes*, Seneca, was himself a victim of Nero. By making this announcement in the guise of a Ciceronian dialogue, he is also announcing not so

much the death of oratory, but the death of dialogue and the dynamic of power it reflected, a death that dated back to Augustus. Oratory serves in the *Dialogus* as a vehicle, but it is not its real subject.

### The *Dialogus* and Cicero

The *Dialogus* and the *Annales* both dish out a lot of literary history, whether by discussing various authors of various genres or by generous allusions to the same. There is also the matter of modeling: Cicero for the *Dialogus* and Sallust for the *Annales*. Roland Mayer, in his introduction to his 2001 edition of the *Dialogus*, and C.O. Brink, as mentioned earlier, go into some detail regarding the fact of the modeling, but Mayer throughout his edition also points out the many instances of textual allusion, mostly to the dialogues *Brutus* and *de Oratore*, as well as *Orator*. Notable, too, are the ways in which Tacitus subverts the Ciceronian model. For instance, although Tacitus is physically present for his mentors' debate, his "presence serves only to reinforce the paradox of his absence," and his voice is never heard, while Cicero, in both the *Brutus* and the *de Oratore*, does not shrink from explicitly expounding his own views.<sup>71</sup> Cicero seems to serve a double purpose of cover and contrast, distance and unity, referent and point of departure.

A.H. Macdonald states that Tacitus is merely following a "convention of 'Ciceronianism' in discussing rhetoric," and that the *Dialogus* "has not chronological signifi-

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<sup>71</sup> D.S. Levene, "Tacitus' *Dialogus* as Literary History," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 134.1 (Spring 2004): 190; see also S.M. Goldberg, "Appreciating Aper: The Defence of Modernity in Tacitus' *Dialogus de oratoribus*," *The Classical Quarterly*, New Series 49.1 (1999): 226. The article also does a nice job of juxtaposing passages from the *Dialogus* side-by-side with parallel passages from Cicero. However, Goldberg seems to take the "second" Maternus at face-value.

cance.”<sup>72</sup> But the choice of Cicero (together with Cassius Severus) as one of the two stylistic *termini*, *post* and *ante quem* would argue otherwise; as Aper points out (17.3 ff.), from the death of Cicero in 43 BCE to the time of the dialogue in 75 CE is conceivably one *aetas*— all that has changed since *divus Augustus rem publicam **rexit*** (boldface my own) is style, taste, not the political situation. As D.S. Levene writes, “Aper is presenting an essential unity of external circumstances between the age of Cicero and the time when he is speaking.”<sup>73</sup>

statue sex et quinquaginta annos, quibus mox *divus Augustus rem publicam rexit*; (adice) ... ac sextam iam *felicis huius principatus* stationem qua *Vespasianus rem publicam fovet*: centum et viginti anni ab interitu Ciceronis in hunc diem colliguntur, unius hominis aetas. (17.3)

Set forth the fifty-six years in which the soon-to-be deified Augustus ruled the Republic ... [the intervening years of the intervening emperors] ... and now the sixth season [year] of this happy principally in which Vespasian fosters the Republic: one hundred twenty years from the death of Cicero to this day are gathered, the age-span of one man.

What is the reader to make of the difference between *rexit* and *fovet*? If he prefers *fovere*, does he prefer Vespasian over *divus* Augustus? Does he dare? What is the point of highlighting the “six seasons [years] of this happy *principatus*,”<sup>74</sup> if Aper wants to communicate that this is one *aetas*? It is passages like these that prompt the reader to remember that this debate takes place at *least* twenty-five years prior to Tacitus’ written *recordatio*, and then to ask if Tacitus is choosing this moment, six years into Vespasian’s reign, to reflect on the current era — several years into Trajan’s reign. *Plus ça change?* (Trajan

<sup>72</sup> A.H. MacDonald, “Theme and Style in Roman Historiography,” *The Journal of Roman Studies* 65 (1975): 9.

<sup>73</sup> Levene, “Dialogus as Literary History,” 174.

<sup>74</sup> Note, again, the echo of *Histories* 1.1, and the breaking of the promise.

treated the senate courteously, but, rather than enhance their authority, he actually reduced their power further by removing their ability to appoint ex-consuls as governors to two poorly run provinces.)

Tacitus is sending a signal with this specific element, at once pro- and analeptic. He is relying upon his audience to do the math, to ask themselves what happens next in Vespasian's rule, or, in this excerpt, "fostering." As mentioned in *Dial.* 6, Eprius Marcellus and Helvidius Priscus have recently (*nuper*) had their altercation in the senate; Helvidius Priscus is soon to be exiled and then executed, while Eprius enjoys the Emperor's favor only a little longer, being forced to commit suicide in 79.

Maternus also uses Cicero as a terminal referent, parallactically; near the end of his final volte-face, he says at *Dial.* 40.14:

Sed nec tanti rei publicae Gracchorum eloquentia fuit, ut paterentur et leges, nec bene famam eloquentiae Cicero tali exitu pensavit.

Nor was the eloquence of the Gracchi of such worth to the Republic that their laws were tolerated, nor did Cicero spend wisely for his reputation for eloquence with such a demise.

Maternus thus caps the end of the chaos that produced the true eloquence with the death of Cicero — and every reader knew exactly the circumstances of *talis exitus*. The rostra still stood in the Forum; one could still visualize the head and hands of Cicero impaled on the ships' beaks. Tacitus did not employ a Ciceronian model simply for its conventions, but rather he used his choice of Cicero to communicate his belief that the death of Cicero marked the death of the Republic and with it the *raison d'être* of public oratory. Dangerous sentiments to express *sua voce*.

Parallels within the *Dialogus* and Three Works of Cicero: *de Oratore*, *Brutus*, *Orator*

Much has been written on Tacitus' debt to Cicero in the *Dialogus*, mostly focusing on the intertext with three works in particular: the *de Oratore*, a dialogue with a similar conceit of going back in time, in this case to 91 BCE (when Cicero would have been, like Tacitus, *iuvenis admodum*), the *Brutus*, a dialogue set in real time (46 BCE) which covers and catalogues the greatest orators of Greece and Rome, and *Orator*, a treatise on oratory addressed to Brutus. The *Dialogus* draws openly from Cicero. The very premise of *de Oratore* — a conversation held among outstanding orators some 36 years before Cicero is writing (55 BCE) — is similar to the *Dialogus*, and the various speakers in the *Dialogus* echo passages from that work, as well as from his *Brutus* and *Orator* (both written in 46 BCE). *Brutus* is also a dialogue amongst three important men, this time contemporary: Cicero himself, Marcus Iunius Brutus (*the Brutus*), and Titus Pomponius Atticus, Cicero's good friend. Like the *Dialogus*, it gives a history of oratory and discusses the merits of various famous orators. R.H. Martin and others have amply cited parallel passages from from all three works in the *Dialogus*, so the question here is why, and not whether, Tacitus makes use of the format and intertext.

It would be easy, and safe, to leave it at the obvious: who better to emulate than Cicero when penning a treatise on oratory? Quintilian, Tacitus' older contemporary (and Pliny's teacher) and author of the *Institutio Oratoria*, referring to Cicero at 10.112, states::

Quare non inmerito ab hominibus aetatis suae regnare in iudiciis dictus est, apud posteros vero id consecutus ut Cicero iam non hominis nomen sed eloquentiae habeatur.



For which reason not undeservedly by men of his own age it was said that he reigned in the courts, and amongst posterity it has followed that “Cicero” is considered no longer the name of a man but of eloquence.

The Quintilianesque character of Messalla extols Cicero and follows his teachings in his defense of bygone orators, while Aper both credits and pokes fun at him. Rhetorically, Tacitus leaves us without resolution. But does Tacitus intend for his audience to pick up on other signals?

I prefer to focus on the fact, rather than the instances, of intertext and allusion. I have already discussed how intertext performs an interlocutory function between author and superaddressee; it is the subtext that recognizes the alterity in the reader. The conceit of a dialogue format immediately triggers a bi-analeptic response to recognize precedent: Plato and Cicero. Both men wrote dialogues (both also on oratory), both men were philosophers, both wrote famously on “the republic.” Plato wrote in a democracy, Cicero looked back to Plato as he wrote in the final days of the Republic.

But Cicero is the more relevant here when connecting the *Dialogus* to the *Annales*. Cicero was a consummate *exemplum* of an orator/statesman. He had climbed the rungs of the *cursus honorum* using his talent, since, as a *novus homo*, he was by default an outsider. He exposed and defeated the Catilinarian conspiracy as consul in 63 BCE. He was a highly effective and entertaining speaker in the courts. He sided with the *Optimates* with the zeal of an *arriviste*, and supported Pompey only when he became the last hope of those trying to preserve the *status quo*. Yet, despite his achievements and his credentials as a Republican, later Romans did not accord him the dissident status and reputation

of Cato or Brutus or Cassius. In imperial-era ears, he set off no alarm-bells for outspokenness, the new meaning of *libertas*. Perhaps this is because he retired from public life after Caesar pardoned him for siding with Pompey. Even now we tend to think of him as someone who refrained from sticking his neck out.

Yet look at his *exitus*. At the age of sixty-three, he stepped onto the *rostra* to deliver his *Phillippics*, a set of speeches against the triumvir Marcus Antonius so audacious and defiant that he found himself on the proscription lists. Though he did then try to leave Rome, when Marcus Antonius' henchmen caught up with him, he literally stuck his head — and neck — out of his *sella* to prevent his own guards from risking bloodshed. *Talis exitus*. Perhaps that was a memory Tacitus wanted his readers to have before them, underneath all of the more obvious and safe talk of Cicero in the context of *eloquentia* and *oratoria*.

Cicero was also a Stoic, a famous one. Although Stoicism rears its head in both the *Agricola* and the *Histories*, its adherents play a major role in the *Annales*. Tacitus, once an advocate of *moderatio*, deplored Stoic martyrdoms as wasteful and vainglorious in his first two works. In the *Annales*, Tacitus seems to have revisited and revised his opinion. Thrasea Paetus becomes *virtus ipsa* by Book 16,<sup>75</sup> and Seneca, once confronted with the inevitability of a death sentence, redeems himself by dying as an *exemplum* of Stoicism, practicing a tenet he had previously better preached.

The context in which Cicero wrote first the *De Oratore*, then the *Brutus* and *Orator*, makes retrospection unavoidable when reading the *Dialogus*. The fact that Tacitus

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<sup>75</sup> *Ann.* XVI.21, “Trucidatis tot insignibus viris ad postremum Nero *virtutem ipsam* excindere concupivit interfecto Thrasea et Barea Sorano...” More on both Thrasea and Seneca will follow.

was looking back *at least* (by my reckoning) thirty-six years to 75 CE immediately alerts the audience to Cicero, who was looking back thirty-six years, from 55 BCE to 91, in *De Oratore*. In 46 BCE, when Cicero wrote the *Brutus* and then *Orator*, the Caesarian Civil War was over, but Caesar, Brutus, and Cassius (and Cicero!) were still alive, and the Battle of Actium was fifteen years in the future. These contexts, and the audience's awareness of them, lend an aura of impending menace to the already fraught ambience of

Maternus' *Cubiculum*, Revisited

*Notable distinctions.* But what is different? In *De Oratore*, Cicero consciously used the past to reflect upon his present, and certainly he knew the outcomes of his interlocutors in the Social War and the civil conflicts between Marius and Sulla. Tacitus' audience, on the other hand, knew not only *their* outcomes, but the fate of Cicero as well, and also the fates of the interlocutors in the *Dialogus*. In the *De Oratore*, the speakers debate on the role of the orator: can or should an orator have a role in guiding the state? Should he stick to the courts? The champion in that debate, the one who defends oratory's practical use against the more philosophical ones espoused by Lucius Licinius Crassus, is Marcus Antonius Orator. Although Cicero may have been writing from a distance of 35 or so years, his hindsight could not foresee what role M. Antonius' grandson would play in his own life as orator, not to mention his death.

Cicero was writing (*De Oratore*) shortly after his recall from exile in 57. His *recordatio* takes place in 91 BCE, shortly before the Social War, which was immediately

followed by the civil war between Marius and Sulla; Cicero wrote knowing that his reading audience would pick up on that and understand the significance of the turbulent era that followed. The host, Lucius Licinius Crassus, would die that very year. Marcus Antonius Orator, Gaius Iulius Caesar Strabo Vopiscus (Julius Caesar's uncle), and Caesar's half-brother Catulus, partisans of Sulla, would all die — either by suicide or execution — in 87, upon Marius' recapture of Rome. (Julius Caesar's father remained a Marian; Marius was married to his sister.) Gaius Aurelius Cotta, outstanding young orator of the day, Julius Caesar's maternal uncle, was the witness who survived to "tell" Cicero about the debates that took place over those two days. The setting in Crassus' villa provides the calm before the storm, a safe point and place for reflection (and thus a contrast to Mater-nus' *cubiculum*). The Republic had been battered, but orators still had a role.

It is also in *De Oratore* that Marcus Antonius gave a critique of the annalistic format of earlier Roman histories, praises the *eloquentia* of Herodotus and Thucydides, and gives this *discursus* on the writing of history as it relates to rhetoric (2.62-64):

Sed illuc redeo: videtisne, quantum *munus* sit oratoris historia? Haud scio an flumine orationis et varietate maximum; neque eam reperio usquam separatim instructam rhetorum praeceptis; sita sunt enim ante oculos. Nam quis nescit primam esse historiae legem, ne quid falsi dicere audeat? Deinde ne quid veri non audeat? Ne quae suspicio gratiae sit in scribendo? Ne quae simultatis? Haec scilicet fundamenta nota sunt omnibus, ipsa autem exaedificatio posita est in rebus et verbis: rerum ratio ordinem temporum desiderat, regionum descriptionem; vult etiam, quoniam in rebus magnis memoriaque dignis consilia primum, deinde acta, postea eventus expectentur, et de consiliis significari quid scriptor probet et in rebus gestis declarari non solum quid actum aut dictum sit, sed etiam quo modo? et cum de eventu dicatur, ut causae explicentur omnes vel casus vel sapientiae vel temeritatis hominumque ipsorum non solum res gestae, sed etiam, qui fama ac nomine excellant, de cuiusque vita atque natura.

But I return to my subject. Do you not see how much history is the duty of an orator? I hardly know whether the flow or variety of the speech is greatest; nor do I ever find it taught separately in the precepts of rhetoricians — for they are always placed before our eyes. Who does not know that it is the first law of history that one dare not say something false? The next that one not dare *not* say something true? That there be not any suspicion of influence or favor in writing? Of any grudge? Indeed these are the foundations known to all; its very structure has been placed on both the affairs and the words; its methodology requires the chronology of events, a description of the locales, and, since in matters weighty and worthy of remembrance the plans are expected first, then the deeds, and then the outcomes, [history] wants also that it be signified, with regard to designs, what the writer approves, and that it be made clear, with regard to deeds, not only what was done or said, but even how. And when writing about the outcomes, in order that all causes be explained — whether mishap or wisdom or or recklessness of the men, and of the men themselves, not only their deeds, but also, at least for those who stand out in reputation and name, the life and nature of each.

This discussion is pointedly absent in the *Dialogus*, though by then Tacitus had most likely written his *Histories*. His audience then would have “heard” that omission more clearly than we do now; it functioned as subtext.

Tacitus’ cataloguing of the literary history of orators and poets by all three interlocutors recalls the same in the *Brutus*. Messalla provides many echoes of Cicero’s statements on oratory (and comes off much like *De Oratore*’s Crassus<sup>76</sup>), while both he and Aper, in his exposé, also discuss the importance of philosophy — featured particularly in *Orator*. In 55, when Cicero wrote *de Oratore*, Caesar was still in Gaul; there had been a First, but not a Second Triumvirate. In the *Brutus* and *Orator*, the year is 46 BCE. Brutus, both a character in the eponymous dialogue and the dedicatee of *Orator*, was known for

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<sup>76</sup> Goldberg, “Appreciating Aper,” 235: “Having sent us back to *de Oratore* by echoing its structural formulae, Tacitus has made it all the easier for readers to recognize Messalla’s speech for what it is, a somewhat complacent and jejune version of the argument that Crassus had made and Antonius refuted.”

his public speaking, had fought on the losing side at Pharsalus, but had yet to fight at Phillippi; Marcius Porcius Cato was already dead, but Brutus had yet to marry Cato's daughter; Caesar had forgiven Brutus, Brutus had yet to assassinate Caesar. Not only had the historian Cremutius Cordus yet to be tried under the *lex maiestatis* for styling Brutus and Cassius as "the last of the Romans" (*Annales* 4.34-36),<sup>77</sup> tragedies and biographies entitled *Cato* had yet to cause imperial dyspepsia. Tacitus' audience knew all of this. Perhaps Tacitus' audience also knew of the paired speeches between Cato and Brutus in Book 2 of Lucan's *Pharsalia/Bellum Civile*. It may have been safe for Tacitus to name Brutus openly as an orator amongst the likes of Cicero and Messalla Corvinus in his own *Dialogus*, but the allusions to the three works of Cicero require the audience to hear the implications they posed, too, to make their own connections and draw their own conclusions. Along with Cicero, Tacitus was conjuring Cato, Brutus, and Cassius, *ultimi Romanorum*.

Also noteworthy is the fact that Cicero's own tone and outlook had changed between 55 and 46. In 55, he could still believe that an orator's place was at the helm of the state — had he himself not saved Rome from Catiline just eight years earlier? He still had an active role in the courts and the Senate. Pompey and Crassus were in their second consulship, and courted his approval. His infamous enemy Publius Clodius Pulcher was still alive. By 46, Julius Caesar was Dictator and had pardoned his enemies, including Cicero, who then withdrew from politics. The assassination of Caesar was two years in the future,

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<sup>77</sup> The speech of Cremutius Cordus in *Annales* 4.34-35 will come under close examination later. Not only does the episode recall an instance of aggressive censorship, but the speech provides a connection between history and oratory.

the *Phillippics*, three. The *Brutus* catalogued the great orators of the past, while the *Ora-  
tor*, at Brutus' request, outlined the qualities needed in the ideal speaker. Both works spoke to and mourned the loss of a republic where such oratory could be practiced with freedom and purpose. Cicero did not then know that he would go out in a blaze of glory in his most audacious stand against Marcus Antonius and the Second Triumvirate.

How would Tacitus' audience have compared 46 BCE to 75CE to early Second Century CE? Cicero could look back only so far. Tacitus' audience could look back twice: to the full scope of Cicero's life, and to the events before and after the dramatic date of the *Dialogus*. They could appreciate the parallels, transpose the references to the similarities between poetry and oratory to earlier references to the similarities also with history; they could be in on the intertextual play. But they could also see less comfortable parallels — the fates of the speakers, the fate of Cicero himself: *nec bene famam eloquentiae Cicero tali exitu pensavit* ("nor did Cicero receive proper recompense for his reputation for eloquence by such a death").<sup>78</sup> Thus, Cicero's works serve as proleptic trigger to Tacitus' audience.

#### Close Reading of Maternus' *Peroratio*

Cicero may have been chafing under the autocratic rule of Julius Caesar, but he was unaware that the Republic would face even worse upheaval, would cease to exist except in name only. Similarly, Maternus, Aper, and Messalla could look back at Nero and the Year of the Four Emperors, but they could not know that Domitian would come to

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<sup>78</sup> *Dial.* 40

power in just seven years. Tacitus' readers would have felt no undue mirth at Maternus' boasting, ironic or not, of current political health:

Quod si inveniretur aliqua civitas, in qua nemo peccaret, supervacuum esset inter innocentis orator sicut inter sanos medicus. Quo modo *tamen minimum* usus *minimumque* profectus ars *medentis* habet in iis *gentibus*, quae firmissima valetudine ac saluberrimis *corporibus* utuntur, sic *minor oratorum* honor *obscurior gloria* est inter bonos mores et in obsequium regentis *paratos*. Quid enim opus est longis in *senatu sententiis*, cum optimi cito *consentiant*? Quid multis apud populum *contionibus*, cum de re publica non imperiti et multi *deliberent*, sed *sapientissimus et unus*? (41)

But if there could be found some state, in which no one were to transgress, an orator would be as useless as amongst the guiltless as a doctor is amongst the healthy. In the way that art of healing has little at all use and little at all profit in those peoples who enjoy strongest health and most salubrious bodies, thus the glory of orators is less and less-known amongst good morals and those trained in obedience to a ruler. For what need is there in the senate for [voicing] long opinions, when the best quickly agree? What [need] for many assemblies, when not the many and inexperienced **d**eliberate about the republic, but the wisest and the one?

This excerpt comes from Maternus' *peroratio*, which throughout contains multiple intertexts with Cicero,<sup>79</sup> and closely follows upon the *nec bene famam eloquentiae Cicero tali exitu pensavit*. There is no room not to hear the allusions. To heighten the irony, much like Catullus 49, these lines seem to take Ciceronian style and exaggerate it to the point of parody. (Two more rhetorical questions follow the last quoted.) He even addresses his companions as *optimi* and *disertissimi* immediately following the questions. If read aloud, beginning with *quo modo*, the preponderance of reduplicative sounds, especially but not restricted to *-or/-er/-ar*, goes beyond rhetorically useful assonance and

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<sup>79</sup> Mayer, in notes to Tacitus, *Dialogus de Oratoribus*, ed. Roland Mayer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 208-215.



ventures into the ridiculous. The frequency of k/kw sounds sounds apoplectic rather than urgent. The overuse of superlatives, too, is comical.

In the midst of the humor, however, two phrases stand out: *in obsequium regentis paratos*, and *de republica ... deliberarent*. The syntax of *obsequium* paired with an objective genitive is unusual,<sup>80</sup> and the participle used substantively calls *rex, regis* to mind. Although Mayer states that *obsequium* (compliance) has positive connotations for Tacitus, citing his use of the word to describe Agricola's behavior approvingly,<sup>81</sup> I believe this is further evidence of a shift of attitude in Tacitus, and its juxtaposition as a correlative with *inter bonos mores* highlights the irony. *Obsequium* does not receive favorable treatment in the *Annales*; it becomes synonymous with words like *servitium* (an archaism for *servitus*, "servitude," also much used).<sup>82</sup> Tacitus choice of the passive participle *paratos* is also jarring — is he using it to modify *mores* further, or do the intervening conjunction and preposition lend a definitive distance in order to substantivize it? I believe the latter, and what an odd choice. "(Those) prepared?" With "in" and the accusative? And passive — at whose agency? Not exactly encomiastic.

Then we have *deliberent*, in a *cum* circumstantial clause. With *de re publica*, it translates as "deliberate about the republic/state." But does Tacitus want his readers also to hear "*de-liberate from a republic*"? He could have used *consultant*. Do we hear the root *libra*, indicating weight, or *liber*, "free"? The verb without the prefix does mean "to

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid. 214

<sup>81</sup> Ibid. 212

<sup>82</sup> cf. *Ann.* 3.65: *memoriae proditur Tiberium, quoties curia egrederetur, Graecis verbis in hunc modum eloqui solitum 'o homines ad servitutem paratos!' scilicet etiam illum qui libertatem publicam nollet tam proiectae servientium patientiae taedebat.* This closes Tacitus' reflection on *praecipuum munus annalium*.

liberate,” and the prefix could have a negating force, especially if one takes the prepositional *de* as “down from,” rather than “about, concerning.” *Imperiti* translates as “inexperienced,” but it sounds a bit like *imperati*, “commanded” (though that form would be ungrammatical in a verb that takes the dative with people). Who now gets to *deliberet* instead? The Princeps, *sapientissimus et unus*. Not only does the word order place the emphasis on the *unus*, in chiasmic position to the *multi*, but there is an audible hissing with all of the ‘s’ sounds.

As for the rhetorical, *Quid enim opus est longis in senatu sententiis, cum optimi cito consentiant?* — is Tacitus playing upon the assonance between *senatus* and *sententia* to alert his audience that in fact the senate’s role *was* to give their opinions? And just who are these *optimi* who so quickly come to agreement? Or should *consentio* be taken literally, as in “think/feel together,” like sheep?<sup>83</sup> Did Trajan likewise function as *sapientissimus et unus*, and did he rely on *optimi* such as Pliny to agree with him with alacrity? Certainly, if you read Book 10 of Pliny’s *Epistulae*, his correspondence with Trajan, you will see how the man who delivered, refined, redelivered, and re-published the *Panegyricus* was *in obsequium regentis paratus*. With Quintilian defunct but his work current, Tacitus may have played with the Ciceronian style to poke fun not only at Quintilian, but at his pupil and acolyte, Pliny.

Just as Maternus’ confounding reversal here forces the audience to go back and re-read his opening remarks, so, too, it would have heard the echoes not only from Pliny’s *Panegyricus*, but also from the proems of both the *Agricola* and the *Histories*, and per-

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<sup>83</sup> It would be interesting to do a short study on Tacitus’ use of words with *grex*, *gregis* as their root. They occur frequently in the *Annales*, and not infrequently in the *Dialogus*.

haps would have re-read them. Did that make a contemporary reader pause to consider the true state of Trajan's government, to wonder what lay ahead, to question the mutability of the cycle? Upon recognizing Tacitus' self-referential intertext, was the audience reminded that he had promised to write of the present, not return to a more distant past? Without a reader, an audience, intertext has no point; Tacitus wrote with his audience in mind, always.

### Cicero as Ambiguous Referent

There other were signs that the *Dialogus* was not intended as an homage to Cicero. Tacitus serves as an eye-witness, silent but attentive, a *iuvenis admodum*; Cicero receives the *recordatio* from Cotta, years later. Tacitus gives only the briefest introduction, addressed but not formally dedicated to Fabius Iustus, a *recusatio* wherein he forbears to give his own opinion on the decline of oratory and the causes thereof. Cicero goes on for pages in his introduction, addressed to his younger brother; he does not spare his readers his opinions.

Cicero therefor serves a different function in the *Dialogus*. Given that Cicero comes up thirty-one times in the *Dialogus*, most often as part of a list or cannon, not every instance carries freight; the reader has to work to find it. Maternus is the first to invoke his name, in section 12, as he is defending poetry as the *eloquentiae praemordia and penetralia* ("origins and innermost sanctuary"), a constant since the bards of the *aureum saeculum*, contrasting it with the current *lucrosae ... et sanguinitatis eloquentiae usus* ("cash- and blood-stained use of eloquence").

vel si haec fabulosa [Orpheus, Linus, Apollo] nimis et composita videntur, illud certe mihi concedes, Aper, non minorem honorem Homero quam Demostheni apud posteros, nec angustioribus terminis famam Euripidis aut Sophoclis quam Lysiae aut Hyperidis includi. Pluris hodie reperies, qui Ciceronis gloriam quam qui Virgilii detrectent: nec ullus Asinii aut Mesallae liber tam inlustris est quam *Medea* Ovidii aut Varii *Thyestes*. (*Dial.* 12)

Or if these seem too fantastic and contrived, certainly you will concede that to me, Aper: that no less honor goes to Homer than to Demosthenes amongst posterity, nor is the fame of Euripides or Sophocles bound by narrower confines than that of Lysias or Hyperides. You will find more today who disparage the glory of Cicero than that of Vergil. Nor is any book of Asinius or Messalla as famous as the *Medea* of Ovid or the *Thyestes* of Varius.

What Maternus says here rings true even today. Perhaps Tacitus did not know that more students would be reading Cicero's *Orationes in Catilinam* or *Pro Caelio* far more than his philosophical treatises, but far more still read Vergil, period. And further on, Aper himself will humorously and cogently critique Cicero with his references to *ius Verrinum*, *rotas Fortunae*, and *esse videatur*.<sup>84</sup>

#### Close Reading of Aper's Speech at *Dial.* 17

Marcus Aper's first defense of *contemporary* rhetoric, where he makes the claim that Cicero and his peer group actually belong to the same *aetas* as the current speakers bears further examination here. It comes shortly after the arrival of Vipstanus Messalla and Aper's mention of his brother, the infamous delator. His manner and diction bury a political statement, one at odds with Aper's apparent stance as fan of the *delatores*.

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<sup>84</sup> *Dial.* 23.

Nam ut de Cicerone ipso loquar, Hirtio nempe et Pansa consulibus, ut Tiro libertus eius scribit, septimo idus [Decembris] occisus est, quo anno divus Augustus in locum Pansae et Hirtii se et Q. Pedium consules suffecit. Statue sex et quinquaginta annos, quibus mox divus Augustus *rem publicam rexit*; adice Tiberii tris et viginti, et prope quadriennium Gai, ac bis quaternos denos Claudii et Neronis annos, atque illum Galbae et Othonis et Vitellii longum et unum annum, ac sextam iam felicitis huius principatus stationem, qua Vespasianus rem publicam fovet: centum et viginti anni ab interitu Ciceronis in hunc diem colliguntur, unius hominis aetas. (*Dial.* 17)

For, as I may speak about Cicero, he was killed, as everyone knows, in the consulship of Hirtius and Pansa [43BCE], as his freedman Tiro writes, on December 7th, in which year the Deified Augustus substituted himself and Quintus Pedius as consuls in the place of Hirtius and Pansa. Add fifty-six years in which the soon deified Augustus *ruled the republic*; add the twenty-three of Tiberius, and the nearly four of Gaius, and the twice-fourteen of Claudius and Nero, and that one long year of Galba and Otho and Vitellius, and now the sixth season of this happy principality, in which Vespasian *fosters the republic*: one hundred-twenty years are bundled together from the death of Cicero to this day — the life-span of one man.

First, [*s*]tuae sex et quinquaginta annos, quibus mox divus Augustus rem publicam rexit. This line screams out to be noticed, and then the reader pans out in both directions. I begin with the last word: *rexit*, “ruled,” as in what a *rex* does. This is in immediate juxtaposition with *rem publicam*. Thanks to Augustus, the Principate retained the nomenclature of the *Res Publica*, though it was thenceforth governed *privatē*. Roland Mayer, in commentary to the *Dialogus*, states here that the verb is “not uncommonly used of the Princeps,” citing the “G-G.”<sup>85</sup> The “G-G” is the *Lexicon Taciteum*, by A. Gerber and A. Greef, published in 1903 in Leipzig. It is a bit misleading not to qualify “not uncommonly” with “in Tacitus.” My own research shows that, up until this instance, Tacitus uses the verb and the noun either with ancient or foreign kings, or with legions and provinces; the

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<sup>85</sup> Mayer, in notes to Tacitus, *Dialogus* (2001), 142.

one exception being assigned to Mucianus, who *regnabat* in Rome while Vespasian was in the east and Domitian still too young (*Agricola* 7). We know from *Histories* 4.43 how the Senate felt about Mucianus.<sup>86</sup>

In the *Annales*, words with the *reg-* root are used seven times in the first 12 sections of Book 1 alone, and the only exception to its being applied to the Princeps or Livia Augusta is in the opening sentences, when it is juxtaposed with a word closely homophonic with princeps: *urbem Romam a principio reges habuere* (“Kings have held the city of Rome from the beginning”). In dactylic hexameter, no less, and, if one were to read the *habuere* as a true perfect, as I have done, rather than preterite, then the import would be contemporary to the date of composition.

For fifty-six years Augustus, the “deified” Augustus, ruled (and note Tacitus uses *divus Augustus* twice in as many lines). To juxtapose *rem publicam* with *rexit* is jarring enough. But from the Battle of Actium to his death in 14 CE is only 45 years. Re-read what precedes. Cicero *occisus est*, “was killed ... in the consulship of Hirtius and Pansa, in which year the deified Augustus put himself and Quintus Pedius in the place of Hirtius and Pansa as consuls.” Why? Because Hirtius and Pansa both died at the Battle of Mutina, in 43 BCE, fighting on the side of the Republicans. It was due to the outcome of that battle that Octavian was able to solidify his power and secure himself a position in the Second Triumvirate. Though fighting alongside the two consuls, against Marcus Anto-

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<sup>86</sup> “Mucianus, ne sperni senatus iudicium et cunctis sub Nerone admissis data impunitas videretur, Octavium Sagittam et Antistium Sosianum senatorii ordinis egressos exilium in easdem insulas redegit. Octavius Pontiam Postuminam, stupro cognitam et nuptias suas abnuentem, impotens amoris interfecerat, Sosianus pravitate morum multis exitiosus. ambo gravi senatus consulto damnati pulsique, quamvis concessio aliis reditu, in eadem poena retenti sunt. nec ideo lenita erga Mucianum invidia: quippe Sosianus ac Sagitta viles, etiam si reverterentur: accusatorum ingenia et opes et exercita malis artibus potentia timebantur.”

nus, Octavian benefitted directly from their deaths as he *se suffecit* (“substituted himself”) consul in their place. The Second Triumvirate was an outgrowth from this battle, which in turn led to the proscription and death of Cicero that same year.

Tacitus reminds us of this chain of events early on in the *Annales*, during the first “debate” in that *opus*: after the death of Augustus, the Roman people “debated,” in *oratio obliqua*, the pro’s and con’s of Augustus. The con’s are given the second, longer “speech,” and it is here that we find Hirtius and Pansa:

caesis Hirtio et Pansa, sive hostis illos, seu Pansam venenum vulneri ad-fusum, sui milites Hirtium et machinator doli Caesar abstulerat, utriusque copias occupavisse; extortum invito senatu consulatum, armaque quae in Antonium acceperit contra rem publicam versa; proscriptionem civium, divisiones agrorum ne ipsis quidem qui fecere laudatas. sane Cassii et Brutorum exitus paternis inimicitiis datos, quamquam fas sit privata odia publicis utilitatibus remittere. *Ann.* I.10

With Hirtius and Pansa slain, whether the enemy an enemy had carried them off, or Pansa through poison poured into a wound, Hirtius his own soldiers and Caesar [Octavian], the engineer of a treachery, he [Octavian] seized the troops of both; having extorted the consulship from an unwilling senate, he turned the arms which he had received to fight Antonius against the state; then the proscriptions of the citizens, the confiscations and distributions of the lands, which even those who carried them out did not praise. Certainly the deaths of Cassius and Brutus were a given as enemies to his father — although it was *fas*<sup>87</sup> for private hatreds to yield to public benefit.

Although these imputations are couched as simply *dicebatur contra*, Tacitus manages not only to weight heavily the rumor of Octavian’s complicity in Hirtius’ death with the *machinator doli Caesar*, but also call into question his *pietas* that had been assigned to the extermination of Cassius and Brutus. And by referring to Octavian as *Caesar* here,

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<sup>87</sup> *Fas* is more easily defined by its opposite, *nefas*: that which is against religious and moral scruple.

Tacitus' readers may have perceived a double injustice: Hirtius fought alongside Julius Caesar, even in Gaul, and was the author of the final book of *De Bello Gallico*.

In *Dialogus* 17, Aper next gives the succeeding *principes* their mention, combining Claudius and Nero into "twice fourteen" years, though their rules were by no means similar ... except that they were repetitions in a cycle. Then the Year of the Four Emperors (here three), given polysyndetically, described as *longum et unum annum*, the two elisions transforming four short words into one long sound. When it comes to the present day, Aper artfully refers to it as the sixth year "of this happy principate," in which Vespasian *fovet* the republic, not *regit*. This all sounds complimentary, and yet he doggedly states that *all* 120 years from the death of Cicero are "bundled together" and constitute one lifespan, or one long nightmare. With Messalla's entrance, and the brief mention of his *frater* (-in-law), Tacitus has reminded us that the art of *delatio* and its attendant *prava interpretatio* continued unabated.

It is clear from this reading that Tacitus intended his audience to link the death of Cicero, a metonym for *libertas*, with the rise of Augustus and the death of the Republic. Thus, the Ciceronian format and intertext likely served to elicit a multi-layered response from his audience: the Republic died with Cicero; the very topic of oratory's decline is a common trope; the fates of the interlocutors in *de Oratore*, particularly the almost immediate demise of the host Antonius, heighten the sense of doom hanging over Maternus; Cicero's own *talis exitus* brings to mind *tanti tales exitus* of authors and Stoics in the *Annales*. The humorous inflating of Ciceronian style distances the author from Quintilian and accentuates an overall ironic reading. For today's reader it is ironic that, although



everyone knew of Cicero, the names of Marcus Aper, Curiatius Maternus, and this younger Messalla (in contrast to the well-known Messalla Corvinus of the Republic) survive only through Tacitus' efforts. Eloquence itself may not have declined, but the times had; *the gloria* attendant upon *eloquentia*, to be lasting, now resided with the written word.

## Chapter IV

### Vipstanus Messalla and Triangulation

#### Overview

The character of Messalla, Cicero's principle advocate in the *Dialogus*, serves multiple purposes for its author: through his half-brother, the notorious *delator* Regulus, he acts as a referent for the chilling, omnipresent menace of delation in the Empire, he summons a response in the reader to re-examine his role in Tacitus' *Histories*, and provides a link to the *Annales* via his kinship with prominent figures from the Tiberian hexad. The various views offer an insight into Tacitus' own changing relationship with *moderatio*.

With the *Agricola* and the *Histories*, Tacitus was writing about people and events of his own lifetime, using sources and witnesses still living, breathing, feeling, using even autopsy. In the *Annales*, Tacitus uses *inventio* from a safer distance, uses a narrative of the past, both mimetic and symbolic, to evoke verisimilitude to the present, to invoke truth. The *Dialogus* is wholesale *inventio*, with himself as witness as well as unreliable narrator. The entire premise is humorous and ironic — an eloquent *tour de force* on the demise of *eloquentia* — as delivered by three paragons of eloquence from his youth, thereby signaling that the debate in question is itself a trope. Just as the character and rhetoric of Seneca may serve to unite the genre of tragedy to the *Annales*, so oratory,

irony, and tragedy serve to unite the *Annales* to the *Dialogus*. A summative look at the *personae* in the *Dialogus* helps to demonstrate this.

### The Paradox of Messalla: Pliny, *Delatores*, and Stoics

Vipstanus Messalla's character operates on multiple levels. Acting as a foil, he marks the transition between the two debates — no more defense of poetry and discussion of offending the powerful; his programmatic speeches amplify the arguments on both sides. He is not a little tiresome, and his defense of by-gone virtues is deliberately clichéd and shop-worn. By offering the most predictable, most Quintilianic arguments, the safety of his rhetoric signals to the reader that Messalla serves another purpose. Goldberg claims that Messalla works as yet another tie to Cicero. I would argue that his character plays a role that far outweighs the content or style of his speeches: Messalla, the historical figure as opposed to the character, acts as a link back to the *Histories* and forward to the *Annales*.

His presence summons to mind connections to Tacitus and Pliny (doubly so, since Pliny learned oratory from Quintilian), as well as to the worst of the *delatores* and their successful persecution of Stoic martyr Thræsea Paetus and his circle. Even before Messalla enters at *Dial.* 14, Tacitus conjures his great-great-grandfather, the famous Caesarian/Augustan orator Messalla Corvinus. The author has Maternus pair him with Asinius Pollio, at *Dial.* 12, as unable to achieve with a speech the *gloria* of Ovid's *Medea* or the *Thyestes* of Varius (but no mention of Seneca, who wrote tragedies under both titles); he is paired with Asinius Pollio again by Aper in *his* second speech, at *Dial.* 17, at the end of

a list of the most noteworthy so-called *antiquos* Latin orators: *Ciceronem et Caesarem et Caelium et Calvum et Brutum et Asinium et Messallam*.

The mention of Messalla Corvinus foreshadows the entrance of his great-great grandson Visptanus Messalla, whereupon all talk of the *Thyestes* and its attendant dangers will cease. Mentioning Messalla together with Asinius Pollio also looks ahead to *Annales* 1.8 and the first mention of the *sons* of both orators:

tum consultatum de honoribus; ex quibus [qui] maxime insignes visi, ut porta triumphali duceretur funus, *Gallus Asinius*, ut legum latorum tituli, victarum ab eo gentium vocabula anteferentur, L. Arruntius censuere. addebat *Messalla Valerius* renovandum per annos sacramentum in nomen Tiberii; interrogatusque a Tiberio se mandante eam sententiam prompsisset, sponte dixisse respondit, neque in iis quae ad rem publicam pertinerent consilio nisi suo usurum, vel cum periculo offensionis: ea sola species adulandi supererat.<sup>88</sup>

There followed a discussion about the honors [for the funeral of Augustus]; of which those seen as most distinctive were that of *Gallus Asinius*: the procession be led through the triumphal gate, and that of Lucius Arruntius: that the titles of laws enacted by him and the names of tribes conquered by him be carried at the head. *Messalla Valerius* was adding that the oath of allegiance to Tiberius' name should be renewed annually; asked by Tiberius whether whether he had offered that opinion under his own orders, he answered that it was of his own free will, and that in matters that pertained to the state he would use no counsel other than his own, even the risk of offending: that was the only form of flattery that remained.

Tacitus closes that bit of indirect discourse from a senatorial vignette with his own sardonic aside. At a time when the singular *metus* for a senator was that he “be seen to understand,” dissembling *libertas* proffered an inverted flattery. In the *Dialogus*, as much as

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<sup>88</sup> Note the inversion of the nomina for Asinius Gallus and Valerius Messalla, unique within the *Annales*, but not for Arruntius; Tacitus presents the names of Eprius Marcellus and Vibius Crispus in this fashion in the *Dialogus*.

Maternus tries to get him to commit to criticizing the present government in his condemnation of the present state of oratory, all Messalla produces is anodyne prescriptions.

The Messalla of the *Dialogus* can be seen on one level as an actant representing senatorial degradation (and the rush into servitude mentioned at *Ann.* 1.7) through his representation of both great orators and their not-so-great sons.<sup>89</sup> Both sons are degraded metonyms of their fathers. In the Tiberian hexad of the *Annales*, Tacitus names Asinius Gallus more than any non-member of the imperial family other than Sejanus.<sup>90</sup> In a perversion of his father's talents, he masters the *simulatio* and *dissimulatio* necessary for survival in a despotic regime, the first instance coming at 1.12:

... senatu ad infimas obtestationes procumbente, dixit forte Tiberius se ut non **toti rei publicae** *parem*, ita quaecumque pars sibi mandaretur eius tutelam suscepturum. tum Asinius Gallus 'interrogo' inquit, 'Caesar, quam *partem rei publicae* mandari tibi velis.' percussus improvisa interrogatione paulum reticuit: dein collecto animo respondit nequaquam decorum pudori suo legere aliquid aut evitare ex eo cui in *universum* excusari mallet. rursum Gallus (etenim vultu offensionem coniectaverat) non idcirco interrogatum ait, ut divideret quae separari nequirent sed ut sua confessione argueretur **unum** esse **rei publicae** corpus atque **unius animo** *regendum*.

With the senate prostrating itself to the basest supplications, Tiberius said by chance that as he was not equal to [the task of] the entire state (*rei publicae*), he would thus undertake whatever guardianship would be entrusted to him. Then, Asinius Gallus said, "I ask, Caesar, which part of the state (*rei publicae*) you would wish to be entrusted to you?" Struck with consternation at the unforeseen questioning, he was quiet for a bit. Then, having collected his thoughts, he answered that to choose or avoid anything out of which he would prefer to be on the whole excused in no way befitted his sense of honor. Again Gallus (for he had surmised offense by his

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<sup>89</sup> Additionally, the very name, Messalla, functions emblematically as it conjures up all of the convoluted links within the Roman nobility, links that connect Messalla both to Claudius' third wife Messalina and her cousin Domitius, aka Nero. Vipstanus Messalla's own son, like that of Helvidius Priscus, belonged to Tacitus and Pliny's circle of friends. Unlike the younger Helvidius Priscus, the younger Messalla outlived Domitian and served as consul in 115, at the end of Trajan's reign.

<sup>90</sup> A. J. Woodman, trans. *Tacitus: The Annals* (Indianapolis: Hackett Press, 2004), 6 n.21.

look) said the questioning was not for the reason that he should divide what could only fail to be separated, but that it be proved, by his own admission, that the body of the state [*rei publicae*] was one and by the mind of one it must be *ruled*.

Note Tacitus' structuring of the exchange: Tiberius in *oratio obliqua*, Gallus in *recta*; Tiberius keeping silent but revealing with a *look (vultu)*<sup>91</sup> his consternation at what he had not *foreseen*; Gallus responding to the look with *oratio obliqua*. Tacitus repeats *rei publicae* three times: first by Tiberius with *toti* (entire), next, by Gallus with *partem* as an *antanaclasis* (and an echo of Tiberius' *parem*), and then again by Gallus with *unus corpus*, the *unus* picking up Tiberius' *universum*, and being repeated with *uno animo*. It is a semantic dissection of the lie that the new *res publica* rests upon: no longer *publica*, with distinct *partes*, but a singular body, ruled by the mind of one. This passage calls to mind Maternus' conversion from the *libertas* of his first speech to the *dissimulatio* of his peroration, at *Dial.* 41, when he rhapsodizes about how healthy bodies need no doctors (metaphors for state and orators), equates *bonos mores* with *in obsequium regentis paratos*, and claims to prefer that, *de re publica non imperiti et multi deliberent, sed sapientissimus et unus*.

Tacitus set up this exchange by having it immediately follow an early instance of Tiberius' own dissembling and the senate's response at *Ann.* 1.11. Here the new Princeps was demurring that he was unequal to the *regendi cuncta onus* ("the burden of ruling the entirety"), having learned by experience how *arduum* it was since Augustus had called him *in partem curarum*, to which Tacitus volunteers:

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<sup>91</sup> *Vultus* — the "face" as relates to vision, as opposed to the other word for "face," *os*, which draws focus to the mouth, the speaking part.

plus in oratione tali dignitatis quam fidei erat; Tiberioque etiam in rebus quas non occuleret, seu natura sive adsuetudine, suspensa semper et obscura verba: tunc vero nitenti ut sensus suos penitus abderet, in incertum et ambiguum magis implicabantur. at patres, *quibus unus metus si intellegere viderentur*; in questus lacrimas vota effundi;

There was more grandeur than faith in such an *oration* [actually Tiberius' out-loud musings before the senate, making manifest subterfuge about his ambitions for the principate]; for Tiberius, even in matters which he would not conceal, whether by nature or acquired habit, always used weighed and obscured diction, and as he then was trying, in truth, to hide his own feelings deeply, they more and more became entwined in the uncertain and ambiguous. But the senators, *for whom the one fear was if they were to be seen to understand*, poured out complaints, tears, and prayers.

Tacitus did not wait long in his *Annales* before he linked the fear and degradation in the senate to the degradation of oratory through adulatory *dissimulatio*, here via the sons of the two great orators insulted in the *Dialogus* by Maternus and mentioned last in Aper's opening list. Tacitus reports further that Augustus, in his *supremis sermonibus*, wherein he was discussing four potential successors other than Tiberius, had dismissed Asinius Gallus as *avidum et minorem* ("greedy and less [than capable]"). Ronald Syme, who dated much of the writing of the *Annales* to the earlier years of Hadrian's rule, believed that Asinius Gallus, along with the three others mentioned, represented the four consulars assassinated upon Hadrian's ascension to the throne.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Ronald Syme, *Tacitus*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958) 481. Syme finds many such parallels to Hadrian's accession, both with Tiberius and with Nero: "senili adoptione," and "mulieris machinatio," the most damning, but also the way in which both Livia and Agrippina kept their husbands' deaths hidden, giving out false reports of their well-being instead until the succession was secured, directly mirrors rumors regarding Plotina, Trajan's wife, upon his passing in the far east.

### The Relationship Between Messalla and the *Delator* Regulus

Perhaps the most relevant aspect of Messalla, one that connects to the *unus metus ...intellegere viderentur*, lies with the fact that his half-brother was the infamous *delator* Marcus Aquilius Regulus. As Thomas Strunk points out, all talk of danger and offending the powerful ceases upon Messalla's arrival, and he therefore may represent the menace hovering over Maternus.<sup>93</sup> One could view the *Dialogus*, after the entrance of Messalla, as an elaborate composition orchestrated around this "one fear." Regulus, mentioned by Aper only obliquely at *Dial.*15 (*oblitus tuae et fratris tui eloquentiae*), figures prominently in the episode in Book 4 of the *Histories* where Eprius Marcellus squares off and defeats Helvidius Priscus.

#### *Histories* 4.40-42

The context for this episode, and its prequel, deserves examination, because I believe it acted as the seed from which the *Dialogus* and the *Annales*, in part, germinated. In it we have Messalla and Regulus as well as Eprius Marcellus and Vibius Crispus, the two *delatores* held up as exemplars by Aper. Marcellus and another speaker here, Curtius Montanus, both appear as centrally connected to Thrasea Paetus and his destruction in Book 16 of the *Annales*. The fact that Regulus lives on to aid in the destruction of the next generation's Stoics makes the careful omission of his name relevant to the continuing danger in the Principate.

Tacitus first slips in a reference to this *contratempus* at *Dial.* 1.5:

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<sup>93</sup> Thomas Strunk, "Offending the Powerful: Tacitus' *Dialogus de Oratoribus* and safe criticism," *Mnemosyne* 63 (2010): 241-67, *passim*.



Quid aliud infestis patribus nuper Eprius Marcellus quam eloquentiam suam opposuit? Qua accinctus et minax disertam quidem, sed inexercitatum et eius modi certaminum rudem Helvidii sapientiam elusit.

What other than his own eloquence did Eprius Marcellus recently put up against a hostile senate? Girded with which and menacing he made sport of the wisdom of Helvidius, well-spoken, certainly, but untrained and green in contests of this kind.

*A quick overview.* Curtius Montanus, prosecuted together with Thrasea Paetus and Helvidius Priscus by Cossutianus Capito and Eprius Marcellus under Nero, attacks Regulus in the senate for his role in the death and desecration of Calpurnius Piso (Galba's chosen successor) as well as his career of lucrative (7,000,000 sesterces as one reward!) *delatio* under Nero. The reception of this attack by the senate gives Helvidius Priscus moral encouragement to attack the *delator* Eprius Marcellus in an effort — not his first — to avenge the death of his father-in-law Thrasea Paetus. Both attacks ultimately carry no weight. Eventually, Helvidius will be executed for his opposition to Vespasian, just as his homonymous son will be under Domitian.<sup>94</sup> Eprius Marcellus wins here, as does Vibius Crispus, but falls afoul of Vespasian four years later, when he is convicted of treason and sentenced to suicide. Regulus lives until around 105 CE, and receives more vituperative criticism in Pliny's letters than anyone else. And, of course, Thrasea Paetus is the Stoic martyr and hero of the Neronian books of the *Annales*, friend of and foil to his fellow Stoic, Seneca. The subtle shifts in attitudes towards and portrayal of these characters,

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<sup>94</sup> The son was a good friend of both Pliny and Tacitus; Pliny eventually writes, at great length and unstinting in self-aggrandizement, an account of his attacking Publicius Celer for his role in the younger Helvidius' downfall, *Domitiano occiso*, of course. Pliny placed this letter, *Ep.* 9.13, immediately prior to his last to Tacitus. This letter also contains allusions to Thrasea Paetus, whose maxims on the justifiable reasons for public speaking Pliny gives us in *Ep.* 6.30, a letter on the merits of oratory, specifically his own.

both the likes of Eprius Marcellus and Thrasea and his circle, from one work to the next, provide insight into how perhaps the very act of writing the *Histories* engendered Tacitus' shift from *moderatio* to disillusioned cynicism. The *Dialogus* acts as the fulcrum.

### The Proceedings

In that sequence of events, *Hist.* 4. 40-42, the senate is in session, with the young Domitian presiding, his father Vespasian and older brother Titus being absent. Tacitus describes Domitian as having spoken about his youth *pauca et modica*, (a few modest words) and then goes on to say he was *decorus habitu: et ignotis adhuc moribus crebra oris confusio pro modestia accipiebatur* (“of decorous comportment — with his morals as yet unknown, his frequent blushing was being taken for modesty”) (4.40) The business turns to something like a war-crimes trial, going after those responsible for causing the downfall and deaths of senators by practicing *prava interpretatio* and *delatio* under Nero.<sup>95</sup> The senate demands access to the *potestatem* of the Imperial Register for evidence and the names of every *delator*, but Domitian demurs, insisting that his father must be consulted in such a request.

The senate instead draws up an oath, upon which all members were to swear to their own innocence, that they had not personally gained from the destruction of a fellow Roman. The senators “many to whom there was a consciousness of their own crimes

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<sup>95</sup> I find it odd that in this same passage, 4.40, the Cynic philosopher Demetrius, the very man Thrasea Paetus was addressing at the moment the extant *Annales* cuts off, defends the delator Publicius Egnatius Celer, *ambitiosius quam honestius*. This is the same man Pliny accused for his role in the younger Helvidius Priscus' death, as related in *Ep.* 9.13, referenced above. Celer, also a Stoic philosopher, had stood as chief witness against fellow Stoic Barea Soranus, when Soranus was charged and condemned for treason alongside Thrasea Paetus, at *Ann.* 16.21. Demetrius was an intimate both of Thrasea and of Seneca, though not a Stoic.

were all a-quiver changing the words of the oath through various feints” (*Hist.* 4. 41). The senate first fixes its wrath on three of the worst *delatores*, and it cascades from there into a series of deflections, which ends with a certain Paccius Africanus turning on his own accuser — *societate culpae invidiam declinavit* (“he turned aside the hatred by means of his fellowship of guilt”) — the same Vibius Crispus named by Aper along with Eprius Marcellus in the *Dialogus*.

Tacitus, in the very next line, the opening of 4. 42, while continuing the general narrative line, breaks the sequence with:

Magnam eo die pietatis eloquentiaeque famam Vipstanus Messalla adeptus est, nondum senatoria aetate, ausus pro fratre Aquilio Regulo deprecari.

Vipstanus Messalla on that day attained a great reputation for *pietas* (here “familial devotion”) and eloquence, having dared to intercede on behalf of his brother, Aquilius Regulus.

Well done, Messalla! except that Tacitus then goes on at much greater length — the entire rest of section 42 — to enumerate the reasons for the *odium* towards Regulus that was widely felt in the senate. The only interruption is another mention of Messalla, who *flexerat quosdam*, “had (note pluperfect) turned some (of the senators),” by placing himself in the way of *periculis fratris* (his brother’s dangers), but not *tueri causam neque reum* (“to defend the case nor the defendant”). Given Tacitus’ stance towards useless acts of valor at this stage in his career, what really comes across here is not only Messalla’s ineffectualness, but also his strong bond with such a heinous figure. Complimenting Messalla for his eloquence and *pietas* may simply be a concession to the memory of a man Tacitus knew personally, whose son was still active in the senate.

Curtius Montanus' Speech against Regulus at *Histories* 4.42

However, Regulus' crimes were not confined merely to Nero's reign, within the scope of the *Annales*; Tacitus chooses Curtius Montanus (assonant, curiously, with Curvatus Maternus<sup>96</sup>) to meet Messalla's efforts with a *truci oratione*, a fierce speech that enumerates the past crimes of Regulus and challenges the senate to act. Curtius Montanus was a poet and friend of Thrasea Paetus, and was among those convicted with him in Book 16 of the *Annales*.<sup>97</sup> He launches his attack by accusing Regulus of sinking his teeth into the head of Piso after Galba's fall, having paid off his murderer. Then the meat of his speech begins, and with it a rare instance of speech moving events in the *Histories*, a vehicle for plot that Tacitus uses far more often in the *Annales*. This speech receives piecemeal attention from scholars,<sup>98</sup> but I think it deserves attention *in toto*:

'Nero non coegit, nec dignitatem aut salutem illa saevitia redemisti. sane toleremus istorum defensiones qui perdere alios quam periclitari ipsi maluerunt: te securum reliquerat exul pater et divisa inter creditores bona, nondum honorum capax aetas, nihil quod ex te concupisceret Nero, nihil quod timeret. libidine sanguinis et hiatu praemiorum ignotum adhuc ingenium et nullis defensionibus expertum caede nobili imbuisti, cum ex funere rei publicae raptis consularibus spoliis, septuagiens sestertio saginatus et sacerdotio fulgens innoxios pueros, inlustris senes, conspicuas feminas eadem ruina prosterneres, cum segnitiam Neronis incusares, quod per singulas domos seque et delatores fatigaret: posse universum senatum una voce subverti. retinete, patres conscripti, et reservate hominem tam expe-

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<sup>96</sup> This assonance is profound enough to generate an error in the index to Rudich's book, *Political Dissidence Under Nero*. When looking for a supposed reference to Curvatus Maternus on pp. 204-205, I found only Curtius Montanus.

<sup>97</sup> Montanus was prosecuted and convicted for writing libelous verse and then entrusted to the guardianship of his father and banned from public service. His father had been a staunch supporter of the Principate.

<sup>98</sup> The one scholarly article devoted solely to this speech focuses on rhythmical *clausulae* and examples of Ciceronianisms and anti-Ciceronianisms. cf. Ronald H. Martin, "The Speech of Curtius Montanus: Tacitus, *Histories* 4, 42," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 57.2 (1967): 109-114.

diti consilii ut omnis aetas instructa sit, et quo modo senes nostri *Marcellum, Crispum*, iuvenes *Regulum* imitentur. invenit aemulos etiam infelix nequitia: quid si floreat vigeatque? et quem adhuc quaestorium offendere non audemus, praetorium et consularem ausuri sumus? *an Neronem extremum dominorum putatis?* idem crediderant qui Tiberio, qui Gaio superstites fuerunt, cum interim instabilior et saevior exortus est. non timemus Vespasianum; ea principis aetas, ea moderatio: *sed diutius durant exempla quam mores.* elanguimus, patres conscripti, *nec iam ille senatus sumus* qui occiso Nerone delatores et ministros more maiorum puniendos flagitabat. optimus est post malum principem dies *primus.*'

Nero did not force you, nor did you ransom your standing or safety with that act of cruelty. Indeed we may tolerate the defense of those who preferred to destroy others rather than endanger themselves: you your father, the exile, had left behind free from care, as he had left his goods distributed amongst his creditors; not yet an age capable of the *cursus honorum*, you had nothing which Nero could covet, nothing which he could fear; out of lust for blood and agape for gain, an as yet unknown talent, experienced at defending none, you drenched yourself in noble slaughter, when, having snatched the hides of consuls from the death of the republic/state, you, fattened on seven million *sesterces*, gleaming with a priesthood, you laid waste to innocent boys, illustrious old men, distinguished women all with the same ruin, when you bemoaned the sluggishness of Nero, because he wore out himself and his informants [*delatores*] with single households, when it was possible to overturn the entire senate with one word. Keep, conscript fathers, and preserve a man of such expeditious counsel that our whole age may be instructed, and so that in the way our old men imitate *Marcellus* and *Crispus*, the young may imitate *Regulus*. Even calamitous worthlessness finds emulators — but what if it were to flourish and thrive? We do not dare to offend one while still but a quaestor; are we intending to offend him when he is praetor or consul? *Or do you think that Nero is the last of our despots?* So had those who survived Tiberius and Gaius [Caligula] thought, when meanwhile one detestable, more cruel arose. We do not fear Vespasian: the age of the princeps, his moderation. *But exempla endure longer than customs.* We have become enfeebled, conscript fathers; *no longer are we that senate* who, upon Nero's slaughter, was tirelessly at work punishing his informants and ministers in the custom of our ancestors. The best day after a bad princeps is the first.

This speech is a tour-de-force both in content and style. “We are no longer that senate,” pierces the scrim of time. Readers of Sallust can see obvious elements from Julius Caesar’s speech in Sallust’s *Bellum Catilinae* (*non timemus Vespasianum*, etc.). But one can also find echoes of Maternus’ closing remarks at *Dial.* 41 (e.g. *sapientissimus et unus*), twisted into a distorted *rictus*. Why eviscerate Regulus by name here, but by allusion only in the *Dialogus*? Is it that the interlocutors were speaking six years into the reign of Vespasian, long after that first and best day? Tacitus may indeed here be using reticence to communicate to the readers the *metus* felt in Maternus’ *cubiculum* and the sudden need for self-censorship upon the arrival of Messalla.

Eprius Marcellus, Vibius Crispus, and Helvidius Priscus

The speech meets with such an enthusiastic reception in the senate that Helvidius Priscus takes it as his cue to attack Eprius Marcellus in a second attempt to avenge his father-in-law, Thrasea Paetus. Helvidius Priscus gets no direct quote here, but Marcellus, who acts ready to leave the chamber, does:

“Imus,” inquit, “Prisce, et relinquimus tibi senatum tuum: regna praesente Caesare.” sequebatur Vibius Crispus, ambo infensi, vultu diverso, Marcellus minacibus oculis, Crispus renidens, donec ad cursu amicorum retraherentur. cum glisceret certamen, hinc multi bonique, inde pauci et validi pertinacibus odiis tenderent, consumptus per discordiam dies. (*Hist.* IV. 43)

“We are going,” he said, “Priscus, and we are leaving to you your senate: rule with Caesar present.” Vibius Crispus followed, both men hostile, with different look: Marcellus with menacing eyes, Crispus beaming, until they were dragged back in by an onrush of their friends. Meanwhile the conflict blazed: on the one side, many good men, on the other a few, yet robust, strained in their tenacious hatreds, the day consumed in discord.

Epirus Marcellus gets the better of Helvidius Priscus. Priscus gets no *oratio recta*. Marcellus' sarcasm is not without the ring of truth. It is interesting to see here how Tacitus uses the two characters of Marcellus and Vibius Crispus to divide the face, the *vultus*, into the eyes and the mouth, *renidens* intended to evoke an over-bright smile (as with Egnatius in Poem 39 of Catullus).

The audience of the *Dialogus* would likely also have recollected the earlier battles between Marcellus and Priscus, at *Histories* 4.6 and again at 4.7- 8. Tacitus starts, at 4.5, with a lengthy and encomiastic introduction of Helvidius Priscus, giving him moral approbation equalled only by his praise for Germanicus, Agrippina Maior, and Thræsea Paetus:

ingenium inlustre altioribus studiis *iuvenis admodum*<sup>99</sup> dedit, non, ut plerique, ut nomine magnifico segne otium velaret, sed quo firmior adversus fortuita rem publicam capesseret. doctores sapientiae secutus est, qui sola bona quae honesta, mala tantum quae turpia, potentiam nobilitatem ceteraque extra animum neque bonis neque malis adnumerant. quaestorius adhuc a Paeto Thræsea gener delectus e moribus soceri *nihil aequae ac libertatem hausit*, civis, senator, maritus, gener, amicus, cunctis vitae officiis aequabilis, opum contemptor, recti pervicax, constans adversus metus.

While still a youth he gave his shining talent to loftier studies, not, as most do, to veil sluggish leisure with a resplendent name, but to engage in public affairs (*rem publicam*) more strengthened against chance. He followed the teachers of wisdom, who counted as good only what was honest, as evil only what was disgraceful, and power, nobility and the rest beyond the soul neither as good nor ill. While still a quaestor, he was chosen as son-in-law by Thræsea Paetus, and from the morals of his father-in-law he drank in *libertas* none too judiciously; a citizen, senator, husband, father-in-law, equable in all of life's duties, despiser of wealth, obstinate for the right, resolute against fear.

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<sup>99</sup> The very words Tacitus uses to describe himself in his proem to the *Dialogus*.

It reads more like an obituary, and since we have lost the part of the Histories that would have included his death, it will have to suffice as one. But Tacitus places an alternative view second — an example of his own *moderatio* at work: *Erant quibus adpetentior fama videretur, quando etiam sapientibus cupido gloriae novissima exuitur* (“There were those to whom he seemed too avid for fame, since desire of glory is the last to be cast aside, even for the wise”). To enforce this lesson in *moderatio*, Tacitus points out that Priscus’ desire for *ultio*, “vengeance,” though *iustior*, had divided the senate, and that ultimately, though both orators gave outstanding orations, Priscus dropped the case, with the divided senate either praising his *moderatio* or questioning his *constantia* (the aforementioned *constans adversus metus*). Likewise, when Priscus seizes upon the next opportunity to oppose Marcellus, in a show of obsolete senatorial pride, Tacitus, through mimetic *oratio obliqua*, reveals a man of moral soundness, but hot-headed and ineffective.

It is Marcellus who carries the day with a longer, more eloquent, and more compelling reply — also in mimetic *oratio obliqua* — a reply in which we can trace outlines of themes to be covered both in the *Dialogus* and the *Annales*, but here with moderate pragmatism:

Marcellus non suam sententiam impugnari, sed consulem designatum censuisse dicebat, secundum vetera exempla quae sortem legationibus posuissent, ne ambitioni aut inimicitii locus foret. nihil evenisse cur antiquitus instituta exolescerent aut principis honor in cuiusquam contumeliam verteret; sufficere omnis obsequio. id magis vitandum ne pervicacia quorundam inritaretur *animus novo principatu suspensus et vultus quoque ac sermones omnium circumspectans*. se meminisse temporum quibus natus



sit, quam civitatis formam patres avique instituerint; ulteriora mirari, praesentia sequi; bonos imperatores voto expetere, qualiscumque tolerare. non magis sua oratione Thraseam quam iudicio senatus adflictum; saevitiam Neronis per eius modi imagines inlusisse, nec minus sibi anxiam talem amicitiam quam aliis exilium. denique constantia fortitudine Catonibus et Brutis aequaretur Helvidius: se unum esse ex illo senatu, qui simul servierit. suadere etiam Prisco ne supra principem scanderet, ne Vespasianum senem triumphalem, iuvenum liberorum patrem, praeceptis coeheret. quo modo pessimis imperatoribus sine fine dominationem, ita quamvis egregiis modum libertatis placere. haec magnis utrimque contentionibus iactata diversis studiis accipiebantur. vicit pars quae sortiri legatos malebat, etiam mediis patrum adnitentibus retinere morem; et splendidissimus quisque eodem inclinabat metu invidiae, si ipsi eligerentur. (*Hist.* IV. 8)

Marcellus was saying that it was not his own opinion that was being attacked, but what the consul designate had decreed, following the examples of old, which had put forth the casting of lots for envoys, lest there be a place for electioneering or animosities. Nothing had happened for the customs of old to become obsolete or for the honor of the Princeps to be redirected to the insult of any man; all were capable of the deference due. What needed to be avoided more was lest a mind uncertain in his new principate and scanning the faces and conversations of all be provoked by the obstinacy of certain members. He himself remembered the times in which he was born, what form of state his fathers and grandfathers had established. He admired times past, but adhered to the present; he sought good rulers through prayer, tolerated whomever. Thrasea had been damaged no more by his speech than by the judgement of the senate; the cruelty of Nero entertained itself through these forms, nor was such a friendship any less fretful for him than exile for others. Finally, Helvidius may equal the Catos and Bruti in his unwavering fortitude; but he [Marcellus] was but one in that senate which has served as one. He would also advise Priscus not to climb above the Princeps, nor to correct with his precepts Vespasian, an old man triumphant, father of free-born young men. In the way that despotic rule without limit pleases the worst emperors, so, too, a check on *libertas* pleases even the outstanding ones. These [speeches], hurled with great vehemence on both sides, were received with varying zeal. And so won the side that preferred envoys to be selected by lot, with even the moderates in the senate striving to adhere to custom; and each most resplendent member inclining the same way, due to fear of jealousy, should they themselves be chosen.

Whereas Helvidius' speech was delivered more as an *ad hominem* attack against Marcellus, vituperative in addition to being likely displeasing to Vespasian, that of Marcellus was at once restrained and forceful. It appealed to the customs of old, enjoined his colleagues to reflect upon their own complicity and the vicissitudes of fortune, and produced a result that Tacitus seemed to condone as approved by the *mediis*, while scoffing at the *quisque splendissimus*, those motivated by fear of envy.

In these speeches of Marcellus, we can hear why Aper choses him for an *exemplum* — there is both merit and demerit here. In his argument at *Dial. 5*, Aper exhibits the same forceful *eloquentia* as he includes a reference to this very clash:

Nam si ad utilitatem vitae omnia consilia factaque nostra derigenda sunt, quid est *tutius* quam eam exercere artem, qua semper armatus **praesidium** amicis, opem alienis, salutem **periclitantibus**, invidis vero et inimicis metum et terrorem ultro feras, ipse securus et velut quadam **perpetua potentia** ac **potestate** munitus? cuius vis et utilitas rebus **prospere** fluentibus aliorum **per**fugio et tutela intellegitur: sin **proprium periculum** increpuit, non hercule lorica et gladius in acie firmius munimentum quam reo et **pericli**tanti eloquentia, **praesidium** simul ac telum, quo **propugnare** pariter et incessere sive in iudicio sive in senatu sive apud **principem** possis. Quid aliud infestis patribus nuper Eprius Marcellus quam eloquentiam suam opposuit? Qua accinctus et minax disertam quidem, sed inexercitam et eius modi certaminum rudem Helvidii sapientiam elusit.<sup>100</sup>

For if all of our plans and deeds are to be directed at what is useful in life, then what is safer than to exercise that skill, armed with which you may bring protection to your friends, aid to strangers, safety to those imperiled, but fear and terror to the envious and hostile as well, all the while safe yourself and virtually fortified by unceasing might and power. Whose force and utility when things are flowing along prosperously are understood to be a refuge and protection for others; but if danger threatens closer to home, by God neither a cuirass nor a sword is a stronger fortification in battle than is eloquence to an endangered defendant, at once a bulwark and a weapon, with which you can attack as well as respond —

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<sup>100</sup> Note this begins with a simple condition, rather than a statement of fact.

whether in court or in the senate or before the Princeps. What else besides his own eloquence did Eprius Marcellus recently put up against hostile senators? Thus girded and menacing, he mocked the the wisdom of Helvidius, well-spoken, certainly, but untrained and green in contests of this kind.

#### Connection with *Dialogus*, Pliny, and Chronological Relevance

As with the *Dialogus*, it is hard to date the composition of the *Histories* with any precision. It is likely that Regulus was still alive as Tacitus wrote Book 4; Pliny's response to his friend's request for information on the eruption of Vesuvius (79 CE) comes in Book 6 of the *Epistulae*, as does Pliny's letter on the death of Regulus (*Ep.* 6.2). Regardless of whether Book 6 was published in 106 or 107,<sup>101</sup> the events in Book 4 of the *Histories* take place nine years prior to the eruption. The *Histories* went up to the death of Domitian, fourteen years later. If the *Histories* contained fourteen books, and Book 4 contained the events of the year 70, then a composition date prior to 105 seems likely. Tacitus did not necessarily proceed chronologically while composing, but there is no reason to assume he did not.

The larger question is why did the author of the *Dialogus* choose the dramatic date of 75, rather than 70? Five years prior would not be considered *nuper*, "recently." Tacitus' readership would have known the chronology, would have caught the conflation and wondered what purpose it served. Helvidius Priscus was sentenced to die in 75. The conflation serves to connect Eprius Marcellus and what Maternus called his *lucrosae*

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<sup>101</sup> Murgia, "Pliny's Letters," 191-192, n. 41, gives a succinct round-up of the debate surrounding the dating of Pliny's letters, both as to composition and publication. For the following paragraph, bear in mind that Ronald Syme posited that none of the "books" of the *Epistulae* was published before 105.

*huius et sanguinantis eloquentiae usus recens et ex malis moribus natus, atque ... in locum teli repertus.* And, since Tacitus ropes Regulus into a trio with Epruius Marcellus and Vibius Crispus in *Histories* 4, we are meant to place him in this group here as well; I believe Tacitus wanted his readers to connect Regulus to the abuses of oratory that led to the deaths of Thrasea Paetus and Helvidius Priscus, and to remind us of his role in the downfalls of Arulenus Rusticus and Herennius Senecio, the biographers of the first two.

### Pliny and Regulus

As mentioned earlier, Pliny wrote about Regulus with great hostility, and at this date, Tacitus may have been responding with his own version of character assassination, this time through a character who dared to challenge Regulus openly (Curtius Montanus). As discussed in an earlier section, Pliny's first published letter to Tacitus comes at *Ep.* 1.6. *Ep.* 1.5 marks the first time Pliny writes concerning Regulus; he describes, with great zest and abundant self-aggrandizement, Regulus' trepidation following the death of Domitian and the *delator*'s subsequent desire for a rapprochement with the all-important epistolographer. Pliny begins with the reasons for his *schadenfreude*: the *delator*'s pivotal role, under Domitian, in the downfall of Arulenus Rusticus and his gratuitous public harangue against Herennius Senecio, already brought down by another *delator*. Arulenus was the fellow Stoic and biographer of Thrasea Paetus; as a member of Thrasea Paetus' final "council," he had offered to overturn the senate's conviction through his veto as a tribune. Tacitus records this scene near the end of the extant *Annales*, at 16.26.4. Herennius Senecio wrote a biography of Helvidius Priscus, and paid for that with his life; a dif-

ferent *delator*, Mettius Carus, had seen to that, but Regulus, according to Pliny, wished to share in the renown for that deed.

Two more items from that letter bear mentioning. Regulus had thought he had perhaps insulted Pliny by implying that he tried to copy Cicero and was unhappy with *eloquentia saeculi nostri* (“the eloquence of our era”), to which Pliny responds that he chose to take it as a compliment:

'Est enim' inquam 'mihi cum Cicerone aemulatio, nec sum contentus eloquentia saeculi nostri; nam stultissimum credo ad imitandum non optima quaeque proponere.' *Ep.* 1.5

‘For there is,’ I say, ‘for me a rivalry with Cicero, and I am not content with the eloquence of our age; I believe it is most stupid not to put forth all the best things to imitate.

Tacitus had found his voice for Vipstanus Messalla.

Meanwhile, Regulus lived and flourished until ca. 105, not without enemies. Pliny frankly admired his oratory and the zeal and diligence with which he prepared his speeches. When he died, Pliny was torn, wishing on the one hand that Regulus had died earlier, so that he could have harmed fewer, but missing the opportunities to appear with him and thereby benefit from the amounts of time he was able to command from the bench.<sup>102</sup>

The second item brings contiguity to the flip side of Messalla’s role, the reason behind the self-censorship that ensues upon his arrival. At the end of the letter, after all of Pliny’s vitriolic bluster, he weighs the advisability of attacking Regulus *openly*:

Nec me praeterit esse Regulum δυσκαθαίρετον; est enim locuples factiosus, curatur a multis, timetur a pluribus, quod plerumque fortius amore est.

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<sup>102</sup> Pliny, *Ep.* 6.2

Potest tamen fieri ut haec concussa labantur; nam gratia malorum tam infida est quam ipsi.

It has not escaped me that Regulus is a conundrum; for he is wealthy, divisive yet influential, by many courted, by more feared — which for the most part is stronger than love. However it may happen that even these things may be rattled and fall, for the influence of evil men is as inconstant as they themselves are.

This much is reminiscent of Maternus' earlier, fiery speech at *Dial.* 1.13, just *before* Messalla's entrance:

Nam Crispus iste et Marcellus, ad quorum exempla me vocas, quid habent in hac sua fortuna concupiscendum? Quod timent, an quod timentur? Quod, cum cotidie aliquid rogentur, ii quibus praestant indignantur?

For Crispus and that Marcellus of yours, to whose example you call my attention, what do they have in fortune's lot to be desired? That they fear, or that they are feared? What? That when they are daily asked for some favor, those whom they assist resent them?

But then Pliny's own irresolution, his lack of *constantia adversus metus* comes out:

Verum, ut idem saepius dicam, exspecto Mauricum. Vir est gravis prudens, multis experimentis eruditus et qui futura possit ex praeteritis providere. Mihi et temptandi aliquid et quiescendi illo auctore ratio constabit.

But, as I shall say the same rather often, I am waiting upon Mauricius. He is weighty and wise, learned with much experience, and one who can foresee the future from what has passed. My reckoning as to whether I shall attempt anything or keep quiet will rest upon his authority.

Pliny cannot even bring himself to label what he might attempt — an indefinite pronoun must do. Nor did he ever speak out publicly against Regulus during his life time.

Pliny's caving to caution in the face of the continuing threat of *delatio* finds an ironic distortion in Tacitus' decision not to name Regulus in the *Dialogus* and to have Maternus completely change his tack upon the arrival of his half-brother. The character of

Aper extolled the power and prestige of two *delatores* connected earlier by Tacitus with Regulus; why would he have refrained from naming him when taunted by Messalla for examples of contemporary excellence? Self-censorship is crucial to the *zeitgeist* of the *Dialogus*. By referring only obliquely to Regulus with *tui fratris*, Tacitus may be signaling to his audience that Messalla brings with him the menace of *prava interpretatio*, just as Aper is signaling to Maternus that it is time to rein it in, to temper his tone.

#### More Call-and-Response Between Tacitus and Pliny

Pliny *had* attacked one *delator*, Publius Egnatius Celer, in the senate, probably in 97, for his prosecution of the younger Helvidius Priscus, but Celer was not as formidable a foe. Pliny does not write about this personal triumph, however, until *Ep.* 9.13, a letter that goes on and on and on about it (six pages worth). It is the letter immediately prior to his final missive to Tacitus. Perhaps another call-and-response is at play: Pliny's wavering in *Ep.* 1.5 is met by Tacitus with the outspoken speech of Curtius Montanus in *Histories* 4; Pliny responds to the perceived rebuke with a lengthy self-justification, the account of his heroics at *Ep.* 9.13, followed by a conciliatory plea to Tacitus at *Ep.* 9.14 (a mere paragraph):

Pergamus modo itinere instituto, quod ut paucos in lucem famamque provexit, ita multos e tenebris et silentio protulit. Vale.

Let us just persist along our established path, which as it has carried but a few into the light of fame, thus has it borne many out of the shadows of silence. Farewell.

“Please, please, *please* include me in your *Histories* and do so kindly!”

By the time Tacitus wrote the *Dialogus*, his *moderatio* had deserted him, as it had yet to desert Maternus, at least not completely. In the *Dialogus*, Tacitus is looking back at the episode in the *Histories*, which showcased someone who did openly oppose Regulus. When Tacitus wrote the *Agricola*, in 98, he made no mention of Regulus, despite recording the downfalls of Arulenus Rusticus and Herennius Senecio.<sup>103</sup> Regulus was still too powerful, Tacitus still in the thrall of self-justification and *moderatio*. In the *Histories*, he chose Curtius Montanus to be his mouthpiece for attacking Regulus, while he allowed Eprius Marcellus to be at least a compelling, if not appealing, orator.

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<sup>103</sup> At *Agricola* 2.1. See Charles Murgia, "Pliny's Letters and the Dialogus," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 89 (1985): 192.



## Chapter V

### The *Dialogus* and Cremutius Cordus: *Annales* 4 and Forward

#### Overview

The historian Cremutius Cordus acts as a touchstone for Tacitus. In *Annales* 4, Tacitus uses the episode of Cremutius' trial and death to communicate not only his own stance on the enduring validity of the written record, but his intent to position his own work, if not his life, as similarly imperiled. Cremutius also serves a double function as a link to Seneca, both as a tragedian and a Tacitean figure, through the latter's *Consolatio ad Marciam*, a "letter" to Cremutius' daughter. Through this connection, we can close the circle by connecting Seneca back to the *Dialogus*' Curiatius Maternus.

#### *Annales* 4 and the Genesis of the *Delator*

By the time Tacitus wrote the *Annales*, the gloves were off, as he delved into the genesis of the scourge of the *delatores*, inseparable as they were from the fear they served to augment. At Book 4.29, shortly before the digression on history which prefaces the account of the trial of the historian Cremutius Cordus, Tacitus records an *exemplum atrox, reus pater, accusator filius* ("a black *exemplum*: the defendant a father, accuser his son"). As Tiberius is bent on the destruction of the father, prosecuted by his own son, Tacitus gives us the real reason the Emperor was deaf to all proof of the man's innocence: the father, Vibius Serenus, had eight years previously sent the Tiberius a letter that had

contained *quaedam contumacius quam tutum apud auris superbas et offensionis proniores* (“certain things more insolent than was safe among ears that were haughty and too prone to offense”) (4.29), and Tiberius still bore a grudge. This lead-in, laden as it is with diction that echoes Aper’s remonstrations at *Dial.* 10,<sup>104</sup> puts the reader on alert for a revival of the theme of the danger attendant upon *libertas* in the Principate. As for the likes of Eprius Marcellus and Regulus, Tacitus does not hold back:

ibaturque in eam sententiam ni durius contraque morem suum palam pro accusatoribus Caesar inritas leges, rem publicam in praecipiti conquestus esset: subverterent potius iura quam custodes eorum amoverent. *sic delatores, genus hominum publico exitio repertum et ne, poenis quidem umquam satis coercitum, per praemia eliciebatur.* (4.30)

Things were headed that way [approving a law against paying informer/prosecutors], had not [Tiberius] Caesar, rather harshly and — against his custom — openly on behalf of the informers, complained that the laws would be useless and the republic would fall headlong: they might as well subvert legislation as remove its guardians. Hence the *delatores*, a species of man, discovered for the people’s destruction and not ever sufficiently checked by penalties, began to be enticed by rewards.

Tacitus has primed his audience for what is to follow. The imminent threat to free speech viewed in the context of the historian’s written record predisposes the reader to accept the futility of pitching temporal power against the lasting *auctoritas* of literature. Cremutius’s speech in his own defense, at 4. 34, is the single best example from the Tiberian hexad of Tacitus combining oratory, history, censorship, and the enduring nature of the written word. Given that it also mentions Messalla Corvinus and Asinius Pollio, it

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<sup>104</sup> The second half of this section, where *offendo* comes up four times, will be discussed later; it ends with the collocation, *potentiorum aures offendere*,

connects directly back to the *Dialogus* in theme, content, and character, and connects to our discussion of Vipstanus Messalla.

*Annales* IV. 31-35: Cremutius Cordus and the *Dialogus*

*Annales* IV. 32-33 — A Second Proem to the *Annales*.

Immediately following Tacitus' damning words on *delatores*, Tacitus gives an instance of Tiberius granting clemency to a man *probrosi in se carminis convictum* ("convicted of shameful verses against [Tiberius]") (4.31). This is couched as a *modica laetitia* ("modest happiness") amidst *tam assiduis tamque maestis* ("unrelenting sorrows"), principle amongst which were two false charges of treason, one the afore-mentioned brought by a son against his own father, and another by a brother against his sister. Tacitus uses this act of clemency, in a case of scurrilous versification, to foreshadow its absence in the case of Cremutius Cordus. He brings further attention to it by remarking:

quo magis mirum habebatur gnarum meliorum et quae fama clementiam  
sequeretur tristiora malle. (4.31)

because of which it was considered all the more strange that one knowing  
of better and what talk followed clemency would prefer the harsher.

Tacitus then disrupts the narrative at 4.32 for a digression on the writing of history, a second proem of sorts to the *Annales*. This digression immediately precedes Tacitus' account of the trial of Cremutius Cordus. Both its content and its use of first and second person signal the reader to connect the author (Tacitus) to the voice of the historian who

speaks so cogently and damningly in the direct discourse that follows. So, too, do both the digression and the speech that follows recall sections and themes of the *Dialogus*, and Pliny's *Ep.* 9.27.

Pleraque eorum quae rettuli quaeque referam parva forsitan et levia memoratu *videri non nescius sum*: sed *nemo* annalis nostros cum scriptura eorum contenderit qui veteres populi Romani res composuere. ingentia illi bella, expugnationes urbium, fusos captosque reges, aut si quando ad interna praeverterent, discordias consulum adversum tribunos, agrarias frumentariasque leges, plebis et optimatum certamina libero egressu memorabant: nobis *in arto* et *inglorius labor*; *immota* quippe aut modice lacessita pax, maestae urbis res et princeps proferendi imperi *incuriosus erat*. *non tamen sine usu fuerit introspicere illa primo aspectu levia ex quis magnarum saepe rerum motus* oriuntur.<sup>105</sup> (4.32)

I am not unaware that the bulk of what I have related and what I shall relate seems perhaps slight and trifling to recount; but no one will have compared my annals with the writings of those who set down old matters of the Roman people. They were recounting, with freedom to digress, huge wars, the storming of cities, kings cast out and captured, or whenever they would turn their attention to internal matters, discord of the consuls against the tribunes, laws concerning land and corn, struggles between the commoners and the aristocracy. For me the task is constrained and without glory — there was stagnant [literally unmoved] or at most moderately-harassed peace, sorrowful affairs of the city, and a princeps indifferent to extending the empire. Nevertheless, it will not have been without benefit to examine closely those things, at first glance trifling, from which the movements of great matters arise.

The digression begins with a *recusatio* — not that he plans some day to cover the current, happier times as he claimed in both the *Agricola* and the *Histories* — but, in an ironic inversion of his own earlier and Sallust's *praefatio* in his *Bellum Catilinae*, that

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<sup>105</sup> "Magna eloquentia, sicut flamma, materia alitur et motibus excitatur et urendo clarescit. Eadem ratio in nostra quoque civitate antiquorum eloquentiam provexit. Nam etsi horum quoque temporum oratores ea consecuti sunt, quae composita et quieta et beata re publica tribui fas erat, tamen illa perturbatione ac licentia plura sibi adsequi videbantur, cum mixtis omnibus et moderatore uno carentibus tantum quisque orator saperet, quantum erranti populo persuaderi poterat." *Dial.* 36.

what he has to say may seem not to merit recording: *Pleraque eorum quae rettuli quaeque referam parva forsitan et levia memoratu videri non nescius sum* (“I am not unaware that the bulk of what I have related and what I shall relate seems perhaps slight and trifling to recount”). Having criticized other historians in the other two works as well as in Book 1 of the *Annales* for writing with either too much sycophancy and adulation or an excess of bitterness, Tacitus here makes a plea that no one compare *annalis nostros* with the writing of those who wrote of the Romans of old. There are no wars to report, no strife among political factions, no material fit for *libero egressu*, a “liberal digression” (as he digresses) — in short, those things Antonius prescribes for the historian in Cicero’s *De Oratore*. Perhaps no *libertas* as well.

Tacitus laments, in both 4.32 and 4.33, the dearth of civil discord, valorous deaths, and other weighty matters that *retinent ac redintegrant legentium animum* (“hold and refresh the readers’ minds”) (4.33). Such had been Tacitus’ path in his *Histories*; the *Annales*, for its part, is not without *clari ducum exitus* (“distinguished deaths of leaders”) — but these deaths, such as that of Germanicus, carry the freight of household malice and intrigue, not battlefield heroics. Outside of the imperial family, by far the most conspicuous deaths are of those who paid the penalty for their *libertas*, their exercise of free speech, specifically authors.

#### Allusions to Sallust

To highlight the paradox of the author’s mortality alongside authorial immortality, Tacitus alludes to Sallust in a two-pronged fashion: while he seems to invert his prede-

cessor's claim to authorial significance, his allusions at such a pivotal moment in the text are not only an overt homage to Sallust, but a textual reminder to his audience that historiography endures and matters. Rather than the Sallustian dilemma of *facta dictis exaequanda sunt*,<sup>106</sup> Tacitus would have us believe that, *nobis in arto et inglorius labor* ("my task is constrained and without glory") — part of a repurposed echo of the words that precede the above quote from Sallust:

Ac mihi quidem, tametsi haudquaquam par gloria sequitur scriptorem et actorem rerum, tamen in primis arduum videtur res gestas scribere.  
(*Bellum Catilinae* 3.2)

Indeed to me, even though not at all equal glory attends the writer as the doer of deeds, nevertheless it seems especially arduous to write of the accomplishments.

*Ipsa facto*, the reference situates Tacitus amongst his predecessors.

### *Gloria*

The mention above of *gloria/ingloriosus* binds the *Annales* to a theme central to the *Dialogus* as well. Though the first debate in the earlier work centers around whether equal glory attends the poet as attends the orator, and the second whether the contemporary orator can achieve the *gloria* of the *antiqui*, the means to *gloria*, its feasibility, is a subtext common to both. Indeed, Tacitus brings it up in his opening address to Fabius Iustus. And again in his proem, at *Dial.* 2, in his description of Marcus Aper's oratory, Tacitus claims that Aper only pretended to lack erudition, believing that *maiolem industriae et laboris gloriam habiturum* ("that he would have greater gloria for his industry and

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<sup>106</sup> "The words must equal the deeds." Sallust, *Bellum Catilinae* 3.2.

work”), if his talent were seen to rely upon no crutches of *alienarum artium* (“acquired skills”). *Gloria* comes up another thirteen times in the *Dialogus*, often paired with *laus*, as Aper and Maternus plead their causes. (Messalla mentions it only once, to blame its decline on the sloth of youth and negligence of the parents.<sup>107</sup>)

4.32 draws attention back to the *first* debate in the *Dialogus*, that concerning the *gloria* attendant upon oratory vs. poetry — in Maternus’ case, tragedy, a *Cato* and then a *Thyestes*. The literary history attendant in this debate *de facto* affirms the enduring nature of literature. Thrasea Paetus, *virtus ipsa*, wrote a biography of Cato. Seneca, another of the most important figures in the Neronian books, wrote not only the original *Thyestes*, but also the *Consolatio ad Marciam* (*Dialogus* 6), which looks ahead to 4.34 ff. Marcia was the daughter of Cremutius Cordus, the historian whose trial immediately follows this digression, in whose history he praises the two other foremost martyrs of the Republic, Brutus and Cassius, as the *ultimi Romanorum*; she was also one responsible for ensuring the survival of her father’s works after their suppression and burning.<sup>108</sup> We will be looking closely at the *Consolatio* later.

#### Tacitus and Authorial Anxiety?

At *Annales* 4.32-33, Tacitus transposes the contrast in *gloria* between past and present eloquence from oratory to history. Dylan Sailor, in his masterful close-reading of

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<sup>107</sup> *Dial.* 28.

<sup>108</sup> Seneca, *Consolatio ad Marciam* 1.3.

this digression and the speech that follows, perceives a Tacitus anxious about his own prospects for *gloria*, as he continued to need to ply a middle path while engineering the *appearance* of a work that was inherently dangerous.<sup>109</sup> Sailor discusses the rhetoric involved as Tacitus constructs different levels of readership, real and imaginary, through calibrated levels of figured speech and ellipsis.<sup>110</sup> Building on the work of O’Gorman, he depicts Tacitus fashioning one audience who comes to a history to be entertained by tales of wars and besieged cities, another who persists in reading his *Annales* despite it being an *in arto et inglorius labor*, understanding that *non sine usu fuerit introspicere illa primo aspectu levia ex quis magnarum saepe rerum motus oriuntur* (4.32); this second audience receives privileged entrée into the historian’s regard. But it is the third audience, the perceived hostile audience, that, according to Sailor’s argument, Tacitus needs for his work to be seen as consequential. This is the audience who effects a close reading not to learn, but to find material offensive enough to be dangerous, dangerous enough to be offensive, the audience that Pliny feared in *Ep.* 9.27 and Tacitus paints thus:

multorum qui Tiberio regente poenam vel infamias subiere posteris manent. utque familiae ipsae iam *extinctae* sint, reperies qui ob similitudinem morum aliena malefacta sibi obiectari putent. etiam gloria ac virtus infensos habet, ut nimis ex propinquo diversa arguens. (4.33)

The descendants of many who suffered punishment or disgrace while Tiberius ruled remain. And though the families themselves may now be extinguished, you will discover those who think others’ misdeeds are being cast upon themselves, due to the similarity of their morals. Also those

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<sup>109</sup> Dylan Sailor, *Writing and Empire in Tacitus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 250-314.

<sup>110</sup> By figured speech, Sailor supplies this definition from Frederick Ahl’s “The art of safe criticism in Greece and Rome,” *American Journal of Philology* 105 (1984): 174-208 (187): “Figured speech ... is ... criticism from which the speaker or writer himself stands back. He is safe because the critical links in thought must be established by his reader or listener: the text is incomplete until the audience completes the meaning.” Sailor, *Writing and Empire*, 264 n. 36.



who find glory and *virtus* offensive, as proving too divergent from their own situation.

By placing the last readership in an unflattering light, Tacitus accomplishes two things, according to Sailor: makes it unsavory for hostile readers to come forward, and situates his book as relevant to the contemporary scene.

But I believe there is still more going on here. Given the Sallustian tone and language of 4.32-33, its function as a second proem with echoes of the first (encapsulation of history, *verso civitatis statu* vs. *converso statu*, etc.), and its placement immediately before the trial of an *historian* whose works are ordered to be burned (the use of *extinctae* foreshadows this), Tacitus is consciously addressing his fourth and most important audience — the audience of the future. Sailor does point out the irony of Tacitus achieving, through his historical writing, *ultio* for Cremutius Cordus by denying Tiberius his earnest desire, *prosperam sui memoriam* (4.38).<sup>111</sup> But again, that was something his contemporary, self-selecting audience would have appreciated. What we have here, as with the *Dialogus*, is a deliberate call for the reader to zoom out as he *introspect*, to look backwards and forwards not just to the reigns of Tiberius and Hadrian, but to the implicit understanding that just as Tacitus' contemporaries still read not only Sallust but also Thucydides and earlier historians, so, too will audiences far beyond the scope of the Empire be reading the *Annales* to inform their own future judgements. I see it as more of a declaration of certainty than anxiety. Tacitus is not avoiding specifics in order to infer danger while dodging it; as he moves from plebeian and patrician power to the monarchy, he is

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<sup>111</sup> Sailor, *Writing and Empire*, 300-305.

making a sweeping generalization based on observations of patterns made by centuries of historians. There is no ellipsis in the *haec*;<sup>112</sup> there are at least sixteen books, all predicated on the one, oxymoronic ablative absolute that echoes Book 1, *converso statu*.<sup>113</sup> The rule of one had returned, and Tacitus left no record of an *unus* who was, in fact, *sapientissimus*. What he did record was a testimony to the pernicious cause-and-effect cycle inherent in the Principate itself.

Sailor reads this digression and trial in the context of the Tiberian hexad, which, treating figures from a more remote past, did not seem as dangerous as Tacitus would have his readers believe. However, Tiberius is only the first in a series (hence both *rettuli* and *referam*); the Principate itself is on trial here. Tiberius, Claudius, and Nero all personify the corrupting and vitiating effects of prolonged power. One can only project from Tacitus' contemporary Suetonius just what the books on Caligula would have contained. (I am sure I am not the only Tacitus enthusiast who daydreams about the discovery of those lost books....). Just as the readers of the *Dialogus* knew that Domitian followed Vespasian (after Titus), so, too, did the super-addressee of the second person singular here know that the *Annales* would not be ending with Tiberius, nor could the Empire realistically hope that there would not be another Caligula, Nero, or Domitian. While Tacitus

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid, 264, "Tacitus does not here transmit to his readers a subversive observation, but rather equips them with a mode of thinking whose further consequences, if they chose to complete the argument, belong wholly to themselves."

<sup>113</sup> The oxymoron lies in the juxtaposition of *converso*, "overturned," or "turned around," with *statu*, which could mean both "the state," and a *stasis*. The fact that it echoes the *verso civitatis statu* of I.4: "Igitur verso civitatis statu nihil usquam prisci et integri moris: omnes exuta aequalitate iussa principis aspectare," would indicate that it means "the state," but both meanings hold. The ablative absolute construction leaves open to interpretation whether it is temporal, concessive, or causal; the only thing certain is that it is precedent to what follows.

may have been writing with “the biographical baggage of success,”<sup>114</sup> his experience under four emperors and over more than a quarter-century of service, combined with his historical research, would have endowed him with a regard for his own legitimacy as witness. If he was alluding to the current emperor with his *princeps proferendi imperi incuriosus* (and more damaging comparisons perhaps to come with his descriptions of Nero’s “Greekness”), it was not just to prove the consequentiality of the *Annales* for the reign of Hadrian. This was more than an *exegesis* to help us understand Tacitus’ ἀγωνία between being “alienated” at the same time as being “implicated.”<sup>115</sup>

#### The “Second Proem” and the *Dialogus*

In the *Dialogus*, Tacitus does not make it easy to pick a winner in either of the debates; Virgil and Cicero are enlisted to argue the merits of both sides in the first, and there was no question that oratory remained a valuable weapon in the contemporary lucrative, yet bloody arena. That was as true under Trajan as it was under Vespasian, to judge by Regulus’ continued success. And there was also no denying that the original *Thyestes*, for example, had already brought its author eternal renown — note again that Tacitus rather pointedly leaves Seneca’s name out of the debate.

In the second debate, Maternus overturns the premise of oratory’s purpose, arguing disingenuously that the need for oratory no longer exists in a well-ordered state, while Aper pokes numerous holes through Messalla’s attack on contemporary oratory and the

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<sup>114</sup> Sailor, *Writing And Empire*, 257.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid: *passim*.

causes for its decline. Likewise, in the *Annales*, given the preponderance of litotes in 4.32-33, the audience can consider itself invited to see through the scrim of false modesty. What Tacitus has and will relate will be as instructive and as enduring as a *Thyestes*.

As part of his *in arto et inglorius labor*, Tacitus complains of *immota quippe aut modice laccessita pax, maestae urbis res et princeps proferendi imperi incuriosus* (“undisturbed certainly or modestly-provoked peace, melancholy affairs of the city, and a princeps indifferent of extending the empire”), a dig, perhaps, at Hadrian, who undid Trajan’s conquests in Dacia and made the Danube once again the border.<sup>116</sup> What he had earlier called *levia memoratu*, he now styles *primo levias aspectu*, which is why he provides direction to his audience, shifting from a passive *videri* to a word not only laden with agency, but at once etymologically akin and oxymoronic to *aspectu* — *introspicere*:

non tamen sine usu fuerit introspicere illa primo aspectu levias ex quis [sic] magnarum saepe rerum *motus* oriuntur.

It will not however have been without advantage to examine [literally ‘look within’] those things, trifling at first glance, from which the stirrings of great affairs arise.

The above and what follows at 4.33 summon further signposts from the *Dialogus*.

Compare with Maternus, before he gets completely carried away, in *Dial.* 36:

Magna eloquentia, sicut *flamma*, materia alitur et *motibus* excitatur et *urendo* clarescit. Eadem ratio in nostra quoque civitate *antiquorum eloquentiam* provexit. Nam etsi horum quoque temporum oratores ea consecuti sunt, quae composita et quieta et beata re publica tribui fas erat, tamen illa perturbatione ac licentia plura sibi adsequi videbantur, cum *mixtis omnibus et moderatore uno carentibus* tantum quisque orator *saperet*, quantum erranti populo persuaderi poterat.

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<sup>116</sup> For more on possible slights to Hadrian in the Tiberian hexad, see Syme, *Tacitus*, 492-503.

Great eloquence, like a flame, is nourished by material and aroused by stirrings and becomes clearer by burning. That same rationale in our state also brought forth the eloquence of the ancients. For even if the orators of these times have achieved those things which it was allowed to be conferred in a quiet and prosperous republic, nonetheless they seemed to pursue more for themselves through that upheaval and license, when, with all confused and lacking the *one* director, as much as each orator could sense it, that much the errant populace could be persuaded.

The simile of the flame picks up on the metaphor of fire that pervades the *Annales*, but it bears direct relevance to this part of Book 4: to say that *magna eloquentia ...urendo clarescit*, is to presage not only what Cremutius Cordus foretells for his own work, but also what literally happens — the burning and subsequent glory of his histories (and name). We will see when we look at Cremutius Cordus' appearance in the *Consolatio ad Marciam*, that flame imagery pervades there as well.

Tacitus' defense of the purpose and lasting merits of his *Annales* bears a resemblance to sections in both debates within the *Dialogus*: the utility of oratory vs. poetry and the consequent *gloria* attached to each, and the matter of whether and why the state of oratory has declined. Both debates come with a healthy dose of literary history to remind us that literature endures, and that the writer and his *oeuvre* are one in that immortality. 4.32, with its contrast between the *antiqui* historians and his current work summons the question of relative *gloria* debated prior to the arrival of Messalla, as well as the subsequent debate over the decline of oratory; 4.33 and *Dial.* 36 recall Maternus' peroration, where he claims there is no need for oratory in such happy times:

Quo modo tamen minimum usus minimumque profectus ars medentis habet in iis gentibus, quae firmissima valetudine ac saluberrimis corporibus utuntur, sic minor oratorum honor obscuriorque gloria est inter bonos mores et in obsequium regentis paratos. Quid enim opus est longis in sen-

atu sententiis, cum optimi cito consentiant? Quid multis apud populum contionibus, cum de re publica non *imperiti* et multi *deliberent*, sed *sapientissimus* et *unus*?...credite, optimi et in quantum opus est disertissimi viri, si aut vos prioribus saeculis aut illi, quos miramur, his nati essent, ac deus aliquis vitas ac [vestra] tempora repente mutasset, nec vobis summa illa *laus et gloria* in eloquentia neque illis *modus et temperamentum* defuisset: nunc, quoniam nemo eodem tempore adsequi potest magnam famam et magnam quietem, bono saeculi sui quisque citra obtrectationem alterius utatur. (Dial. 41)

Just as how the skill of a doctor has the least benefit and least effect in those peoples who enjoy the strongest health and most salubrious bodies, thus there is less honor and dimmer glory for the orators amongst good morals and those ready in obedience to the ruler. For what is the point on long opinions in the senate, when the best quickly come to agreement? What use among the populace for many elections, when not the unskilled and many deliberate regarding the republic, but the wisest and the *one*? Believe me, you best and — what matters here — most eloquent men, if either you had been born in earlier ages or those, whom we admire, had been born in these times, and some god had changed your lives and times, neither would *you* have lacked that praise and glory in eloquence nor *they* the measure and moderation. Now, since no one at the same time can pursue great fame and great peace, let each enjoy the good of his own age without disparagement of the other's.

This peroration, with its over-the-top Ciceronianisms, with its wry *sapientissimus et unus*, alerts the audience to the irony of a formidable orator subverting his earlier subversion with a paean to the *status quo*. The rhetorical display can almost serve to negate Tacitus' praise of the contemporary weal in his previous works. *Annales* 4.33 contains echoes from both of the above excerpts, and, when placed next to the *Dialogus* as a whole, demonstrates how both works, different as they are, speak to the use of literature as weapon, the connection between *liber, libri, m.* and *libertas, auctor* and *auctoritas*:

Nam cunctas nationes et urbes populus aut primores aut *singuli regunt*: delecta ex iis et consociata rei publicae forma laudari facilius quam *evenire*, vel si *evenit*, haud diuturna esse potest. igitur ut olim plebe valida, vel cum patres pollerent, noscenda vulgi natura et quibus modis *temperan-*

*ter* haberetur, senatusque et optimatum ingenia qui maxime perdidicerant, callidi temporum et *sapientes* credebantur, sic *converso statu* neque alia re Romana quam si *unus imperitet*, haec conquiri tradique in rem fuerit, quia pauci *prudencia* honesta ab deterioribus, *utilia* ab noxiis discernunt, plures aliorum *eventis* docentur. ceterum ut profutura, ita minimum oblectationis adferunt. (4.33)

For the people or the patricians or individuals rule all nations and cities: a form of republic selected and united from these is praised more easily than it happens, or, if it happens, it can hardly be lasting. Therefore, as once with the people in power, or when the senate was prevailing, one had to know the nature of the masses and by what measures they could be moderately held, and those who had most thoroughly learned the temperaments of the senate and old guard were believed to be the shrewd and wise of their day, so with the state turned around and with the Roman condition not other than if *one* were *commanding*, it will have been of use for these things to be sought out, gathered, and passed along, because few distinguish with good sense the honorable from the worse, the useful from the harmful; more are taught from the outcomes of others. But as useful as it will be, it nevertheless offers scant delight.

4.33, reminiscent of Sallust's *Bellum Catilinae* 6-13 (particularly 6-8), prompts the reader to assume Sallustian themes: the template of historical repetition, the decline in morality attendant upon the increase in *imperium*, the role of *Fortuna* (in just this paragraph Tacitus uses some form of *evenire* three times), the tension between *actores* and *scriptores*, and a disingenuously simplistic and dichotomous view of the nature of man. But in addition, by this very allusion he salutes the power and longevity of literature, history in particular, as useful to future generations.

Yet Tacitus here is also self-referential. He has given us echoes not only of *Annales* 1.1-7, but also the themes and diction of the *Dialogus*; Messalla bemoans the moral decline in Sallustian terms and all three speakers parry the respective merits of oratory and literature, of old and contemporary. In this way, the author coaches his audience to

connect the two works and thereby to connect oratory to history. In the next section of the *Annales*, 4.34-35, Tacitus provides a personification of that connection. The trial and speech of the historian Cremutius Cordus provides the most cogent presentation of Tacitus' firm belief in the enduring nature of the written word, especially when subjected to suppression.

### The *Oratio* of Cremutius Cordus

The section is introduced with the new year, consular dating, and what becomes formulaic diction in Tacitus: *novo ac tunc primum audito crimine* (4.33).<sup>117</sup> This follows from his earlier *converso statu*; everything is “new,” and “strange.” Tacitus, to ensure his audience understands that he, not Cremutius, is the *auctor* of this *oratio recta*, certifies that Cremutius began *in hunc modum*:

*verba* mea, patres conscripti, arguuntur: adeo *factorum* innocens sum. sed neque haec in principem aut principis parentem, quos lex maiestatis amplectitur: *Brutum et Cassium laudavisse dicor*, quorum *res gestas* cum plurimi *composuerint*, nemo sine honore *memoravit*. Titus Livius, eloquentiae ac fidei praeclarus in primis, Cn. Pompeium tantis laudibus tulit ut Pompeianum eum Augustus appellaret; neque id amicitiae eorum offecit. Scipionem, Afranium, hunc ipsum Cassium, hunc Brutum nusquam latrones et parricidas, quae nunc *vocabula imponuntur*, saepe ut insignis viros nominat. *Asinii Pollionis scripta* egregiam eorundem *memoriam* tradunt; *Messalla Corvinus* imperatorem suum Cassium *praedicabat*: et uterque opibusque atque honoribus perviguere. Marci Ciceronis *libro* quo Catonem caelo aequavit, quid aliud *dictator* Caesar quam *rescripta* oratione velut apud iudices respondit? Antonii *epistulae* Bruti contiones falsa quidem in Augustum probra sed multa cum acerbitate *habent*; *carmina* Bibaculi et Catulli referta contumeliis Caesarum *leguntur*: sed ipse divus Iulius, ipse divus Augustus et tulere ista et reliquere, *haud facile dixerim, moderatione magis an sapientia*. namque spreta exolescunt: si irascere,

<sup>117</sup> “under a new charge heard then for the first time.” cf. *Annales* I.6: *Primum facinus novi principatus fuit Postumi Agrippae caedes*, and 13.1: *Prima novo principatu mors*.



adgnita videntur. Non attingo Graecos, quorum non modo libertas, etiam libido impunita; aut si quis advertit, *dictis dicta* ultus est. sed maxime solutum et sine obtrectatore fuit prodere de iis quos mors odio aut gratiae exemisset. num enim armatis Cassio et Bruto ac Philippensis campos obtinentibus belli civilis causa populum per contiones *incendo*? an illi quidem septuagesimum ante annum perempti, quo modo imaginibus suis noscuntur, quas ne victor quidem abolevit, sic partem *memoriae* apud *scriptores* retinent? suum *cuique decus posteritas* rependit; nec deerunt, si damnatio ingruit, qui non modo Cassii et Bruti set etiam *mei meminerint*.<sup>1</sup> *egressus dein senatu vitam abstinentia finivit. libros per aedilis cremandos censuere patres: sed manserunt, occultati et editi.* quo magis socordiam eorum inridere libet qui *praesenti potentia* credunt *extingui* posse etiam sequentis aevi *memoriam*. nam contra punitis ingeniis gliscit *auctoritas*, neque aliud externi reges aut qui eadem saevitia usi sunt nisi *dedecus sibi* atque illis gloriam peperere. (Ann. 4.34-35)

“My words, Conscript Fathers are being prosecuted: to such an extent am I innocent of deeds. But not even these are against the Princeps, or the Princeps’ father, which the *lex maiestatis* does embrace. I am said to have praised Brutus and Cassius, whose deeds, while very many have composed, not one has commemorated without honor. Titus Livius, especially distinguished for his eloquence and trustworthiness, raised Gnaeus Pompeius with such praises that Augustus called him *Pompeian*; nor did that hinder their friendship. Nowhere did he name Scipio, Afranius, this very Cassius, this Brutus as thieves and parricides — which designations are now imposed — but often as eminent men. The writings of Asinius Pollio pass down the outstanding memory of these same; Messalla Corvinus proclaimed Cassius his commander; and each man thrived in wealth and honors. To Marcus Cicero’s book, in which he equated Cato to the heavens, how else did Caesar the Dictator respond than with a speech written in reply as if before the court? The letters of Antonius and the public speeches of Brutus contain, though false certainly, abuse against Augustus, pack with acerbity; the poems of Bibaculus and Catullus, stuffed with insults of the Caesars, are still read: but the deified Julius himself, the deified Augustus himself, both bore those things and left them be — though it would hardly be easy to say whether it was more out of moderation or wisdom. For things disdained come to lose their stench:<sup>118</sup> but if *you* should become angry, they are seen as acknowledged. I don’t touch upon the Greeks, whose free-speaking and wantonness both went unpunished;

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<sup>118</sup> *Exolesco* generally means to grow out of, or to become obsolete, but its connection to the verb *oleo*, to reek, give off a smell, is hard for me to ignore, given Tacitus’, and the Roman, fondness for corporeal language. Thus I have translated it as “come to lose their stench.”

or, if anyone noticed, he avenged words with words. But it was especially unfettered and without disparager to publish about those whom death had removed from hatred or influence. Is it that, with Brutus and Cassius armed and besieging the fields at Philippi for the sake of civil war, I am inflaming the people through rallies? Do they, seventy years ago annihilated, as they are still known by their *imagines*, which not even their conqueror obliterated, do they not thus retain part of their memory [alive] amongst writers? Posterity gives each man his recompense in honor; nor will they be lacking, if condemnation falls upon me, those who will remember not only Cassius and Brutus, but also me.” Having then left the senate, he ended his life by fasting. The senators decreed that his books be burned by the *aediles*: but they have remained, hidden and then published.<sup>119</sup> It is all the more pleasing to mock the folly of those who believe that the memory of even future ages can be extinguished by raw power in the present. On the contrary, *authority* blazes up when its talents are punished, nor have foreign kings or those who have used the same cruelty begotten anything but dishonor for themselves, and glory for others.

Tacitus, of course, deploys his rhetorical mastery — weaponizes his artistry. The historian on trial recalls the Sallustian dichotomy up front, but in an inverted sense: being innocent of *deeds*, he should not be prosecuted for mere *words*. Yet he goes straight into a literary history that argues the opposite. The *res gestae* of Brutus and Cassius are bracketed by the authorial agency that commits deeds to memory, even as Cremutius uses the passive voice for himself and another contrast between words and deeds: “*I am said to have praised [Brutus and Cassius], whose deeds, while very many have composed [in writing], not one has commemorated without honor.*” Anti-imperialist heroes, especially Brutus and Cassius, but also Pompey, Cato, and Antonius, are mentioned by name several times throughout the speech — Brutus and Cassius, Caesar’s assassin’s, receive five mentions each, four times as a pair, once each alone.

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<sup>119</sup> By his daughter, Marcia. cf. *Consolatio ad Marciam*, I.3.

The first mention of Brutus and Cassius (quickly followed by Pompey and Antony) in the *Annales* comes in the first book at 1.2, and Tacitus leaves no doubt as to the connection between the deaths of Brutus and Cassius and the death of the Republic:<sup>120</sup>

Postquam Bruto et Cassio caesis nulla iam publica arma, Pompeius apud Siciliam oppressus exutoque Lepido, interfecto Antonio ne Iulianis quidem partibus nisi Caesar dux reliquus, posito triumviri nomine *consulem se ferens* et ad tuendam plebem tribunicio iure contentum, ubi militem donis, populum annona, cunctos dulcedine otii pellexit, insurgere paulatim, munia senatus magistratuum legum in se trahere, nullo adversante, cum ferocissimi per acies aut proscriptione cecidissent, ceteri nobilium, quanto quis servitio promptior, opibus et honoribus extollerentur ac *novis ex rebus* aucti tuta et praesentia quam vetera et periculosa mallent. (1.2)

After there was no longer — Brutus and Cassius having been slain — any army of the Republic, and Pompey was crushed at Sicily, and with Lepidus cast off and Antonius slaughtered, and with not even any Julian partisans left except Caesar as the remaining leader, having put aside the name of triumvir he bore himself as consul and as happy to keep the people safe with tribunician authority, when he enticed the soldiery with gifts, the people with free grain, and all with the sweet taste of leisure, he gradually rose in power, attracting to himself the duties of the senate, the magistrates, the laws, with none opposing him; since the fiercest had fallen either in battle or because of the proscriptions, the remaining nobles, by however much each was readier for servitude, were raised up by riches and honors, and their standing thus increased by the revolution, they preferred the safe and present to the old and dangerous.

Although he never mentions Cassius in the *Dialogus*, when Tacitus first introduces Brutus (mentioned seven times), at *Dial.* 17,<sup>121</sup> it is in a list of orators: *Ciceronem et Caesarem et Caelium et Calvum et Brutum et Asinium et Messallam*, whom Aper claims belong more to his age than to the ancients. Who follows Brutus and Cassius in Cremutius' speech? Asinius and Messalla. This is the same section in which Aper brings

<sup>120</sup> As with *statu civitatis verso* and *converso statu*, the ablatives absolute here serve as undisputed and indisputable precedents.

<sup>121</sup> A passage discussed earlier in this paper.

in the execution of Cicero, as well as Hirtius and Pansa (who died at Mutina), and claims that Augustus, upon *their* deaths (as Cicero's *libertus ...scribit*), *se et Q. Pedium consules suffecit* ("made himself and Quintus Pedius consuls"). This is followed by Aper's feat of chronological contrivance, where he adds up all of the years *quibus Augustus mox divus rem publicam rexit* ("by which Augustus, soon to be deified, ruled the republic"), until *sex-tam iam felicitis huius principatus stationem, qua Vespasianus rem publicam fovet* ("the sixth season of this happy principate, in which Vespasian fosters the Republic"). He runs through the entire list of emperors up to his present day, and claims it is one man's life-span. In so doing, he lumps Vespasian in with the rest of the ill-starred group. At *Dial.* 30 comes another noteworthy mention of Brutus: *Notus est vobis utique Ciceronis liber, qui Brutus inscribitur* ("Known to you also is the book of Cicero which is inscribed/entitled *Brutus*"); given that only a macron separates the noun *liber*, "book," from the adjective *liber*, "free," Tacitus' audience could themselves connect "book" to "free" to "Brutus," with "known" and "written" bracketing them both.

Tacitus brings in Livy to introduce the idea that Augustus was tolerant of offending *verba*, yet we know from Book 1 and elsewhere (Ovid, for example) that this was not entirely the case; surely Tacitus' readership knew the same, and knew as well that Livy was comfortably pro-Augustus. Tacitus switches from past tense to present, from *tulit*, to *nominat*, again reinforcing that Livy still speaks through his written work, and speaks with greater authority than communicated with the contrasting passive *quae nunc vocabula imponuntur*, itself an anemic echo of *plurimi composuerint*. The actual *scripta*, not Asinius Pollio himself, are the agent of *memoriam tradunt*, again present tense, while

Tacitus has Messalla Corvinus as the subject of *praedicabat* in the imperfect; perhaps a slight is intended in the contrast. Asinius Pollio was himself an outspoken historical figure, never one to shrink from criticizing the likes of Caesar or Cicero, Sallust or Livy; his *Historiae* recounted the years from the First Triumvirate to the Battle of Philippi and praised Brutus, and his literary career before that placed him with the poets Vergil and Catullus;<sup>122</sup> as an orator he achieved distinction for his more restrained, Attic style, and was criticized by the likes of Cicero. When Tacitus chooses *praedicabat* for Messalla, it may be to emphasize that he *used to* call Cassius his commander, reminding the audience of Messalla's inconstancy: having been proscribed by the Second Triumvirate, he fled to and fought with Brutus and Cassius at Philippi, then went over to Antonius, before finally fighting on the side of Octavian against Sextus Pompeius. He, instead of Antonius, was named consul with Octavian in 31 BCE, and fought with him at Actium. And yet both Asinius Pollio and Messalla Corvinus "thrived" under Augustus with *opibus atque honoribus*, the same couplet applied to the *ceteri nobilium* who were noted for their servility in *Annales* 1.2.

When Tacitus has Cremutius mention Cicero, it is for his *liber* in which he raised Cato to the heavens, the panegyric *Cato* — the first literary work to set Cato up as the quintessential Republican hero; the mention recalls the *Dialogus* in two ways: the above-mentioned collocation of Cicero's *liber* and *Brutus*, and Maternus' recently-penned *Cato*. Caesar's response, what Cremutius refers to as *rescripta oratione*, was his *Anticato*. By having Cremutius juxtapose *rescripta* with *oratione*, Tacitus reinforces the re-purposing

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<sup>122</sup> Vergil dedicated his Fourth *Eclogue* to Asinius Pollio.

of oratory through literature, just as the historian Cremutius' speech within Tacitus' history depicts the embodiment of that juncture and shift. Both *aequavit* and *respondit* are perfect tense.

Next come the *epistulae* (written) of Antonius and the *contiones* (spoken) of Brutus: they still *habent* (present tense) their insults against Augustus, albeit *falsa quidem*. The slanderous poems against Julius Caesar and Augustus, by Catullus and Bibaculus, respectively, are still read, *leguntur*. The two Caesars are paired again with *ipse divus Iulius, ipse divus Augustus*, as Tacitus has Cremutius claim that the two men took these poems and let them be — both verbs in the perfect, followed by a curious parenthetical, *haud facile dixerim, moderatione magis an sapientia* ("I could hardly with ease say whether due to moderation or wisdom").

Cremutius had been making a point about *moderatio*, but the final and contrasting position of *sapientia* both distinguishes it from *moderatio* and gives it more weight, as does the following explanation: *namque spreta exolescunt: si irascere, adgnita videntur*. The diction here is telling. The perfect passive participle, used substantively as the subject of a *-scere* verb provides a linguistic tension: "disdained things [*carmina* or *verba* in general, probably] **become** odorless/come to lose their stench." The next verb, the one in the condition, is another *-scere*, the deponent *irascor*, and it is both present subjunctive, as the *protasis* of a future less vivid condition, and second person singular: "If *you* should become angry...." Cremutius is speaking to the *patres conscripti*, and so for Tacitus to use the second person singular is both for him to have Cremutius address Tiberius alone, and for him to step out of the speech and address his *own* audience; yes, it is a general truism,

but the “you” may also be the one who currently wields *imperium*. The *apodosis* of the condition is indicative, that of a simple condition. The subject is again a substantivized perfect passive participle, *adgnita*;<sup>123</sup> the ending indicates the same understood noun as *spretta*, and it acts more as a predicate nominative: *adgnita videntur*, “they are seen as acknowledged.” The passive voice in *videntur* allows for a translation of both “are seen,” which implies agency elsewhere, and “seem,” which implies none outside of the subject. Though the syntax is subtle, the impact of the perfect passive participles as factual precedent to the indicative verbs sends a clear message as to what constitutes *sapientia* in this context: wisdom lies in taking the high road and allowing the written word to wither through scornful indifference. Does this reflect what Sailor considers to be Tacitus’ anxiety about his own work dying through approval? I think he here positions himself to survive the present in order to address the future. The final lines of 4.35 serve as reinforcement.

The *praeteritio* that opens 4.35, *non attingo Graecos*, with its juxtaposition of *libertas* and *libido*, again recalls Sallust’s proem to his *Bellum Catilinae*; the message behind the emphatic *impunita* recalls Caesar’s speech from the same work (*Bellum Catilinae* 51), where he reminds the senate that adhering to the rule of law, not the anger of the moment, is not only what Rome stands for, but what history most favorably records. *Lubido*, *licentia*, and *libertas*, but especially *lubido* are touchstone words in that speech; and

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<sup>123</sup> I hear assonance with *ignita* and *adgnita*.

Caesar, like Tacitus, uses *novum* to trigger a negative reaction.<sup>124</sup> Thus, embedded in an *oratio recta* delivered by an historian whose work survived being consigned to the flames — the ultimate in censorship — is a reference to yet another historian and the *ipse divus Iulius* whose wisdom and moderation Cremutius, and Tacitus, is invoking. Well played.

“Or if anyone noticed, he avenged words with words [said things with said things].” A simple condition, in contrast to the mixed one above. Cremutius then proceeds to posit that it had been safe to write of those “whom death had removed from hatred or influence,” a clause of characteristic to communicate a pattern, and reminiscent of *Annales* I.1. This sets up his sarcastic rhetorical question: “Am I, with Cassius and Brutus holding the fields at Philippi, setting fire to the people through rallies for the sake of civil war?” Good question. And disingenuous. This is Cremutius’ third of four invocations of the duo. If they were not already rallying points for the Republican cause, they certainly became representative tropes from this point forward. Tacitus here uses the two to reinforce his message regarding the futility and self-defeating nature of censorship, much as he did at the end of Book 3, at the funeral of Junia.<sup>125</sup> The metaphorical use of *incendo* adeptly mocks the impending fate of his books.

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<sup>124</sup> "Omnis homines, patres conscripti, qui de rebus dubiis consultant, ab odio, amicitia, ira atque misericordia vacuos esse decet. Haud facile animus verum providet, ubi illa officium, neque quisquam omnium lubidini simul et usui paruit. Ubi intenderis ingenium, valet; si libido possidet, ea dominatur, animus nihil valet. Magna mihi copia est memorandi, patres conscripti, quae reges atque populi ira aut misericordia impulsu male consuluerint. Sed ea malo dicere, quae maiores nostri contra lubidinem animi sui recte atque ordine fecere." This is just the *exordium*. To remind the *patres conscripti* of their duties due to their *maiores* and the rule of law, Caesar pairs *novum* with *consilium* twice, *genus poenae*, once, and *exemplum* once. Tacitus’ pairing of *novum* with *crimen* at the beginning of 4.34 echoes this.

<sup>125</sup> *Annales* 3.76: *sed praefulgebant Cassius atque Brutus eo ipso quod effigies eorum non visebantur*. (“Cassius and Brutus outshone the rest [of the families represented by the images already mentioned], due to the very fact that their effigies [substitute for the aforementioned *imagines*] were not seen.” Also, at the opening of 3.76, Tacitus dates the funeral by saying it was *sexagesimo quarto post Philippensem aciem anno*.)



*An illi quidem septuagesimum ante annum perempti, quo modo imaginibus suis noscuntur, quas ne victor quidem abolevit, sic partem memoriae apud scriptores retinent?*

Again the rhetorical question. *Perempti* and *abolevit* are in the perfect tense, with the “seventieth year” as a reference to the Battle of Philippi, while *noscuntur* and *retinent* are in the here and now. *Perempti* echoes and amplifies the *exemisset* above; the *imaginibus suis* (as well as the reference to the year) recalls Junia’s funeral as Cremutius/Tacitus sets up the parallel between the visual *noscuntur* and the figurative *partem memoriae ... retinent* that the *scriptores*, the agents of the written word provide. The repeated reference to Caesar, here as *victor*, increasingly sharpens the contrast between the liberal-minded dictator and the Princeps, especially given that *abolevit* provides a more potent echo to the earlier *exolescunt*: with the *ne...quidem*, the argument is that Caesar, as victor, could not only have checked the growth of, but outright *abolished* the literal and figurative *imagines* of Brutus and Cassius, even of Cato. Yet he did not, nor did his reputation suffer. But more important is the reminder that it is through *writers* that Brutus and Cassius keep part of their memory alive.

Cremutius’ next sentence, his closing statement, begins with a gnomic saying, *suum cuique decus posteritas rependit* — banal enough on its own. The use of *rependit* evokes pecuniary matters, freighted after the introduction of *delatores*. On closer inspection, *si quis introspiciat*, the collocation of *decus posteritas* summons *Annales* 3.65, and Tacitus’ own justification for his own *Annales*:

Exequi sententias haud institui nisi insignis per honestum aut *notabili dedecore*, quod praecipuum munus annalium reor ne virtutes sileantur utque pravis *dictis factisque ex posteritate* et infamia metus sit.

By no means did I decide to pursue pronouncements unless they are signal for their honesty or of notable disgrace, because I think the foremost duty of annals is so that virtues not be silenced and that there be dread of posterity and infamy for perverse words and deeds.

Looking forward to Book 16, and the last words we have from Tacitus on the purpose of history, the *suum cuique decus posteritas* finds its echo in:

detur hoc inlustrium virorum *posteritati* , ut quo modo exequiis a promisca sepultura separantur, ita in traditione supremorum accipiant habeantque *propriam memoriam*. (16.16)

Let this be given to the posterity of illustrious men, that in the way they are set apart from a common burial in their exequies, thus in the transmitting of their final moments may they receive and hold their proper memory [memorial].

Crementius then closes with a future more vivid condition in which he situates himself with Cassius and Brutus:

nec deerunt, si damnatio ingruit, qui non modo Cassi et Bruti sed etiam mei meminerint.

Nor will there be lacking, if condemnation falls upon me, those who will remember not only Cassius and Brutus, but also me.

*Q.E.D.* A litotes, *nec deerunt* (“nor will they be lacking”), alliterative with *damnatio*.

*Damnatio* is a striking subject for *ingruit*, a word with overtones of battle or uncontrolled nature, and it helps to join Crementius with two who fell in a real battle. “They will remember me.” Tacitus the historian makes those words the historian’s last.

What follows is a curious sentence on Crementius’ death: *egressus dein senatu vitam abstinentia finivit*. With Crementius’ *egressus*, Tacitus gives us literally what he claimed his annals could not provide — scope for a *libero egressu*. Tacitus gives Crementius

tius full agency over his death: “he ended his life by fasting,” and even the *abstinentia* holds more agency than, say, *inedia*, derived as it is from the present active participle. The senate then decide that his books must be burned, and Tacitus chooses *cremandos*, often used for the burning of the dead or of sacrificial victims.<sup>126</sup> “But they remained, having been hidden and published.”<sup>127</sup> The next sentence switches back to the present tense, and more Sallustian verbiage: “Because of which it more pleases to mock the folly of those who believe that memory of even a subsequent age can be extinguished with present power.” In Tacitus’ summation of the events, the author bitingly contrasts *auctoritas*, with *praesens potentia* as he simultaneously aligns *externi reges* (“foreign kinds”) with *qui eadem saevitia usi sunt* (“those who have used the same savagery”). Using another *-scere* verb, he makes the claim that *auctoritas gliscit* — “authority blazes up” for punished *ingenia*. And what have those foreign kings or those who have acted likewise to show for their efforts? Nothing except *dedecus sibi atque illis gloriam*, “disgrace for themselves and for them [the authors] glory.”

We witness in 4.35 Tacitus’ full mastery of rhetorical power: metaphorical fire bracketing the literal (*incendo, cremandos, extinguere*), a closing chiasmus opposing *dedecus* and *gloriam*, the semantic play upon *auctoritas*. Cremutius’ trial takes center stage in Book IV. Book IV marks the turning point between the restrained and effective Tiberius and the Tiberius whose “true nature” finds its abettor in Sejanus, with increasingly delete-

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<sup>126</sup> Charlton Lewis and Charles Short, *A Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996 printing), 480.

<sup>127</sup> Tacitus does not see fit to mention here that the “editi” versions had also been edited; Quintilian notes that Cremutius was known for his “libertas,” even though “circumscisis quae dixisse ei nocuerat.” (Inst. 10.1.104) See Sailor, *Writing and Empire*, 280.

rious results. The *Annales* records the pattern of each emperor succumbing to the corrupting influences of power; not one emperor is spared this assessment. The surviving reputations of Brutus and Cassius, of Cato, serve to remind the current emperor and future generations that the written word is the last word. The literary history embedded in the *Dialogus* serves the same purpose, also via the vehicle of oratory.

Cremutius Cordus and Seneca's *Consolatio ad Marciam* (*Dial.* 6)

Seneca is glaringly absent from the *Dialogus*, and of pivotal importance in the Neronian books of the *Annales*. Given the significance of the trial of Cremutius Cordus in the Tiberian hexad, it would be hard to imagine that Tacitus had not read the *Consolatio ad Marciam*, as well as the various tragedies by Seneca. Cremutius Cordus' presence does more than hover at the edges of the *Consolatio*, though it was written to console Marcia on the death of her son, not her father; Marcia is the one credited with preserving her father's writings.<sup>128</sup> A panegyric to Cremutius comes at its beginning, and Cremutius himself appears in a *prosopopoeia* that serves to conclude the work. Just as Maternus' *Thyestes* connects Seneca to the *Dialogus* and thus the *Dialogus* to the *Annales*, Cremutius' spectral appearance helps to connect the *Dialogus* to the *Annales* via Seneca. It furnishes a speech by the earlier historian germane to the one Tacitus records in his trial in Book 4 and serves as a two-fold example of literature's enduring legacy: addressed to one who rescued a condemned author's work from literal extinction, it is a surviving work of an author who himself twice fell from imperial favor.

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<sup>128</sup> Seneca, *Consolatio ad Marciam* I.3

As complex and contradictory a role Seneca, as a man, plays for Tacitus, the import of his written work obviously resonated. Seneca is thought to have written the *Consolatio* sometime around the year 40, one year before Claudius sent him into exile in Corsica.<sup>129</sup> The work survived both Claudius and Nero, and it is not difficult to see its themes reflected in both the *Dialogus* and the *Annales*. In section 1.2, after praising her display of filial *pietas* towards her father upon his resolution to die and his subsequent death, Seneca commends Marcia's courage and forethought in preserving Cremutius' literary legacy:

Vt uero aliquam occasionem *mutatio temporum* dedit, ingenium patris tui, de quo sumptum erat supplicium, in usum hominum reduxisti et a uera illum uindicasti morte ac restituisti in *publica monumenta libros* quos uir ille fortissimus sanguine suo scripserat. *Optime meruisti* de Romanis *studii*: magna illorum pars arserat; optime de *posteris*, ad quos ueniet *incorrupta rerum fides*, *auctori* suo magno inputata; optime de ipso, cuius uiget uigebitque *memoria* quam diu in pretio fuerit Romana *cognosci*, quam diu quisquam erit qui *reuertere* uelit ad acta maiorum, quam diu quisquam qui uelit *scire* quid sit uir Romanus, quid subactis iam ceruicibus omnium et ad Seianianum iugum adactis indomitus, *quid sit homo ingenio animo manu liber*. Magnum mehercules detrimentum *res publica* ceperat, si illum ob duas res pulcherrimas in obliuionem coniectum, eloquentiam et *libertatem*, non eruisses: legitur, floret, in manus hominum, in pectora receptus uetustatem nullam timet; at illorum carnificum cito scelera quoque, quibus solis *memoriam meruerunt*, tacebuntur. (*Consolatio ad Marciam*, Dial. 6.I. 2)

Indeed as soon as the change of situation gave any opportunity, you brought back to mankind's advantage the genius and character of your father, that for which he paid the ultimate penalty, and you thus freed him from true death and restored as a public memorial the books which that bravest man had written with his own blood. You have best merited worth with regard to Roman literature — a great part of [the books] had burned; likewise in regard to posterity, to whom will come the uncorrupted truth of

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<sup>129</sup> He was exiled for having an adulterous affair with Claudius' niece, Julia Livilla, as well, perhaps, as extortion in Britain following Claudius' invasion, extortion that may have played a part in spurring Boudicca's rebellion.

affairs, a truth credited to the author at such a great cost; likewise with regard to your father himself, whose memory thrives and will thrive as long as it will be worth the price for Roman affairs to be known, as long as there will be anyone who wishes to be directed to the deeds of our ancestors, as long as there is anyone who wishes to know what is a Roman man, what remains indomitable after the necks of all have been bowed and driven to the yoke of Sejanus, what is man free in mind, spirit, and hand. By God, the state had taken on a great loss, had you not rescued him after he had been cast into oblivion on account of those two finest things: eloquence and *libertas*. He is read, he flourishes, received back into the hands of men, into their hearts; he fears no old age. But - even the crimes of those butchers, by which means alone they have been remembered, will quickly be silenced.

First, there is the recognition of a *mutatio temporum*, a reminder that times do change; during the *prosopopoeia* at the end, Seneca has Cremutius echo this theme by invoking *Fortuna*. Seneca reinforces the inability of present power to avert future judgment by crediting Marcia with saving her father from “real death” and returning the historian’s work as *publica monumenta*, juxtaposing *libros* to make the connection clear. By claiming that Marcia had served equally and simultaneously Roman literature, posterity, and her father, the *auctor*, Seneca seeks to aggrandize all authors, with an eye to his own future — his own not yet assured, but as Seneca the Elder’s son, within reach.

Cremutius’ memory, which thrives, is contrasted with that of his executioners, the *carnifices*, who are remembered only for their crimes and will soon be silenced. Seneca, in stating why men will continue to read Cremutius’ works, speaks to the role of history, not only in commemorating the deeds of ancestors, but in having the last word as to *quid sit vir Romanus*, and in equating the act of writing with freedom: Cremutius is called *indomitus*, and *homo ingenio animo manu liber*. The asyndeton, the triple endings in “o,” changing to a final “u” in *manu* — all lead up to the word *liber*. The collocation of *manu*

and *liber* signals a double reading: *liber* can mean “free” or “book.” By using *manu* as a metonymy for action, the act of writing comes to mind. What is a “free man?” A man and his writing are one. And so we recall how we find Maternus, at *Dialogus* 1.3, just after the proem:

Igitur ut intravimus cubiculum Materni, sedentem ipsum[que], quem pridie recitaverat *librum*, inter *manus* habentem deprehendimus.

Therefore, as we entered the bedroom of Maternus, we caught him sitting and holding in his hands that very book which he had recited the day before.

Marcia has rescued the two *res pulcherrimas ... eloquentiam et libertatem*, from oblivion, a thing which would have been a great loss to the *res publica*. By using the indicative of *ceperat*, Seneca emphasizes the condition as contrafactual; by echoing *res publica* with *res pulcherrimas*, he has made eloquence and *libertas* the finest things in the republic. Cremutius does not fear oblivion, because he has been received into the hands and hearts of men — the repetition in *manus hominum* helps to read *manu* above as literal, the *homo liber* as both free and book. Thus, in the *Dialogus*, when we read Maternus’ pronouncement that eloquence is not needed under the current happy times, that *libertas* is just a cover-word for *licentia*, we know not to take him at his word; after all, he is planning to write a *Thyestes*.

Seneca uses the *prosopopoeia* at the end to reinforce the dichotomy between mortal life and the immortality rendered by the historian’s pen:

Nescis quantis fortuna procellis disturbet omnia? Quam nullis benignam facilemque se praestiterit, nisi qui minimum cum illa contraxerant? Regesne tibi nominem felicissimos futuros, si maturius illos mors instantibus subtraxisset malis? an Romanos duces, quorum nihil magnitudini

deerit, si aliquid aetati detraxeris? an nobilissimos uiros clarissimosque ad ictum militaris gladi composita ceruice curuatos? Respice patrem atque auum tuum: ille in alieni percussoris uenit arbitrium; ego nihil in me cuiquam permisi et cibo prohibitus ostendi tam magno me quam uidebar animo scripsisse. Cur in domo nostra diutissime lugetur qui felicissime moritur? (26.2)

Do you not know with how great storms Fortune throws everything into confusion? How she presents herself has kind and easy-going to none, except those who had least dealt with her? Should I name for you the kings who would have been very happy had death more hastily pulled them from their looming ills? Or Roman leaders, whose greatness will lack nothing, if you take anything from their age. Or those most noble and distinguished men, bent with carefully-placed neck to the blow of a soldier's sword? Look back at your father and grandfather: your grandfather came under the judgement of a foreign assassin; but *I* permitted nothing against myself, and, having kept myself from food, I demonstrated that I was seen as of as great a spirit as that with which I have written. Why is one who dies most happily mourned in our house for so very long?

Although Seneca wrote this near the end of Caligula's reign, it would have been difficult not to see the parallels here with the second half of Tiberius' reign, particularly the emperor's vitiated seclusion on Capri, which begins shortly after the trial of Cremutius. The reputations of those *duces* taken in their prime, like Germanicus, survive in a burnished state.

#### Food and Power, Food and Tragedy

Tacitus may also have seen, in the historian's defiant pride in his fast-to-the-death, a recurring trope centered around food: at Book 6.20, Tiberius tells the future emperor Galba, *et tu, Galba, quandoque degustabis imperium* ("You, too, Galba, will at some



point taste *imperium*”);<sup>130</sup> fasting represents self-determination (and termination) in Book 6, most notably with Asinius Gallus (aforementioned grandson of Asinius Pollio), *egestate cibi* (6.23), Agrippina Maior, *negatis alimentis* (6.25 — Tiberius is described as *exarsit* with the charges) and, ultimately, Cocceius Nerva, Tiberius’ confidante and conscience, grandfather of the future emperor, *abstinentiam cibi* (6.26). This last death, the one Tiberius considered *grave conscientiae, grave famae suae*, was, according to those *gnari cogitationum eius*, Nerva’s election of an *honestum finem*.<sup>131</sup>

At 6.23, in one of the more horrifying episodes of the Tiberian hexad, the emperor contrives the death of his own grandson Drusus by means of a humiliating imprisonment (within his own *cubiculum*), beatings, and starvation:

Drusus deinde *extinguitur*, cum se miserandis alimentis, mandendo e cubili tomento, nonum ad diem *detinisset*.

Drusus is next extinguished, although he had held on until the ninth day with deplorable nourishment, by chewing on the stuffing from his mattress.

The pitiable ravings of the Drusus, provided in writing (*epistulae*) by imperial slaves, evoke the House of Atreus (where a grisly banquet is featured) :

ubi exspes vitae fuit, meditatae compositasque diras imprecabatur, ut, quem ad modum nurum filiumque fratris et nepotes domumque omnem caedibus complevisset, ita poenas nomini generique maiorum et posteris exolveret. (6.24)

Once he was beyond hope of life, he called down upon him deliberate and composed curses, in the manner that as he [Tiberius] had finished off his

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<sup>130</sup> For more on food in Tacitus, see A. J. Woodman, “Tiberius and the Taste of Power in the Year 33 in Tacitus,” *Classical Quarterly* 56.1 (2006):175-189.

<sup>131</sup> “heavy on his conscience, heavy on his own reputation,”... “cognizant of his [Nerva’s] reflections,” ...”an honest end.”

daughter-in-law, his brother's son and grandsons, and the whole house with slaughters, thus would he pay the penalty to the name and line of his ancestors and to posterity.

And in a further nod to the genre of tragedy, Tacitus reports the Senate's fear and horror at the recitation of these events by stating:

sed penetrabat pavor et admiratio, callidum olim et tegendis sceleribus obscurum huc confidentiae venisse ut tamquam dimotis parietibus ostenderet nepotem sub verberibus centurionis, inter servorum ictus extrema vitae alimenta frustra orantem. (6.24)

But fear and amazement settled in, that a man once canny and dark in covering his crimes had arrived at such confidence that, as with the walls removed, he was revealing his grandson beneath the lashes of a centurion, amongst the blows of slaves, begging in vain for the final nourishment of life.

These episodes surround a curious *discursus* on prophecy and the nature of fate at 6.21-22, and precede the *discursus* on the appearance of the phoenix at 6.28, and the trial of Mamercus Scurus, accused of composing a tragedy *additis versibus qui in Tiberium flecterentur* ("with verses added that could be twisted as against Tiberius"). This tragedy apparently revolved around the House of Atreus.<sup>132</sup>

Seneca, Cremutius, and the Long View

Seneca's Cremutius continues, condemning the present evils by highlighting their absence in the afterlife:

Quid dicam nulla hic arma mutuis furere concursibus nec classes classibus frangi nec parricidia aut fingi aut cogitari nec *fora litibus strepere* dies perpetuos, nihil in obscuro, *detectas mentes et aperta praecordia* et in pub-

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<sup>132</sup> Woodman, *Tacitus: The Annals*, 181 n. 91.

lico medioque vitam et omnis aevi prospectum venientiumque?  
 (*Consolatio ad Marciam, Dial. 6.26.4*)

Why need I say that there are no armies here raging in mutual onslaught, no fleets being dashed upon fleets, no parricides taking form or even being contemplated, nor courts raucous with lawsuits for endless days. Here there is nothing hidden, all minds uncovered and hearts open, and life in the public midst, with a view of all time and things to come.

This almost sounds like Maternus, at *Dial.* 11-12, divorcing himself from *forensi labore*, and seeking the *nemora vero et luci*. Cremutius' after-life is like Maternus' Golden Age:

quod non in strepitu nec sedente ante ostium litigatore nec inter sordes ac lacrimas reorum componuntur, sed secedit animus in loca pura atque innocentia fruiturque sedibus sacris. Haec eloquentiae primordia, haec penetralia; hoc primum habitu cultuque commoda mortalibus in illa casta et nullis contacta vitiis pectora influxit: sic oracula loquebantur. (*Dial.* 12)

which [poems/tragedies] are not composed in a din nor with a litigant sitting before my door nor amongst the tatters and tears of defendants, but the soul retreats into pure places free from harm and enjoy its sacred seats. These are the origins of eloquence, these its shrines. In such garb and style first pleasing to mortals did it flow into into those pure hearts untouched by any vices; thus the oracles used to speak.

Through the lense of Tacitus, it becomes hard to see where Cremutius ends, where Seneca meets Maternus, and where Tacitus steps in.

Iuvabat unius me saeculi facta componere in parte ultima mundi et inter paucissimos gesta. Tot saecula, tot aetatium contextum, seriem, quicquid annorum est, licet visere ; licet surrectura, licet ruitura regna prospicere et magnarum urbium lapsus et maris novos cursus.  
 (*Consolatio ad Marciam, Dial.* 6.16.5)

It used to please me to compose the deeds of one age in the farthest part of the globe and the accomplishments amongst a very few.<sup>133</sup> Now it is permitted to see so many centuries, the weave of so many ages, the succes-

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<sup>133</sup> In fact, Cremutius' history is supposed to have covered the civil wars and the reign of Augustus.

sion of however many years there are. It is permitted to look ahead to the kingdoms about to rise, and those destined to fall, as well as the collapse of great cities and new paths for the sea.

Seneca's creation of an historian who can see the future speaks to historiography itself; the truths inherent in recording the patterns of the past generate a view to the future. History is cyclical. If entire kingdoms and cities fall, what of the frailty of individual emperors? The new paths for the sea may be intended as natural, but they bring to mind Tacitus' depiction of Neronian subversion and perversion of nature, especially in the wake of the Great Fire — the lake in the midst of the Domus Aurea, the various gardens that witness murder and suicide by decree, and Nero's attempt to carve out a literal new path for the sea, from the Bay of Naples to Lake Avernus — the mythological entrance to the Underworld.<sup>134</sup>

#### Portents and Disease in the *Consolatio* and the *Annales*

Seneca's Cremutius concludes his pronouncements with apocalyptic language:

Nam si tibi potest solacio esse desiderii tui commune fatum, nihil quo stat loco stabit, omnia sternet abducatque secum uetustas. Nec hominibus solum (quota enim ista fortuitae potentiae portio est?), sed locis, sed regionibus, sed mundi partibus ludet. Totos supprimet montes et alibi rupes in altum nouas exprimet; maria sorbebit, *flumina auertet* et commercio gentium rupto societatem generis humani coetumque dissoluet; alibi hiatus uastis subducat urbes, tremoribus quatiet et ex infimo *pestilentiae* halitus mittet et inundationibus quicquid habitatur obducat necabitque *omne* animal orbe submerso et *ignibus uastis torrebit incendetque mortalia*. Et cum tempus aduenerit, quo se mundus renouaturus *extinguat*, uiribus ista se suis caedent et sidera sideribus incurrent et *omni flagrante materia uno igni* quicquid nunc ex disposito lucet *ardebit*. Nos quoque felices animae

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<sup>134</sup> *Annales* 15.42.

et aeterna sortitae, cum deo uisum erit iterum ista moliri, labentibus cunctis et ipsae parua ruinae ingenti accessio in antiqua elementa uertemur.'

For if it can be a solace to your grief that it is a common fate, that nothing will stand in the place where it now stands, and old age will lay waste to and sweep away everything with it. Nor does it mock mankind alone (for how very small a portion of fortune's power is that), but all places, regions and parts of the world. It will push down entire mountains and elsewhere push up new cliffs on high; it will absorb seas, turn away rivers, and with the trade of nations severed, it will dissolve the community and union of the human race. Elsewhere it will carry off cities with vast chasms, will shake them with earthquakes, send forth exhalations of plague from below, will overspread with inundations whatever land is dwelt in and will kill all creatures in the submerged world and will scorch with vast fires and set fire to all mortal beings. And when the time comes in which the world extinguishes itself in order to be renewed, all of that will slaughter itself with its own strength, and constellations will crash upon constellations, and, whatever now shines in its array will blaze with all material flaming in one fire. Then we, too, the happy souls allotted with no beginning nor end, when it will seem fit to god set it all in motion again, with everything slipping, we will be turned into our ancient elements, being but a small addition to that enormous ruin.

Some solace. This jarring conclusion weaves elements of Epicureanism into a Stoic framework, proselytizing *ataraxia* in the face of cyclical destruction and rebirth, and a reunion into *antiqua elementa*. The phoenix of *Annales* 6.28 comes to mind in particular, a physical manifestation of self-immolation and renewal. Tacitus does not limit his end-of-days imagery to that alone; the *Annales* spreads portents and calamities throughout the extant text. These work as fictional indices, situating the *Annales* within the literary context of tragedy; they thus serve to connect the *Annales* with the *Dialogus* further. A few examples will serve to illustrate.

When Tiberius, in 15 CE (*Ann.* 1.72), not only revives the ancient *lex maiestatis*, but expands its scope so that it was no longer true that *facta arguebantur, dicta inpune*

*erant*, there follows a series of injustices (at one trial, Tiberius “*exarsit*” with indignation; at another, he decreed that *deorum iniurias dis curae*), and, as if in response, the Tiber floods, at 1.76; Asinius Gallus proposes consulting the Sibylline Books; Tiberius refuses. The collapse of the Amphitheater at Fidenae (*gravior pestis*), at 4.62, which precedes the conflagration of nearly the entire Caelian Hill at 4. 64; the bolt of lightning that destroyed a gymnasium in Rome and melted an image of Nero into *informe aes* the same year an earthquake destroyed much of Pompeii in 62 (15.22) and the year before the premature consecration of Poppaea’s womb (for the daughter who died within the fourth month); the collapse of the theater at Naples, at 15.34 (an episode followed by the account of Tigellinus’ party, a monument of stagecraft and obscenity, which culminates in the Emperor playing the bride to his freedman Pythagoras); the Great Fire, at 15.38, a fire that is without *remedia*.

With the unraveling of the Pisonian Conspiracy, in 65 CE, following the death of Seneca’s nephew, the poet Lucan,<sup>135</sup> Tacitus depicts what any Roman would see as *nefas*, as he mixes slaughter and sacrifice, with suspected conspirators rounded up and exterminated while those spared must dissemble gratitude, even as their own loved ones fall victim:

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<sup>135</sup> Lucan’s death scene is brief but noteworthy: “Exim Annaei Lucani caedem imperat is profluente sanguine ubi frigescere pedes manusque et paulatim ab extremis cedere spiritum fervido adhuc et compote mentis pectore intellegit, recordatus carmen a se compositum, quo vulneratum militem per eius modi mortis imaginem obisse tradiderat, versus ipsos rettulit, eaque illi suprema vox fuit.” (15. 70) He recites verses from his own *Pharsalia*, the words of a dying soldier. Thus he “scripts” his own death. Tacitus awards all authors their dying words, or at least a farewell speech. Ellen O’Gorman, in *Irony and Misreading* (2000), 157, notes the word-play on *compote mentis* and *compositum*, and the weight of the poet’s *suprema vox*: “... he reasserts control over the emperor’s artwork (his subject’s death).”

Sed compleri interim urbs funeribus, Capitoliam victimis; alius filio, fratre alius aut propinquo aut amico interfectis, agere grates dis, ornare lauru domum, genua ipsius advolvi et dextram osculis fatigare. (15.71)

But meanwhile, the city was being filled with funerals, the Capitoline with sacrificial victims; one man whose son, another whose brother or relative or friend had been killed, gave thanks to the gods, bedecked his house with laurel, prostrated himself on his knees before the emperor himself, wearying his right hand with kisses.<sup>136</sup>

This depiction strains credulity, as the reader witnesses this inversion of *pietas* — relatives sacrificing to offer thanks for the murder of their own kin. This extreme, theatrical display underscores the prevalence of *dissimulatio*, the *modus vivendi* of the Principate, still at play in the *cubiculum* of Maternus, and probably in the senate of Trajan and Hadrian as well.

Tacitus goes on to close out Book 15 with more irony, portents, and blasphemy. In 15.73, Nero orders that the proceedings of the trial and confessions of the condemned be compiled and published in book form; the Princeps' motives are defensive, yet they result in the immortalization of a conspiracy that was as justified as it was unsuccessful:

crebro vulgi rumore lacerabatur, tamquam viros [claros] et insontes ob invidiam aut metum *extinxisset*. ceterum coeptam adultamque et revictam coniurationem neque tunc dubitavere, quibus verum noscendi cura erat, et fatentur, qui post interitum Neronis in urbem regressi sunt.

He was being torn to pieces by the continuous rumor of the people that he had extinguished brilliant and innocent men due to hatred or dread. But no one at that time for whom the concern was to learn the truth doubted that a conspiracy had been begun and nurtured and repressed, and those who returned to the city after Nero's demise confessed as much.

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<sup>136</sup> The future emperor Nerva, at 15.72, together with Tigellinus, receives triumphal honors and a dedicatory statue in the Forum; this is the first mention of Nerva, and hardly an auspicious one. Why, so far into his writing of the *Annales*, would Tacitus potential besmirch the name of one whom he formerly revered?

Next a senator by the name *Clemens* (emblematic names, especially when ironic, are another fictional index) denounces Seneca's brother, but is deterred by the body of the senate:

ne publicis malis abuti ad occasionem privati odii videretur, neu compositia aut oblitterata mansuetudine principis novam ad saevitiam retraheret.

lest he be seen to abuse public ills for the purpose of a private hatred, nor drag back some new savagery, with matters now settled or forgotten thanks to the emperor's clemency.

The final section, 15.74, has the senate decreeing more thanks to more gods, particularly Sol, by whose *numen* the conspiracy was uncovered. Then come two possible indicators of Nero's future demise. In the first, Nero himself consecrates the purported assassin's blade to Jupiter Vindex, which though in *praesens haud animadversum* ("at the time hardly noticed"), was seen in retrospect as *augurium et praesagium futurae ultionis* ("an augury and presage of future vengeance").<sup>137</sup> In the second, Tacitus cites his source in first person — *reperio in commentariis senatus* (I find in the recordings of the Senate) that — that another senator, a consul designate, proposes that a temple to Nero be established at public expense as quickly as possible — but the emperor declines, lest *ad omen sui exitus verteretur: nam deum honor principi non ante habetur, quam agere inter homines desierit* ("lest it be turned into an omen of his own death: for the honor of the gods is not delivered to the princeps before he has ceased to function amongst men").<sup>138</sup>

Thus we have, in 15.73-74, two references to an extant written record of historical events.

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<sup>137</sup> *Vindex* translates as "vindicator." This is in reference to an uprising against Nero, led by Jullius Vindex, in the spring of 68. cf. Woodman, trans, *The Annals*, 340 n. 107.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.* 340 n. 108. This last the author claims to have found in *commentariis senatus*, his only open reference to consulting this document.



### Eyes on the Audience

Book 15 ends there, but not the year 65, nor the joining of portent and calamity to the Princeps' *facinora*. *Inludit dehinc Neroni fortuna per vanitatem ipsius* — “From here Fortune made sport of Nero through his own empty-headedness” (16.1). A Punic con-man convinces the Princeps that he knows the location of Queen Dido's treasure, based on his dreams. Nero wastes no time in investing in this delusion and spending the foretold fortune.<sup>139</sup> Many in Rome are swept up in the speculation, contemporaneous with the celebrating of the second quinquennial games, and speeches are given in praise of the emperor and the earth's renewed, gods-granted fecundity, *quaeque alia summa facundia nec minore adulatione servilia fingeant, securi de facilitate credentis* (“and they were fashioning other such things of utmost eloquence and of no less servile adulation, worry-free in the readiness of the believer [Nero]”) (16.2). *Facundia*, ***summa facundia***, under the Principate has sunk to the level of *adulatione servilia*, no more. Was Tacitus' Maternus trying to express the same sentiment in his panegyric-esque *peroratio*?

With the collapse of the empty promise, Nero turns to the literal theater, as part of the ongoing games, and the senate is powerless to prevent further disgrace:

Interea senatus propinquo iam *lustrali* certamine, ut dedecus averteret, offert *im peratori victoriam cantus* adicitque facundiae coronam qua *ludicra deformitas velaretur*. (16.4)

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<sup>139</sup> “Igitur Nero, non *auctoris*, non *ipsius negotii fide* satis spectata nec missis per quos *nosceret an vera* adferentur, *auget* ultro *rumorem*...” (16.2) and “*Gliscebat interim luxuria spe inani* consumebanturque veteres opes quasi oblati quos multos per annos prodigeret ... et divitiarum expectatio inter causas paupertatis publicae erat.” (16.3)

Meanwhile the senate, with the quinquennial contests now near, in order to avert disgrace, offered the Emperor victory for singing and added a crown for eloquence by which his theatric hideousness could be veiled.

The diction here drips with metaphoric irony. *Lustralis* does come to mean pertaining to the quinquennial games, which were first instituted by Nero, but originally it pertained to ritual purification (often by sacrifice, such as the *suovetaurilia* — the offering of a swine, sheep, and bull — done every five years), from the verb *luo*, *-ere*. Tacitus then elects to use *imperator*, rather than *princeps*, and juxtapose it with *victoria*, but a *victoria cantus*, not *militaris*, to highlight the ludicrous. Then he adds a *corona facundiae*, not *triumphalis*, and assigns it the purpose of “veiling” the emperor’s *deformitas*, which echoes the *dedecus*, with the modifying adjective *ludicra* faintly echoing the *lustralis*, but jarringly discordant.

The emperor insists he needs no special favor, no *potestate senatus*, to win on his own merits; the obvious unwritten is that the Senate is, of course, powerless. He recites a poem on stage, then enters the theater to play the lyre, following all the rules of performance. Upon finishing, he gets down on his knees and clasps his hands, *ficto pavore*, in a false show of fear — this man who himself engenders true *metus* in so many. To add to the theater of the bizarre, Tacitus unsparingly depicts the plebs as an enthusiastic audience:

et plebs quidem urbis, *histrionum* quoque *gestus* iuvare solita, *personabat* certis modis plausuque composito. crederes laetari, ac fortasse laetabantur per incuriam publici flagitii. (16.4)

And indeed the plebs of the city, accustomed to aid the gestures also of actors, sounded out in fixed rhythms and arranged applause. *You* would

believe they were rejoicing — and perhaps they actually were rejoicing, unmindful of the public outrage.

The second person singular serves to place the reader as a secondary audience, together with another group of outsiders, those from the remote municipalities of Italy and those who came as delegations from the provinces:

Sed qui remotis e municipiis severaque adhuc et antiqui moris retinente Italia, quique per longinquas provincias lascivia inexerti officio legationum aut privata utilitate advenerant, neque aspectum illum tolerare neque labori inhonesto sufficere, cum *manibus nesciis* fatiscerent, turbarent *gnaros* .... (16.5)

But those from the remote municipalities and the stern part of Italy still retaining the morals of old, and those who had come from faraway provinces in the role of ambassadors or on private business, inexperienced in wantonness, could neither bear that sight nor supply such unwholesome toil, since their unwitting hands would grow tired and they would disturb those in the know....

*Nesciae* and *gnaros* act as triggers for the reader to be alert to other signposts of tragedy; the collocation of *manus nesciae* generates a interpretant of tragedy, an actualization through semanalysis. Tacitus' readers may have picked up on the stark contrast between these *unwitting* hands of the outsider audience, those with the customs of old, and the metonymy, perviously discussed, inherent in the *Dialogus*, as Maternus sits in his bedroom *librum inter manus* (*Dial.* 3), as well as in Seneca's *Consolatio ad Marciam*, at 6.I.

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restituisti in *publica monumenta libros* quos uir ille fortissimus sanguine suo scripserat. Optime meruisti de Romanis studiis: magna illorum pars arserat; optime de posteris, ad quos ueniet incorrupta rerum fides, auctori suo magno inputata; optime de ipso, cuius uiget uigebitque memoria quam diu in pretio fuerit Romana cognosci, quam diu quisquam erit qui reuerti

uelit ad acta maiorum, *quam diu quisquam qui uelit scire quid sit uir Romanus*, quid subactis iam ceruicibus omnium et ad Seianianum iugum adactis *indomitus*, *quid sit homo ingenio animo manu liber*. Magnum mehercules detrimentum res publica ceperat, si illum ob duas res pulcherrimas in obliuionem coniectum, *eloquentiam et libertatem*, non eruisses: legitur, floret, in *manus hominum* ....

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You restored as a public memorial the books which that bravest man had written with his own blood. You have best merited worth with regard to Roman literature — a great part of [the books] had burned; likewise in regard to posterity, to whom will come the uncorrupted truth of affairs, a truth credited to the author at such a great cost; likewise with regard to your father himself, whose memory thrives and will thrive as long as it will be worth the price for Roman affairs to be known, as long as there will be anyone who wishes to be directed to the deeds of our ancestors, as long as there is anyone who wishes to know what is a Roman man, what remains indomitable after the necks of all have been bowed and driven to the yoke of Sejanus, what is man free in mind, spirit, and hand. By God, the state had taken on a great loss, had you not rescued him after he had been cast into oblivion on account of those two finest things: eloquence and *libertas*. He is read, he flourishes, received back into the hands of men ....

Here we have the tragedy of unwitting hands witnessing *illum aspectum*, the downfall and perversion of *facundia*, while those who are *gnaros* understand that they are the ones being watched. The scene grows more menacing: soldiers beating those not in compliance, members of the equestrian order being trampled at the gates, and others, too afraid to leave (*si spectaculo defuissent* — leaves the reader wondering whether the audience or the Emperor is the *spectaculum*), dying of disease in their seats, rather than running the risk of being reported by the numerous, hidden spies:

ut nomina ac vultus, alacritatem tristitiamque coeuntium scrutarentur ...  
adversum inlustris dissimulatum ad praesens et mox redditum odium.

so that they could scrutinize the names and faces, the eagerness or dismay of the assembled ... their hatred towards the illustrious dissembled for the present, but soon rendered.

The future emperor Vespasian only narrowly escapes punishment after being caught napping — an escape Tacitus ascribes to his *maiore fato*. The resultant and merited paranoia is reminiscent of that at the end of Book 4, where many in Rome feared that even roof and walls were watching the *anxia et pavens civitas* (4.70), only now it verges on paradox, as it is the audience who is watched by eyes and ears designated by the emperor who is performing on the stage.

After the games are over, a parade of further victims of Nero ensues, beginning with his wife Poppea; in a moment of *fortuita mariti iracundia*, he kicks her while pregnant. While Tacitus passes over reports of venom as *odio magis quam ex fide*, he does note that the body was not *igni abolitum, ut Romanus mos, se regum externorum consuetudine differtum odoribus conditur tumuloque Iuliorum infertur* (“demolished by fire, as is the Roman custom, but in the manner of foreign kings packed with perfumes and brought to the tomb of the Iulii [Augustus’ mausoleum]”). The juxtaposition of oriental luxury and the tomb of Augustus must have made every proper Roman groan, while the irony of not consigning her to the flames after the city had itself been set on fire seems even crueler when cremation is given the designation, *Romanus mos*. Nero himself gave the obsequies from the Rostra, praising her *fortunae munera pro virtutibus* (“her gifts of Fortune in place of virtues”)(16.6).

The next victim brings to mind once again Cremutius Cordus, as Nero prevents Gaius Cassius from attending Poppea’s funeral — what Tacitus calls the *primum indicium*

*mali*. Whereas the late historian was found guilty of praising Caesar's assassin in writing, this Cassius is charged with worshiping — amongst the *imagines* of his ancestors — the *effigiem* of the Republican hero, inscribed with *duci partium*, “to the leader of the Party,” the implication being that he was thus sowing the *semina belli civilis*. Next fall his supposed accomplice Silanus, and more, culminating with the triple suicide of a consular, his mother-in-law, and his daughter, all of whom die with honor, using the same blade to sever their veins.

Tacitus closes out the *annus horribilis* in the style of Seneca's Cremutius, by making explicit the connection between crimes and calamity, as plague and conflagration become one, at 16.13:<sup>140</sup>

Tot facinoribus foedum annum etiam dii tempestatibus et *morbis insigne* vastata Campania turbine ventorum, qui villas arbusta fruges passim disiecit pertulitque violentiam ad vicina urbi; in qua omne mortalium genus vis *pestilentiae* depopulabatur, nulla caeli intemperie quae occurreret oculis. sed domus corporibus exanimis, *itineria funeribus complebantur*; non sexus, non aetas periculo vacua; servitia perinde et ingenua plebes raptim *extingui*, inter coniugum et liberorum lamenta, qui dum adsident, dum deflent, saepe eodem rogo *cremabantur*. equitum senatorumque interitus quamvis promisci minus flebiles erant, tamquam communi mortalitate saevitiam principis praevenirent.

Even the gods marked with storms and disease a year foul with so many crimes. Campania was devastated by a tornado, which tossed about farms, groves, crops hither and thither and brought it violence to the vicinity of the City; in which the force of a plague was ravaging the entire race of mortals, with no inclemency of the heavens which might have met the eyes. But homes were continuously filled with lifeless bodies, streets with funerals; neither sex nor age was void of danger; slaves and freeborn commoners equally were being extinguished rapidly, amidst the lamentations of spouses and children, who — as they were sitting by, as they were

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<sup>140</sup> The plague also helps to augment the connection to tragedy; Seneca's play *Oedipus* opens with the city of Thebes being ravaged by a plague, the only remedy for which is expiation, which first requires anagnorisis by Oedipus.

weeping — were often being cremated upon the same pyre. The deaths of the knights and senators, though equally indiscriminate, were less to be wept over, as though they prevented the savagery of the Princeps by their common mortality.

Tacitus opens with the alliterative ‘f’s’ signaling disgust, and then states, unequivocally, that “even the gods marked [the year] with storms and disease.” The indiscriminate nature of the destruction is emphasized repeatedly through asyndeton and diction — *omne mortalium genus, non sexus, non aetas, servitia perinde et ingenua plebes, coniugum et liberorum, eodem rogo cremabantur, promisci*. Curiously, the deaths of the higher ranks were *minus flebiles*; Tacitus qualifies his conjecture as to why with a *tamquam*. The decision to use *extingui* before *cremabantur* inverts the natural order and serves to unite death and fire. Thus Tacitus brings the year 65 CE to a close, a year that saw the death of so many following the Pisonian Conspiracy, most notably that of Seneca.

#### Tacitus’ Final Reflections on the Duty of the Historian

In a pause after another round of executions, at 16.14-15, Tacitus takes one more turn at reflecting upon his *munus* as historian, as he leads the reader into the final days of Petronius and Thrasea Paetus. Since the *Annales* breaks off mid-way through Thrasea Paetus’ suicide, this will be our last direct address from him. Taken with his proem and his digression before the trial of Cremutius Cordus, it can be seen as a triptych:<sup>141</sup>

Etiam si bella externa et obitas pro re publica mortis tanta casuum similitudine memorarem, meque ipsum satias cepisset aliorumque taedium expectarem, quamvis honestos civium exitus, tristis tamen et continuos aspernantium: at nunc patientia servilis tantumque sanguinis domi perditum

<sup>141</sup> If we had the missing books, it would be interesting to see if Tacitus had placed a similar reflection four books into the second hexad, at Book 10.

fatigant animum et maestitia estringunt. neque aliam defensionem ab iis quibus ista noscentur exegerim, quam ne oderim tam segniter pereuntis. ira illa numinum in res Romanas fuit, quam non, ut in cladibus exercituum aut captivitate urbium, semel edito transire licet. detur hoc inlustrium viro- rum posteritati, ut quo modo exequiis a promisca sepultura separantur, ita in traditione supremorum accipiant habeantque propriam memoriam.

(16.16)

Even if I were recounting foreign wars and deaths met on behalf of the republic with such similarity of events, an unwelcome satiety would have seized even myself, and I would anticipate the weariness of others as they avert their gaze from, deaths that, however honorable, were nonetheless bitter and unceasing. But now a slavish forbearance and such a quantity of blood lost at home weary and confine the spirit in melancholy. But I would exact no other defense from those to whom these matters will become known, than that I not hate those dying so listlessly. There has been that wrath of the gods against Roman affairs, which one may not — as in the destruction of armies or the capture of cities — pass over with but one reference. Let this be granted to succeeding generations of illustrious men: that just as by their exequies they are set apart from a common burial, so may they receive and hold their own particular memorial in the transmission of their final moments.

This justification reads differently from the preceding two. This is not a *recusatio*.

No longer is he advocating that things which at first seem insignificant are worth learning. This begins with an “etiam si,” “even if.” Here he seems to have given up on his contemporary audience. He leaves us uncertain as to whether the shift at *at nunc* is meant to contrast the material in the conditional clause to that in the *Annales*, specifically the parade of deaths, or is the *nunc* the first years of Hadrian’s reign, with the murky accession and deaths of the four consulars fresh in everyone’s minds? Is that the import of the *similitudine*? Was the purpose of emphasizing the theater and Nero’s Greek affectations



to mirror those of Hadrian?<sup>142</sup> The *patientia servilis* and the *tantum sanguinis domi*<sup>143</sup> *perditum* are set apart from the condition by *at* and followed by *nunc* and two verbs in the present tense. Perhaps it is Tacitus' *animum* that is fatigued and confined, perhaps not; he leaves it an open question. Heretofore, only the senate has been chided for its servility. He requires a defense only from his future audience — *ab iis quibus ista noscentur* — future indicative, passive. This is an author assured of his authorial permanence.

The *tam segniter pereuntis* and why Tacitus feels the need to have it known that he does not hate them — that is a puzzle. These are deaths that show remarkable fortitude, exemplars of Stoic acceptance, and so perhaps the *tam segniter* implies no more than that acceptance. In his earlier works he had criticized such deaths as wasteful displays, but now, having a perspective closer to that of Cremutius Cordus as he looks down from above upon the cycles of history, he feels differently. That is what Tacitus wants his future audience to know.

The interjection of divine wrath, not present in 4.32-33, as a justification for the *non... semel edito* signals the reader to be alert to what follows. The formulaic let this be granted sounds like a combination eulogy and last will and testament, with religious overtones. The emphatic position of *posteritati*, the interesting choice of the genitive for *illustrious men* — is it to be granted to future generations of all great men, or will *these* great men live into posterity by way of these *Annales*? Tacitus could have been more generic

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<sup>142</sup> Was the valorization of Domitius Corbulo and his command of eastern forces in Book 15 a slight to Hadrian's decision to contract the boundaries of the empire in the east? Corbulo's forced suicide in 67 would surely have received attention as one of the *exitus quamvis honesti* in the succeeding book of the *Annales*.

<sup>143</sup> The choice of *domi*, too, is telling. These are not just deaths at home as opposed to abroad, but most take place at home, literally.

by simply leaving it at the masculine plural of *illustrium*, but he chose to specify with a following *virorum*, perhaps an echo of Seneca's words regarding Cremutius:<sup>144</sup>

optime de posteris, ad quos ueniet incorrupta rerum fides, auctori suo magno inputata; optime de ipso, cuius uiget uigebitque memoria quam diu in pretio fuerit Romana cognosci, quam diu quisquam erit qui reuerti uelit ad acta maiorum, *quam diu quisquam qui uelit scire quid sit uir Romanus*, quid subactis iam ceruicibus omnium et ad Seianianum iugum adactis in domitus, quid sit homo ingenio animo manu liber.

(*Consolatio ad Marciam*, *Dial.* 6.1.5)

likewise in regard to posterity, to whom will come the uncorrupted truth of affairs, a truth credited to the author at such a great cost; likewise with regard to your father himself, whose memory thrives and will thrive as long as it will be worth the price for Roman affairs to be known, as long as there will be anyone who wishes to be directed to the deeds of our ancestors, as long as there is anyone who wishes to know what is a Roman man, what remains indomitable after the necks of all have been bowed and driven to the yoke of Sejanus, what is man free in mind, spirit, and hand.

These lines follow *magna illorum pars arserat* — a possible reminder of the futility of censorship. The last line, too, reminds us of Maternus, at *Dial.* 3, *ipsum ... librum inter manus habentem*. Tacitus' jussive doublet, *accipiant habeantque*, continues the formulaic style that concludes with ultimate goal of the historian: *memoriam*. This digression is the last we have from him.

### Books of Wisdom

In this closing I find a similarity with a passage from a book of wisdom (ca. 200-175 BCE) likely current in the cosmopolitan, Hellenized world of Tacitus and Hadrian, a similarity that grows deeper as the text proceeds:

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<sup>144</sup> The triple suicide that immediately precedes this digression included two women; in fact, several of the most notable deaths are of women.

Let us now praise famous men, and our fathers that begat us. The Lord hath wrought great glory by them through his great power from the beginning. Such as did bear rule in their kingdoms, men renowned for their power, giving counsel by their understanding, and declaring prophecies: Leaders of the people by their counsels, and by their knowledge of learning meet for the people, wise and eloquent are their instructions: Such as found out musical tunes, and recited verses in writing: Rich men furnished with ability, living peaceably in their habitations: All these were honoured in their generations, and were the glory of their times. There be of them, that have left a name behind them, that their praises might be reported. And some there be, which have no memorial; who are perished, as though they had never been; and are become as though they had never been born; and their children after them. But these were merciful men, whose righteousness hath not been forgotten. With their seed shall continually remain a good inheritance, and their children are within the covenant. Their seed standeth fast, and their children for their sakes. Their seed shall remain for ever, and their glory shall not be blotted out. Their bodies are buried in peace; but their name liveth for evermore. The people will tell of their wisdom, and the congregation will shew forth their praise. (*Ecclesiasticus* 44. 1-10, King James version).

I like to imagine Tacitus coming across this text, perhaps in the library at Ephesus during his proconsulship (112-113 CE), fourteen years into the reign of Trajan. It would have resonated with the historian, the author of the *Agricola* and the *Histories*, the man who had already recorded *clarorum virorum facta moresque posteris* (*Agricola* 1). The sentiment was not a new one even then. When he wrote the *Agricola*, in ca. 98, Tacitus still dared to hope that the bad times had perished with Domitian, and that Nerva, quickly succeeded by Trajan, would inaugurate an new era. Though he had begun his career and advanced under Domitian, and thus was able to relate to Eprius Marcellus' comment, *nec minus sibi anxiam talem amicitiam quam aliis exilium* (*Histories* 4.8), his most promising years still lay ahead in 98 — he would have been just over forty.

Nunc demum redit animus ... non tamen pigebit vel incondita ac rudi voce  
 memoriam prioris sevitutis ac testimonium praesentium bonorum compo-  
 sisse. (Agr. 3)

Now at last our spirit returns .. nor will it shame us to have composed a  
 record of earlier servitude as well as a testament of our present good for  
 tunes, even if in a voice disordered and uncultivated.

Then again, Trajan was not to appear in Rome itself for another year.

Fourteen years later, however, Tacitus may have recognized that what he had con-  
 sidered *res olim dissociabiles ... principatum ac libertatem* (Agr. 3) were, in fact, *res ad-  
 huc dissociabiles*; in Ephesus, far from the emperor's court, in an office of the highest  
 prestige, Tacitus could see that even there he had no opportunity to exercise real *libertas*.  
 As Book 10 of Pliny's letters testify, Trajan exerted close control even over his provincial  
 governors.<sup>145</sup> Thus, what Tacitus wrote at *Annales* 16.16 seems to reflect that the series  
 of deaths under Nero were representative not just of one princeps, but of the Principate,  
 and that the death that follows this passage makes for a *déjà vu* to an earlier work, if a  
 later Princeps. Immediately preceding his *nunc redit animus*, Tacitus had written, as a  
 contrast:

Legimus, cum Aruleno Rustico Paetus Thrasea, Herennio Senecioni  
 Priscus Helvidius laudati essent, capitale fuisse, neque in ipsos modo auc-  
 tores, sed in libros quoque eorum saevitum, delegato triumviris ministerio  
 ut monumenta clarissimorum ingeniorum in comitio ac foro urerentur.  
 Scilicet illo igne vocem populi Romani et libertatem senatus et conscientiam  
 generis humani aboleri arbitrabantur, expulsis insuper sapientiae pro-  
 fessoribus atque omni bona arte in exilium acta, ne quid usquam honestum  
 occurreret. Dedimus profecto grande patientiae documentum; et sicut ve-  
 tus aetas vidit quid ultimum in libertate esset, ita nos quid in servitute,

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<sup>145</sup> It is thought that Pliny did not himself publish Book 10 — it seems to undermine the image he so care-  
 fully constructed in Books 1-9. Pliny died in 112 or 113 in Bythnia, where he was serving Trajan contem-  
 poraneously with Tacitus. Perhaps the historian was the one to publish that last book of letters; it would  
 have borne witness to his own lack of *libertas* as governor, without tarnishing his reputation.

adempto per inquisitiones etiam loquendi audiendique commercio. Memoriam quoque ipsam cum voce perdidissemus, si tam in nostra potestate esset oblivisci quam tacere.

We have read, when Thræsea Paetus had been praised by Arulenus Rusticus, and Helvidius Priscus by Herennius Senecius, it had been a capital offense, that rage was vented not only against the authors themselves, but also against their books, with the task delegated to the triumvirs to burn the monuments of such brilliant genius in the Forum. Undoubtedly they thought that by that fire the voice of the Roman people and the *libertas* of the senate and the conscience of mankind would be destroyed, and moreover, with the professors of philosophy banished and all noble arts driven into exile, lest anything worthy present itself anywhere. We have certainly given a grand proof of passivity, and just as an olden age witnessed what was the ultimate in *libertas*, thus we have in servility, with our exchange of speech and hearing taken from us through inquisitions. We would have destroyed our very memory along with our voice, had it been as much in our power to forget as to be silent. (Agr. 2)

Under Domitian, it had proved fatal to write of those who had perished under Nero ... and Vespasian. But Tacitus was looking back only to Domitian in his *Agricola*. The process of writing the *Histories* would have exposed him to the immutable nature of imperial *potentia*, regardless of the individual in power — an inexorable slide into favoritism, paranoia, and eventually despotism. The *Dialogus* serves as a declaration that the voice has been silenced. However, Maternus' self-censorship in his final speech, in all of its contradictions, extends to oratory only; nowhere does he say that he will change what he has written in his *Cato* or not write his *Thyestes*. His written work, too, may have cost him his life, but it appears to have survived both himself and Vespasian. By the time Tacitus was writing the *Annales*, he knew the story he wanted to tell, the famous men he wanted to praise — and those he wanted to consign to enduring ignominy; it would be both a *Cato* and a *Thyestes*, and it would be his capstone. His prominent inclusion of the

trial of Cremutius Cordus in Book 4 and the dying words of so many authors was a recognition of the perils of his work, and the ultimate folly of censorship.

## Chapter VI

## Seneca, Maternus, and the Neronian Books

Te, te cruenta sceptrā qui dextra geris,  
 te pater inultus urbe cum tota petam  
 et mecum Erinyn pronubam thalami traham,  
 traham sonantis uerbera, incestam domum  
 uertam et penates impio Marte obteram.  
 (*Oedipus*, 642-646)

## Overview

*Annales* 14 works as a tragedy encapsulated within a larger historical work that breathes a tragic atmosphere. There are multiple parallels with the praetexta *Octavia*, and both works draw upon Seneca's *Oedipus*. Even if Curiatius Maternus did not write the *Octavia*, his professed desire to follow up on his *Cato* with a *Thyestes* allows the reader to view him as an actant for Seneca and the genre of tragedy, and to hear his intention as Tacitus' announcement of the *Annales*. If, in fact, Maternus is the author of the *Octavia*, then, then the reader of the *Annales* would have heard that announcement echoing from Maternus' cubiculum, loud and clear.

The *Dialogus* presents us with a template for discussing the role of oratory under empire, the chilling effects of *delatores* on free speech, and the performative function of literature as enduring testament. Throughout the various speeches, on both sides of both debates, we hear repeatedly the names of literary figures gone but not forgotten. We sense

that the danger to Maternus is real, but we also hear his conviction that his tragedies will survive to inform and instruct.

It is impossible to know the degree to which Tacitus' contemporary audience was familiar with the fate and works of Maternus, but they would have been able to place him in his literary context, beginning with Nero's reign. While reading the *Dialogus*, this contemporary audience would have wondered at the absence of any mention of the most famous tragedian and preceptor of Nero's day, Seneca, and also of the famous biographer of Cato, Thrasea Paetus. If Aper and Secundus were trying to get Maternus to temper his writing, why did they not use these men as cautionary *exempla*? From the perspective of an audience early in the second century, this lack of mention coupled with the obvious parallels may have served to trigger an identification of Maternus with both of these men. If this was Tacitus' intent, then why?

We have seen Seneca's Cremutius reflected not only in the portrayal of Cremutius in *Annales* 4. 34-35, but also in Tacitus' reflections on his own work as historian. In the Neronian books of the *Annales*, Tacitus presents us with his characterization of Seneca himself, and of his friend and foil, Thrasea Paetus. How did Tacitus reconcile the historical Seneca with his written legacy? I believe Seneca serves not only as a bridge from the *Dialogus* to the *Annales*, but also as the embodiment of a man who had withdrawn from a life of what Dylan Sailor would call "implication" to live out his final years as an exemplum of *libertas* and Stoicism (which he had previously only preached).



In the Neronian books, we have two friends with differing *modi vivendi*, if not stated beliefs: Thrasea Paetus and Annaeus Seneca.<sup>146</sup> In the *Dialogus*, we have the two principal combatants, Maternus and Aper. As we have already seen, Maternus has retreated from public oratory to his *cubiculum*, where we find him polishing his recently recited tragedy, a *Cato*. He has already written a *Medea* and a *Domitius*. After his friend and fellow senator Aper remonstrates with him to temper his work, to make it “safer, if not better,”<sup>147</sup> Maternus announces his intention to follow up with a *Thyestes*, a tragedy which will say *(ali)qua Cato omisit*. Cato, like Brutus and Cassius, is a signpost for Republican *libertas*, Thyestes, for tyrannical cruelty and bloodlust — especially, but not limited to, within the imperial family. Thrasea Paetus, after his retirement from the senate, penned a biography of Cato, which did nothing to improve his standing with Nero. Seneca wrote a *Medea* and a *Thyestes*, most likely during his forced retirement from Nero’s court.<sup>148</sup>

The composition date of the *Dialogus* remains in question, but Tacitus completes (perhaps) his *Annales* during the early years of Hadrian’s principate. While there are many parts of the *Annales* that read like a tragedy, the Neronian hexad does in particular: ominous transgressions of contrived natural landscapes into performative spaces,<sup>149</sup> de-

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<sup>146</sup> Once Seneca is gone, we have, at 16.19, the suicide of Gaius Petronius, — another literary figure who serves as a foil to Thrasea Paetus. His suicide immediately precedes the trial and suicide of Thrasea Paetus.

<sup>147</sup> An echo, as mentioned before, of the promise made in *Histories* 1.1, to write of the current happier time, of *uberiorem securioremque materiam*.

<sup>148</sup> P.J. Davis, *Seneca: Thyestes* (London: Duckworth, 2003), 16.

<sup>149</sup> For a discussion of this aspect at work in *Annales* 11, see Katherine Von Stackleberg, “Performative Space and Garden Transgressions in Tacitus’ Death of Messalina,” *American Journal of Philology* 130 (2009): 595-624. I am thinking more of the constructed groves and grottos of the party thrown by Tigellinus that preceded the great fire.

nouements “staged” in *cubicula* and *horti*, the deaths of Agrippina and Octavia, the bloodbath following the Pisonian Conspiracy, the suicides performed by Seneca, Lucan, Petronius, Thrasea Paetus, interspersed with capital convictions of fathers and daughters — the senate functioning merely as chorus. Hadrian, like Nero, was a philhellene, and he inaugurated his reign with the execution of the four consulars. Tacitus would probably have called that the *primum facinus/prima mors novi principatus*. Thus, in the *Dialogus*, Maternus’ retirement from public life to write tragedies not only looks back to Seneca, but ahead to Tacitus himself.

The dramatic date of the *Dialogus* is 75 CE. As I have previously discussed, this date would have resonated with the audience as contemporaneous with the execution of Helvidius Priscus under Vespasian, *sapientissimus et unus*. The fact that Maternus has just written a *Cato* has invited several scholars to speculate that this real-life tragedy may have been in response to that event<sup>150</sup> — a speculation further aided by Aper lauding the rhetorical prowess of the delator who helped to engineer Helvidius Priscus’ downfall, Eprius Marcellus:

Quid aliud infestis patribus nuper Eprius Marcellus quam eloquentiam suam opposuit? Qua accinctus et minax disertam quidem, sed inexercitatum et eius modi certaminum rudem Helvidii sapientiam elusit. (*Dial.* 5).

What else did Eprius Marcellus put up against a hostile senate recently, other than his own eloquence? Girded with which and menacing, he made sport of Helvidius’ learned, certainly, but green wisdom, untrained in contests of this kind.

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<sup>150</sup> For a discussion of scholars on this connection, see Shadi Bartsch, *Actors in the Audience: Theatricality and Doublespeak from Nero to Hadrian* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 110, n.21.

The audience of the *Dialogus* would also have had *Histories* 4.8 to help make the connection: *denique constantia fortitudine Catonibus et Brutis aequaretur Helvidius*. By pluralizing Cato and Brutus, Tacitus had morphed them from actors into actants.

A look at the larger context of that excerpt helps to illuminate not only Helvidius' connection to his father-in-law Thrasea Paetus, but also a shift that has taken place within Tacitus. The Tacitus of the *Histories* still viewed displays of *libertas* such as that of Helvidius Priscus as excessive and wasteful; Eprius Marcellus, though not particularly appealing, speaks with logic and cogency:

id magis vitandum ne pervicacia quorundam inritaretur *animus novo principatu suspensus et vultus quoque ac sermones omnium circumspectans*. se meminisse temporum quibus natus sit, quam civitatis formam patres avique instituerint; ulteriora mirari, praesentia sequi; bonos imperatores voto expetere, qualiscumque tolerare. non magis sua oratione Thraseam quam iudicio senatus adflictum; saevitiam Neronis per eius modi imagines inlusisse, nec minus sibi anxiam talem amicitiam quam aliis exilium. denique constantia fortitudine Catonibus et Brutis aequaretur Helvidius: se unum esse ex illo senatu, qui simul servierit. suadere etiam Prisco ne supra principem scanderet, ne Vespasianum senem triumphalem, iuvenum liberorum patrem, praeceptis coerceret. quo modo pessimis imperatoribus sine fine dominationem, ita quamvis egregiis modum libertatis placere. haec magnis utrimque contentionibus iactata diversis studiis accipiebantur.

What needed to be avoided more was lest a mind uncertain in his new principate and scanning the faces and conversations of all be provoked by the obstinacy of certain members. He himself remembered the times in which he was born, what form of state his fathers and grandfathers had established. He admired times past, but adhered to the present; he sought good rulers through prayer, tolerated whomever. Thrasea had been damaged no more by his speech than by the judgement of the senate; the cruelty of Nero entertained itself through these forms, nor was such a friendship any less fretful for him than exile for others. Finally, Helvidius may equal the Catos and Bruti in his unwavering fortitude; but he [Marcellus] was but one in that senate which has served as one. He would also advise Priscus not to climb above the Princeps, nor to correct with his precepts Vespasian, an old man triumphant, father of free-born young men. In the

way that despotic rule without limit pleases the worst emperors, so, too, a check on *libertas* pleases even the outstanding ones.

This paean to *moderatio* was discussed at greater length earlier in this paper, as were the roles of Regulus and Messalla in *Histories* 4, but it serves here to illustrate that Tacitus intended his *Dialogus* audience to recollect the earlier connection as a backdrop to his re-calibrated attitude. Aper, by evincing concern for his friend's safety, acknowledges that offending *pro Catone* was dangerous: *quod periculosius est, pro Catone offendis* (*Dial.* 11);<sup>151</sup> he does not pretend otherwise. We know from their discussion in the first debate that Maternus knows full well what he is doing. We also get the sense, in the confined quarters of the *cubiculum*, that Maternus' own tragedy lurks nearby. The abrupt change in topic and tone upon the arrival of Regulus' half-brother, Messalla, and the complete reversal by Maternus in his *peroratio* signal Tacitus' own disillusionment and cynicism.

Helvidius has died for his outspokenness, just as had his father-in-law under Nero.<sup>152</sup> The deaths of Arulenus Rusticus and Herennius Senecio have yet to happen. What was an audience several years into the reign of Trajan to make of the fact that Tacitus does not name the *delator* Regulus, but has Aper refer to him only as *fratris tui* shortly after Messalla enters? Regulus dies ca. 106; no one in Tacitus' audience would have failed to connect him to the concatenation of Stoic martyrs. Aper's oblique reference acts

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<sup>151</sup> "What is *more* dangerous, you offend on behalf of Cato."

<sup>152</sup> Although, interestingly, what Cossutianus Capito and Epirus Marcellus charge Thræsea with is actually a failure to act and a failure to speak. This demonstrates the progression from Cremutius Cordus, when Tacitus records that previously only deeds, not words, had been prosecuted, to a series of prosecutions for words spoken and written, to finally a Rome so filled with dread and paranoia that the virtuous were convicted for inaction and silence.

as a warning to Maternus to check his speech. Tacitus' affected self-censorship here may serve to alert the audience that nothing has changed. One can draw a continuous line from Eprius Marcellus and his major role in the prosecution of Thræsea Paetus (*Annales* 16) to Regulus' continued delatorial activities under Trajan.

#### Maternus' *Domitius*: the *Octavia*?

But more importantly, Maternus, having offended the *potentes* by writing his *Cato*, is about to embark upon his *Thyestes*; he has already written a *Medea* and something Aper refers to as a *Domitius*. Seneca wrote both a *Medea* and a *Thyestes*, along with an *Oedipus*. Some scholars believe that the *Domitius* actually refers to the *Octavia*, the *praetexta* named for Claudius' daughter and Nero's wife. If true, it would strengthen the tie between the *Dialogus* and the *Annales*. The *Octavia* centers around Nero as much as anyone, given that it includes his murder both of his mother Agrippina and of his wife. At one time it was thought to have been written by Seneca, but that has always been an unlikely scenario — not only did Nero survive Seneca by three years, but Seneca does not come off very well in the tragedy. The idea that Maternus' *Domitius* is in fact the *Octavia* is not that far-fetched, since referring to Nero by his original *nomen*, rather than his adoptive 'Claudius,' was a popular way to insult the defunct emperor at that time:

Prior to *Cato* there had been another historical drama, the *Domitius*. In the present context, it is of course puzzling that Aper praises these historical ventures as a *novum negotium*. However, this statement need not preclude the assumption of a similar venture some seven years earlier. Aper may (again) be inaccurate, or simply oblivious of the drama, which any way suited his argument badly. Alternatively, it can be argued that *novum* has generic rather than chronological implications. The difficulty with the

'additional' historical drama may furthermore only be apparent: while the protagonist of the *Domitius* commonly has been identified with either L. or Cn. Domitius Ahenobarbus (Cos. 54 and 32 B.C.), another possibility seems at least equally viable. Given the tendency of Maternus' contemporaries to denigrate Nero by way of using his *nomen gentile*, the old suggestion that Maternus' *Nero* is identical with his *Domitius* certainly merits serious consideration.<sup>153</sup>

This requires a re-examination of a problematic piece of the text at *Dial.* 11.2, when Maternus, asserting that his reputation rests as much on his poetry as his success at the bar, claims that he “first broke the power of Vatinius.” Was it, as Roland Mayer has in his edition, *im(perante) Nerone*, or is it *in Nerone*, that is, in a play entitled *Nero*? This would tidily resolve the difficulties of the corrupt text at 11.2:

Now the one surviving praetexta, the *Octavia*, has Nero as a central figure. Ritter long ago ascribed it to Maternus, and Frank (op.cit.229) is one of his few support-ers. I believe that they are right and that *Domitius* is the real title of the *Octavia*; the current name would be due to an editor who knew the *Annals* well. Even in his lifetime Nero was apparently sometimes called Domitius as an insult, instead of by his adoptive name. Before his accession Britannicus once angered him by thus publicly addressing him. Nero, however, had deep family pride and even talked of resuming his former name. His body was buried in the tomb of the Domitii, whose hereditary vices he had faithfully reproduced. During Vespasian's first years he was evidently referred to as Domitius Nero in certain literary circles. He is never called Domitius outright in the play, but 11.249 ff. come very close indeed. Octavia prays:

utinam suorum facinorum poenas luat  
Nero insitivus, Domitio genitus patre,  
orbis tyrannus!<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Patrick Kragelund, “Vatinius, Nero, and Curiatius Maternus,” *The Classical Quarterly* 37.1 (1987):200.

<sup>154</sup> Harold Mattingly, “The Domitius of Curiatius Maternus.” *The Classical Review* 9.2 (1959):106.

Of further interest in this vein, the first time Nero comes up in the extant books of the *Annales* is at 11.11, a section that demands close scrutiny for multiple reasons.

Isdem consulibus ludi saeculares octingentesimo post Romam conditam, quarto et sexagesimo quam Augustus ediderat, spectati sunt. utriusque principis rationes praetermitto, satis narratas libris quibus res imperatoris *Domitiani* composui. nam is quoque edidit ludos saecularis iisque intentius *adfui* sacerdotio quindecimviralipraeditus ac tunc praetor; quod non iactantia *refero* sed quia collegio quindecimvirum antiquitus ea cura et magistratus potissimum exequabantur officia caerimoniarum. sedente Claudio circensibus ludis, cum pueri nobiles equis ludicrum Troiae inirent interque eos Britannicus *imperatore* genitus et *L. Domitius* adoptione mox in *imperium* et cognomentum Neronis adscitus, favor plebis acrior in *Domitium* loco *praesagii* acceptus est.

During the same consulship, in the eight hundredth year after the founding of the city, and the sixty-fourth after those Augustus had put on, the secular games were viewed. I will omit the reckonings of each princeps, discussed sufficiently in the books in which I set down the affairs of the Emperor Domitian. For he, too put on secular games at which I was rather intently engaged as one of the Quindecimviri and a praetor at that time. I do not report these matters as boasts, but because since antiquity that care has belonged to the college of the Quindecimviri and the magistrates have been performing the ceremonial duties for the most part. With Claudius attending the games of the circus, patrician boys were entering on horses for the game of Troy, amongst them Brittanicus, offspring of the Emperor, and Lucius Domitius, soon by adoption admitted into *imperium* and the cognomen of Nero; the fiercer favor of the plebs for Domitius was taken as prophetic.

Worth noting is not only the clear mention of Nero's pre-adoption name as Domitius, twice, but also the mention of Domitian in close proximity, mentioned through a first-person aside. Reminding his audience of the assonance between Domitius and the equally despised Domitian was likely intentional. The fact that Nero's first appearance was as part of a performance also bears noting. In addition, whenever Tacitus uses the first person, we, the audience, the super-addressee, take notice. The contrast between *genitus* and

*adoptione* is clear, as his the author's disdain for the *favor plebis; loco praesagii*, "in place of a prophecy," signifies that it was no true prophecy, and certainly not *sagax*. Tacitus self-reference in this passage is unique, his office of *quindecimvir* marking him as qualified not only on the subject of the Secular games, but also in regard to portents, since the *quindecimviri* also were in charge of consulting and safe-guarding the Sybilline Books.

In Book 12, Tacitus refers to Nero by his family name until his adoption at 12.26. One of the most notable mentions before that comes at 12.3, when Tacitus surrounds him with both his mother, Agrippina, and his future first wife, Octavia, the daughter of Claudius; not only does Nero engineer the deaths of both women, but, if Maternus' *Domitius* was in fact the *Octavia*, the collocation of the three major protagonists would trigger a response in Tacitus' contemporary readership.<sup>155</sup>

et nondum uxor [Agrippina] potentia uxoria iam uteretur. nam ubi sui matrimonii certa fuit, struere maiora nuptiasque Domitii, quem ex Cn. Ahenobarbo genuerat, et Octaviae Caesaris filiae moliri; quod sine scelere perpetrari non poterat. (12.3)

And not yet his wife she was already using wifely power. For when her marriage was certain, she began to arrange greater things, and to contrive nuptials for Domitius, whom she had born to Gnaeus Ahenobarbus, and Octavia, the daughter of Caesar [Claudius], which she could not bring about without a crime.

Soon thereafter, Tacitus recounts that Agrippina used her influence to recall Seneca from exile, as tutor to her son. Thus Seneca's implication begins:

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<sup>155</sup> As part of the marriage machinations, in the next section, false charges are brought against Octavia's current betrothed, who is then removed from his praetorship with only one day remaining — and replaced with Eprius Marcellus, for just one day. Did his name merit mention at this point for some other reason?



at Agrippina ne malis tantum facinoribus notesceret veniam exilii pro Annaeo Seneca, simul praeturam impetrat, laetum in publicum rata ob claritudinem studiorum eius, utque Domitii pueritia tali magistro adolesceret et consiliis eiusdem ad spem dominationis uterentur, quia Seneca fidus in Agrippinam memoria beneficii et infensus Claudio dolore iniuriae credebatur. (12.8)

But Agrippina, lest she gain notoriety for her evil deeds only, begged for a pardon of Annaeus Seneca's exile, having thought it a cause for public happiness on account of the brilliance of his literary endeavors, and that the boyhood of Domitius would develop with such a tutor, and that they could use the counsel of this same man for their hope of gaining power, because it was believed that Seneca would have trust in Agrippina from his memory of her kindness, and be hostile to Claudius from the pain of his injustice.

As Nero's star rises, Claudius presents him publicly more and more favorably, to his own son's detriment. Then Tacitus relates an episode that seems to seal Britannicus' doom and place him under the control of his stepmother/cousin.

obvii inter se Nero Britannicum nomine, ille Domitium salutavere. quod ut discordiae initium Agrippina multo questu ad maritum defert: sperni quippe adoptionem, quaeque censuerint patres, iusserit populus, intra penatis abrogari; ac nisi pravitas tam infensa docentium arceatur, eruptura in publicam perniciem. commotus his quasi criminibus optimum quemque educatorem filii exilio aut morte adficit datosque a noverca custodiae eius imponit. (12.41)

Meeting each other Nero greeted Britannicus by name, Britannicus him as Domitius. Which, as being a beginning of an argument, Agrippina brought to her husband with much complaining — indeed was his adoption to be scorned, and those things that the senate had decreed and the people had ordered to be abrogated within their own household shrine? And if this hateful perverseness of his teachers be not shunned, then it would erupt into a public calamity! Moved by these *quasi* criminal charges, he inflicted upon each best teacher of his son either exile or death, and placed those presented by his stepmother as his guardians.

This mimetic indirect discourse conjures Agrippina as a fully-formed *persona*, sputtering in her anger and mockery.

*Annales* 14 and the *Octavia*

Whether or not Maternus wrote the *Octavia*, which surely Tacitus had read, Seneca's ghost, the memory of his unexemplary life as well as his exemplary suicide, haunts the stage of Maternus' house. Francesca Santoro L'Hoir gives a thorough discussion on the Neronian books as evocative of a tragedy, and there are multiple episodes that serve as evidence, but I find Book 14 contains a close and deliberate parallel to the *Octavia*. Seneca's absence in the *Dialogus*, coupled with Maternus' plausible authorship of that tragedy as well as the definitive authorship of others written by Seneca, foreshadow his role in the *Annales* overall, and Book 14 in particular. Seneca plays the character that unites not only Book 14, but all of the extant Neronian books to the genre of tragedy, as author, actor, and *actant*. If we take Maternus as a metonym for tragedy, and tragedy as a metonym for history, then we can see how the *Dialogus* functions as an announcement for the *Annales*, the history that reads as a tragedy.

Seneca had entered the tragedy at the beginning of Nero's reign, at 13.2, as the voice of reason for the young emperor and as an antagonist to Agrippina:<sup>156</sup>

Ibaturque in caedes, nisi Afranius Burrus et Annaeus Seneca obviamissent. hi rectores imperatoriae iuventae et, rarum in societate potentiae, concordēs, diversa arte ex aequo pollebant, Burrus militaribus curis et severitate morum, Seneca praeceptis eloquentiae et comitate honesta, iuvantes in vicem, quo facilius lubricam principis aetatem, si virtutem aspernaretur, voluptatibus concessis retinerent. certamen utrique unum erat contra ferociam Agrippinae, quae cunctis malae dominationis cupidinibus *flagrans* habebat in partibus Pallantem, quo auctore Claudius nuptiis incestis et adoptione exitiosa semet perverterat.

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<sup>156</sup> So much for Agrippina thinking Seneca would prove an ally ....

The slaughter would have continued apace, had not Afranius Burrus and Annaeus Seneca gotten in the way. These guides of the emperor's youth and — something rare in the company of power — of one mind, had equal influence with their different skills: Burrus in military matters a sternness of manner, Seneca with the lessons of eloquence and in respectable courteousness, aided in turn to restrain the slippery youth of the Princeps, with granted pleasures, should he spurn *virtus*. The one struggle for both alike was against the ferocity of Agrippina, who, ablaze with all desires of evil domination, had Pallas on her side, with whom as *auctor* Claudius had destroyed himself with an incestuous marriage and deadly adoption.

Seneca's role in both works augments this resemblance between the *Octavia* and Book 14, a resemblance that extends to diction as well as plot. In both, paired speeches between Seneca and Nero take place between the murder of Agrippina and that of Octavia. In fact, the *only* set of paired speeches in the entirety of the *Annales* goes to Seneca and Nero. There are notable parallels between that exchange and the one between Emperor and his tutor in the *Octavia*. In the tragedy, the speeches, interspersed with dialogue, take place immediately following Agrippina's murder; in *Annales* 14, since the action follows the actual chronology, the speeches are a bit later, but still before the death of Octavia. Tacitus will have already alerted the reader to these parallels through previous intertexts, such as Agrippina's final reported words, and the diction surrounding them, which closely resemble those in the *Octavia*. As Matthew Taylor states:

Such compelling similarities have not passed without comment, and the two versions of Agrippina's last words recorded in the *Octavia* and the *Annals* have both been understood as alluding to Senecan tragedy in order to situate the murder within the imaginative field of mythical matricides.... The last words of Agrippina therefore represent a richly allusive as well as dramatic climax in the *Octavia* [and, I would add, the *Annals*], one that invites the audience to remember mothers and matricides from tragedy, and which, through association with the Oedipus myth in particular, even

hints at the rumors of incest between herself and Nero.<sup>157</sup>

Both the author of the *Octavia* and Tacitus chose a Senecan intertext that would not only connect to matricides in mythology, but also draw a sharp contrast by the comparison. Tacitus does more than hint at the rumors of incest. Agrippina serves as not only a tragic character in her own right, but also as a foil to her mother, Agrippina Maior, an exemplar of maternal and uxorial rectitude, and to the hapless Octavia. The Jocasta allusion in the *Annals* acts to tie his historical writing to the tragic genre further. Although Agrippina, like Jocasta, betrays a classic tragic ignorance, Jocasta's noble character also serves to highlight Agrippina's malevolence and depravity.<sup>158</sup> And if the rumors of incest were true, Agrippina was ignorant only of her son's intentions — she was not ignorant of her relationship to Nero, as she had not been of hers to her uncle/husband Claudius. Thus, their divergent moments of *anagnorisis*, juxtaposed, draw even more attention to the vileness that pervades the Neronian court.

Furthermore, Tacitus, by a double-intertext, gives his audience an unmistakable fictional index, and by stepping out of the narrative to relate something about his sources, he draws our attention to his own authorship and place in the canon. As a man also privileged with insider status, Tacitus was able to use Seneca as a double-referent in what

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<sup>157</sup> Matthew Taylor, "The Figure of Seneca in Tacitus and the *Octavia*" in *Latin Historiography and Poetry in the Early Empire: Generic Interactions*. (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2010), 210. Santoro L'Hoir, cf. below, n. 157, also explores this topic.

<sup>158</sup> Francesca Santoro L'Hoir, *Tragedy, Rhetoric, and the Historiography of Tacitus' Annales* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006.), 82-83. "Perhaps the most striking of the tragic poetics with which Tacitus crosses the rhetorical boundaries between history and tragedy is his persistent clustering of recurrent words representing knowledge and ignorance and their related polarities, certainty and uncertainty. Evident from the beginning of the narrative, especially in the contexts of murder, Tacitus' constant thematic shift between these dichotomous concepts throughout the *Annales* throws the reader off balance rhetorically and infuses the narrative with a tragic sense of foreboding and ambiguity." Tacitus manages to imbue both certainty and uncertainty with *metus* — there is no escape from the dread.

Matthew Taylor refers to as the “symbiosis of auctor and actor.”<sup>159</sup> I would add that his applies not only to the aspects of tragedy, but also to intertexts with *De Clementia* and *De Ira* (shared also by the *Octavia*). This ties in, through Maternus, to the role of the *Dialogus* as signaling a shift in rhetoric repurposed from the public forum of oratory to the more lasting arena of literature.

Tacitus opens Book 14 with a jarring juxtaposition: a formulaic ablative absolute indicating the year by consuls (59 CE), followed immediately by language that sets up the tragic stage:

Gaio Vips[t]ano [C.] Fonteio consulibus diu meditatam scelus non ultra Nero distulit, vetustate imperi coalita audacia et *flagrantior* in dies amore Poppaeae, quae sibi matrimonium et discidium Octaviae incolumi Agrippina haud sperans crebris criminationibus, aliquando per facetias incusare principem et pupillum vocare, qui iussis alienis obnoxius non modo imperii, sed libertatis etiam indigeret. (14.1)

With Gaius Vipstanus and Fonteius as consuls, Nero did not further put off the crime he had long contemplated, his boldness nourished by the lengthy duration of his rule and himself daily more inflamed by his passion for Poppaea, who, hardly hoping for a marriage for herself and a divorce from Octavia with Agrippina safe, was chiding the princeps, with frequent accusations, sometimes through witticisms, and calling him a “ward,” who, subject to the orders of another, lacked not only power, but even freedom.

This is followed by Poppaea, in mimetic *oratio obliqua*, further taunting the Emperor with mocking rhetorical questions. Tacitus has given his audience the three women, with poor Octavia in the middle, literally; divorce from her would have had to precede matrimony with Poppaea. On display from the outset are the passion, the boldness, the machi-

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<sup>159</sup> Matthew Taylor, “The Figure of Seneca,” 205.

nations, and the *hubris* of the Emperor, thinking that five years in power would be considered *vetustas imperi* in a man who was still only twenty-one, *iuvenis admodum*, and thus susceptible to the taunts of his ambitious mistress.

In the next section, where he gives two varying accounts of the incest rumors, Tacitus openly credits his sources, both as a way to amplify the charges by making them twice, and to remind his audience that he himself is now the author. He begins, as if from one *parodos*, at 14.2 : [*T*]radit Cluvius, and offers the version where Agrippina is the instigator, using flagrantly dramatic diction and continuing with the heat/fire metaphor that will eventually burst into the literal conflagration that consumes Rome in Book 15 and provides the *peripeteia* of Nero's own fall:

Tradit Cluvius *ardore* retinendae Agrippinam potentiae eo usque provectam, ut medio diei, cum id temporis Nero per vinum et epulas *incalesceret*, offerret se saepius temulento comptam in incesto paratam. (14.2)

Cluvius reports that Agrippina was carried away by her desire to retain her power to the point where, in the middle of the day, at the time when Nero would be growing warm with wine and feasting, she would rather often offer herself, all done up, to her intoxicated son, prepared for incest.

Tacitus then brings Seneca into the plot who hitherto has helped the young emperor to temper his vices and rule moderately well:

iamque lasciva oscula et praenuntias flagitii blanditias adnotantibus proximis, Senecam contra muliebris inlecebras subsidium a femina petivisse, immissamque Acten libertam, quae simul suo periculo et infamia Neronis anxia deferret pervulgatum esse incestum gloriante matre, nec toleraturos milites profani principis imperium.

With those closest already making note of the lascivious kisses and the flatteries portending the shameful act, Seneca sought assistance against the womanly enticements from a female, and sent in the freedwoman Acte,

who, worried because of the danger to herself and the notoriety of Nero, was to report that the incest had been made public by the mother's boasting, and that the soldiers would not tolerate the command of an unholy Princeps.

Seneca, himself a master of *blanditiae*, does not directly intervene, but enlists the services of a vulnerable freedwoman to deliver unwelcome news to the Princeps. Then, from stage right, the opposing chorus: Fabius Rusticus *memorat* that the desire was Nero's, not Agrippina's, but Tacitus goes on to say that *ceteri auctores* and *fama* lean towards Cluvius.<sup>160</sup> The motives for Cluvius' side are then discussed, as to which one is *credibilior*, an excuse to bring up "both of her youthful adulteries," out of *spe dominatio-nis*, and her incestuous wedding to her uncle, which trained her for *omne flagitium*.

Then the various means by which Nero might contrive his mother's death come at the reader with almost comic rapidity and nonchalance, as do their reasons for unsuitability: poison – oops — Britannicus' death by same is too recent, and his mother would not only recognize her own methods, but had fortified her own constitution against them; a blade — but where to hide it, and what if nobody would carry out such a deed? So enters Anicetus, who will later re-enter to effect Octavia's *exitium*. This freedman and commander of the fleet at Misenum masterminds the sea vessel constructed to come apart in a high wind and convey Nero's mother to the watery depths. An artifice drawn from a play, one would think, but true. Then the faked reconciliation, accompanied by more *blandimenta*, to lure her onto the conveyance. Nature — and the gods — do not cooperate and

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<sup>160</sup> cf. 15.38, concerning the beginning of the Great Fire: *Sequitur clades, forte an dolo principis incertum (nam utrumque auctores prodidere), sed omnibus, quae huic urbi per violentiam ignium acciderunt, gravior atque atrocior*. Note also how Tacitus makes a distinction between what is written, *auctores*, and what is said, *fama*.

we have a freighted evocation of Vergil's *tacitae per amica silentia lunae*.<sup>161</sup> *Noctem sideribus inlustrem et placido mari quietam quasi convincendum ad scelus dei praebuere* (The gods offered a night shining with stars and peaceful with a calm sea, as if to prove the crime) (14.5).

The suspense — the ship falls apart and sinks, but his mother is rescued! The plot twist: one slave girl, in an effort to save herself, calls out to the soldiers on board that she is Agrippina, in order to be saved, whereupon they immediately slay her, thus bringing about Agrippina's *anagnorisis*, as she ponders so many signs at once, safe for the moment in her *cubiculum*:

Illic reputans ideo se fallacibus litteris accitam et honore praecipuo habitam, quodque litus iuxta, non ventis acta, non saxis impulsa navis summa sui parte veluti terrestre machinamentum concidisset, observans etiam Acerroniae necem, simul suum vulnus adspiciens, solum insidiarum remedium esse [sensit], si non intellegerentur. (14.6)

Thinking back upon this and how she was summoned by deceitful letters, given a place of honor, and that the ship had collapsed — close to shore, driven by no wind, dashed on no rocks, from its highest point as if an earth-bound machine, regarding too the killing of Acerronia, at the same time looking at her own wounds, she felt that the only remedy for the treachery was if it were not comprehended.

This scene comprises an *analepsis* back to Book 1, as the senate is adjusting to the accession of Tiberius:

plus in oratione tali dignitatis quam fidei erat; Tiberioque etiam in rebus quas non occuleret, seu natura sive adsuetudine, suspensa semper et obscura verba: tunc vero nitenti ut sensus suos penitus abderet, in incertum et ambiguum magis implicabantur. at *patres, quibus unus metus si intellegere viderentur,* (1.11.2)

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<sup>161</sup> Vergil, *Aeneid*, 2.255, of the Greek ships, bearing Troy's doom as they slip from behind their hiding place behind the island of Tenedos.



There was more grandeur than confidence in such an *oration* [actually Tiberius' out-loud musings before the senate, making manifest subterfuge about his ambitions for the principate]; for Tiberius, even in matters which he would not conceal, whether by nature or acquired habit, always used weighed and obscured diction, and as he then was trying, in truth, to hide his own feelings deeply, they more and more became entwined in the uncertain and ambiguous. But the senators, for whom the one fear was if there were seen to understand...

At this point in Agrippina's *clades*, Tacitus' audience would be able to compare the plight of Agrippina, both implicated and a victim, to that of the senate, as at 1.7: *Romae ruere in servitium consules, patres, eques. quanto quis inlustrior, tanto magis falsi ac festinantes*, ("at Rome the consuls, the senators, the knights rushed into servitude: by how much each was more illustrious, by that much more false and hurried").

As Nero learns of his mother's narrow escape, he is seized by *pavor*, mostly because *ne auctor dubitaretur*. He turns to Seneca, his tutor, his very voice, and engages his complicity in an act that abrogates every tenet in every Stoic text he authored.

quod contra subsidium sibi, nisi quid Burrus et Seneca? [expurgens] quos statim acciverat, *incertum* an et ante *ignaros*. igitur longum utriusque silentium, ne *inriti dissuaderent*, an eo descensum credebant, [ut], nisi praeveniretur Agrippina, pereundum Neroni esset. post Seneca hactenus promptius, [ut] respiceret Burrum ac s[c]iscitaretur, an militi imperanda caedes esset. (14.7)

What assistance for him, unless something by Burrus and Seneca. He immediately summoned them (it is uncertain whether they were hitherto ignorant). Long was there silence between the two, lest they be unable to dissuade him — or they believed that the matter had gone so far that, unless Agrippina were to be headed off [killed], Nero would have to die. Seneca then was the readier, to the extent that he looked back at Burrus and asked whether the slaughter must be ordered by a soldier.

Tacitus portrays the character of Seneca here as one at a *stasis*, hovering at his own *peripeteia*, with a litotes of tragic terms: *incertum ... ignaros*. Seneca, once the *vox principis* (13.3), is now silent, afraid his ability to dissuade his pupil would prove *inriti*, “ineffectual.” He is *promptius* — only to the extent that he abdicates responsibility to Burrus, just as he had deputized the slave-girl Acte to inform Nero of the incest rumors.

Agrippina’s rescue is followed by her outright murder at the hands of Anicetus, sent in to finish his botched job. The setting is her *cubiculum*:

cubiculo modicum lumen inerat et ancillarum una, magis ac magis anxia Agrippina quod nemo a filio ac ne Agerinus quidem: aliam fore laetae rei faciem; nunc solitudinem ac repentinos strepitus et extremi mali indicia. abeunte dehinc ancilla, "tu quoque me deseris?" prolocuta respicit Anicetum, trierarcho Herculeio et Obarito centurione classiario comitatum: ac si ad visendum venisset, refotam nuntiaret, sin facinus patraturus, nihil se de filio credere; non imperatum parricidium. circumsistunt lectum percussores et prior trierarchus fusti caput eius adflixit. iam [in] morte[m] centurioni ferrum destringenti protendens uterum "ventrem feri" exclamavit multisque vulneribus confecta est. (14.8)

A small lamp was in the bedroom, along with one of the maidservants, as Agrippina grew more and more anxious, because no one had come from her son, not even Agerinus — there would be a different face to happy circumstance; now there was solitude and sudden din and indications of utmost evil. When even her maidservant was leaving her, having spoken out, “you, too, desert me,” she looked upon Anicetus, accompanied by the trierarch Herculeius and Obaritus the marine centurion: if he had come to visit, he could report that she was revived, but if prepared for a crime, she would not believe it of her son — no parricide had been ordered. The assassins stand around her bed and the trierarch first dashed her head with a club. And to the centurion as he withdrew his sword she, already near death, sticking out her womb, exclaimed “Strike my belly!” and she was done in by many wounds.

Thus Tacitus choreographs the necessary on-stage violence to effect *catharsis*, his alternating between *oratio recta* and *obliqua* not diminishing the immediacy of the scene, yet

reminding us that he is now author. The setting lends both *pathos* and dread, recognition and denial.

In the *Octavia*, we have the chorus setting the scene, reciting the imagined discourse of Nero as he discovers his initial plot has failed. And, in common with Seneca's *Oedipus*, we have in both passages the doomed directing the blow to her womb, the source of her *clades*.

CHORUS:

Quid tibi saeui fugisse maris  
 profuit undas?  
 ferro es nati moritura tui,  
 cuius facinus uix posteritas,  
 tarde semper saecula credent.  
 Furit ereptam pelagoque dolet  
 uiuere matrem  
 impius ingens geminatque nefas:  
 ruit in miserae fata parentis  
 patiturque moram sceleris nullam.  
 missus peragit iussa satelles:  
 reserat dominae pectora ferro.  
 Caedis moriens illa ministrum  
 rogat infelix,  
 utero dirum condat ut ensem:  
 'hic est, hic est fodiendus' ait  
 'ferro, monstrum qui tale tulit.'  
 post hanc uocem cum supremo  
 mixtam gemitu  
 animam tandem per fera tristem  
 uulnera reddit.

(*Octavia*, 356-376)

What did it avail you to have fled the waves of the cruel sea? You are about to die by the blade of your son, whose deed posterity, and the ages, will always scarcely believe. He [Nero] rages that his mother, snatched from the sea, lives and he doubles the enormous, impious sacrilege: He hastens the fate of his wretched parent and allows no delay of his crime. Her attendant, sent by him, accomplishes his orders: he cuts open his mis-

dress's chest with the blade. She, ill-starred, dying, asks the perpetrator of her slaughter to bury the dire sword into her womb: "This, this is what must be cut open with the blade, this which bore such a monster." After this voice, mixed with a final groan, she at last gave up her sad soul through the cruel wounds.

In the *Annales*, Tacitus continues with an aside to his audience:

Haec consensu produntur. aspexitne matrem exanimem Nero et formam corporis eius laudaverit, sunt qui tradiderint, sunt qui abnuant. (13.9)

These things are related in general agreement. Whether he looked upon his lifeless mother and praised her beauty, there are those who have passed that on, others who deny it.

By stepping out of the narrative, he draw's the readers attention even more closely to the intertext. But the *Oedipus*, too, has an intertext of its own, and one of stark contrast in character: Jocasta, deserted by her ignorance.

inuisa proles: sed tamen peior parens  
quam gnatus, utero rursus infausto grauis  
(*Oedipus*, 636-7)

Despised offspring — but worse than the son is the parent, again pregnant in her unfortunate womb.

Although the similarities with the death of Jocasta are striking in language, the characters themselves could not be more different. As Jocasta says: *Fati ista culpa est: nemo fit fato nocens* (*Oed.* 1019).<sup>162</sup> Jocasta and Oedipus begin in ignorance, Oedipus' original sin that of trying to evade a monstrous fate, and by that evasion accomplishing it. Jocasta reacts with the horror that befits her noble character.

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<sup>162</sup> "Your fault is that of fate; in fate no one is made guilty."

**Ioc.** Quid, anime, torpes? socia cur scelerum dare  
 poenas recusas? omne confusum perit,  
 incesta, per te iuris humani decus:  
 morere et nefastum spiritum ferro exige.  
 non si ipse mundum concitans diuum sator  
 corusca saeua tela iaculetur manu,  
 umquam rependam sceleribus poenas pares  
 mater nefanda. mors placet: mortis uia  
 quaeratur.—Agedum, comoda matri manum,  
 si parricida es. restat hoc operi ultimum:  
 rapiatur ensis; hoc iacet ferro meus  
 coniunx—quid illum nomine haud uero uocas?  
 socer est. utrumne pectori infigam meo  
 telum an patenti conditum iugulo inprimam?  
 eligere nescis uulnus: hunc, dextra, hunc pete  
 uterum capacem, qui uirum et gnatos tulit.

(*Oedipus*, 1024-1039)

Jocasta: What — sluggish, my soul? Why refuse to pay the penalty, ally, as you are, of his crimes. By you, incestuous one, all honor of human law has been confounded and lost. Die and drive out your unholy spirit with your sword. Not if the sire of the gods himself, shaking the earth, were to throw his gleaming weapons with his own cruel hand, could you, unspeakable mother, ever repay with penalties equal to your crimes. Death pleases; let the way of death be sought.— Come now, lend your hand to your mother, if you be a parricide. This is all that remains to your work: let the sword be seized; my husband lies [slain] by this sword — why call him not by his true name? He is my father-in-law. Shall I bury this weapon in my chest, or press it deep into my open throat? You don't know the wound to choose: attack, o hand, this capacious womb, which bore both husband and children.

Oedipus curses fate and calls himself a double parricide. He and Jocasta were ignorant until it was too late.

Nero, too, is a parricide — and also the murderer of his wife/cousin and step-brother/cousin. As for Agrippina, Book 13 opens with:

Prima novo principatu mors Iunii Silani proconsulis Asiae *ignaro Nerone*  
 per dolum Agrippinae paratur.

The first death of the new principate — that of the proconsul of Asia, Julius Silanus<sup>163</sup> — was contrived by Agrippina with Nero unknowing.

Tacitus, following her death, reports that she had consulted an oracle about her son's fortune, and was told he would be emperor and kill his mother; Tacitus gives her reply in *oratio recta*, concluding her tragedy with these words: '*occidat, inquit, dum imperet.*' "“Let him kill,’ she said, ‘provided that he rules’” (14.9) — an ironic echo of the iconic *oderint dum metuant*.

Tacitus depicts the Emperor beset with guilty dread and unable to sleep; he sends a letter to the senate, presenting his version of events. This time, Seneca comes in for harsh criticism from the senate, not for his complicity in Agrippina's murder, but for his poor handling of the public-relations mess it engendered.

ergo non iam Nero, cuius immanitas omnium questus anteibat, sed Seneca adverso rumore erat, quod *oratione tali confessionem scripsisset*.<sup>164</sup> (14.11)

Therefore it was no longer Nero, whose heinousness outstripped the complaints of everyone, but Seneca who was subjected to rumor — that in such as speech he had written a confession.

Oration, confession (a speech act), and writing lead to Seneca ultimately losing his role as the voice of the Princeps.

Tacitus' description of the reception of this letter recalls the reaction to Nero's oration at Claudius' funeral, at 13.3, where those present instantly recognized the work of Seneca:

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<sup>163</sup> This was the office Tacitus held in 112-113.

<sup>164</sup> Again Tacitus includes the written, *scripsisset*, with the spoken, *rumore ... oratione ... confessione*.

oratio a Seneca composita multum cultus praeferret, ut fuit illi viro ingenium amoenum et temporibus eius auribus accommodatum.

The oration, composed by Seneca, offered much refinement, since to that man there was a talent pleasing and well-suited to the ears of that time.

One can hear Aper saying that in approbation, Quintilian with a sneer.

The extended murmurings of the crowd in turn recall the themes of literary and oratorical history in the *Dialogus*:

adnotabant seniores quibus otiosum est vetera et praesentia contendere, primum ex iis, qui rerum potiti essent, Neronem alienae facundiae eguisse. nam dictator Caesar summis oratoribus aemulus; et Augusto prompta ac profluens quaeque deceret principem eloquentia fuit. Tiberius artem quoque callebat, qua verba expenderet, tum validus sensibus aut consulto ambiguus. etiam C. Caesaris turbata mens vim dicendi non corruptit; nec in Claudio, quotiens meditata dissereret, elegantiam requireres. (XIII.3)

The elders for whom it is a pastime to compare things old and current were noting that Nero was the first of those who had gained power to have required another's eloquence. For Caesar the Dictator rivaled the top orators; Augustus had a ready and fluent eloquence, as befit a Princeps. Tiberius also was expert in that skill with which to weigh one's words, at times strong in his sentiments, or deliberately ambiguous. Even the disturbed mind of Gaius Caesar did not break his power of speech; nor would you be missing eloquence in Claudius, whenever he was discussing something he had thought upon.

The importance and power of oratory had now shifted from the luminaries senate to the Princeps. As Maternus said in his *peroratio*, an orator in the Principate was as useful as a doctor to a well person.

#### Seneca and Nero: the Paired Speeches

In Book 14, Seneca transitions from being the voice of the Emperor to ineffectual adviser after the death of Agrippina. When Burrus dies, at 14.52, Tacitus reports that

Seneca's power was broken. In an attempt to spare himself danger and further humiliation, Seneca now, in a transitional echo from the scene following the first attempt at Agrappina's murder, *criminantium non ignarus*, approaches the Emperor to ask permission to retire. The set of paired speeches that follows, the only paired speeches in all of the *Annales*, marks the turning point when Nero seizes his voice back from Seneca, sending his tutor away in silence. He will reappear, briefly, to mistakenly laud the Princeps for mending fences with Thrasea Paetus, and then we do not hear from him again until his dramatic suicide, when Tacitus allows him to speak, but denies him his *ultima verba*, claiming that they had long been widely published.

Seneca's speech to Nero is expertly crafted, with due flattery and recourse to imperial precedent. He has fulfilled his duties, now that Nero has grown to manhood; the Emperor has been too generous to his tutor, who has received ... *quantum princeps tribuere amico posset, et ego, quant(um) amicus a princip(e) accipere* ("as much as a princeps can bestow upon a friend, and I, as much as a friend can receive from a princeps"), occasioning the envy of others; what is a Stoic doing amongst such wealth? Allow me to grow old in simple seclusion and scholarship; my estate is yours. The "I's" and "thou's" are balanced, and there are "we's" aplenty, but it is all disingenuous. It brings to mind Aper, at *Dialogus* 8, as he refers to the *delatores* Eprius Marcellus and Vibius Crispus:

*principes fori, nunc principes in Caesaris amicitia agunt feruntque cuncta atque ab ipso principe cum quadam reverentia diliguntur, quia Vespasianus, venerabilis senex et patientissimus veri, bene intellegit [et] ceteros quidem amicos suos iis niti, quae ab ipso acceperint quaeque ipsi accumulare et in alios congerere promptum sit, Marcellum autem et*



Crispum attulisse ad amicitiam suam quod non a principe acceperint nec accipi possit.

Foremost in the forum, now foremost in Caesar's friendship, they do and bear all and are chosen by the Princeps himself with a certain reverence, because Vespasian, a venerable old man and most tolerant of the truth, well understands that the rest of his friends rely upon those things which they receive from him, and what it is easy for him to amass and heap on others, but that Marcellus and Crispus have brought to their friendship that which they did not receive from the Princeps nor could it be received.

If Tacitus' audience recalled that speech, they might also have recalled that Vespasian eventually executes Eprius Marcellus. In the *Dialogus*, Maternus' reply to that speech, in defense of his decision to withdraw to write (as Seneca wished), rings with more truth, and seems to foreshadow his own death while setting up a prolepsis for Seneca's downfall in the *Annales*:

Nam Crispus iste et Marcellus, ad quorum exempla me vocas, quid habent in hac sua fortuna concupiscendum? Quod timent, an quod timentur?... Quod adligati omni adulatione nec imperantibus umquam satis servi videntur nec nobis satis liberi? Quae haec summa eorum potentia est? tantum posse liberti solent...nec insanum ultra et lubricum forum famamque pallentem trepidus experiar. Non me fremitus salutantium nec anhelans libertus excitet, nec incertus futuri testamentum pro pignore scribam, nec plus habeam quam quod possim cui velim relinquere; quandoque enim fatalis et meus dies veniet: statuarque tumulo non maestus et atrox, sed hilaris et coronatus, et pro memoria mei nec consulat quisquam nec roget. (*Dial.* 13)

As for that Crispus and Marcellus, to whose example you beckon me, what do they have to be desired in this fortune of theirs? That they fear, or that they are feared? ... That they, bound by every flattery, never seem either servile enough to those in power not free enough to us? What is this utmost power of theirs? Freedmen are accustomed to be as powerful... May I no longer, trembling, experience that crazed and slippery forum and a pallid fame. May neither the din of the morning well-wishers nor a panting freedman rouse me, nor may I write a will for security, uncertain of my future, nor have more than what I might leave to whom I please; whenever my fateful day will arrive, may I be set upon a tomb not mournful and

grim, but cheerful and bedecked, and as for my memory, may no one consult or beseech on behalf of my memory.

In the paired speeches in the *Annales*, Nero sees through Seneca's posturing at once, but dissembles masterfully, while meeting every one of Seneca's points, in 240 words to Seneca's 301 — the pupil has surpassed the master:

quod *meditatae orationi* tuae statim occurram, id primum tui *muneris* habeo, qui me non tantum praevisa, sed subita expedire docuisti.<sup>165</sup> [ab]avus meus Augustus Agrippae et Maecenati usurpare otium post labores concessit, sed in ea ipse aetate, cuius auctoritas tueretur quicquid illud et qualecumque tribuisset; ac tamen neutrum datis a se praemiis exiit bello et periculis meruerant; in iis enim iuventa Augusti versata est. nec mihi tela et manus tuae defuissent in armis agenti; sed quod praesens condicio poscebat, ratione consilio praeceptis pueritiam, dein iuventam meam fovisti. et tua quidem erga me munera, dum vita suppetet, aeterna erunt: quae a me habes, horti et faenus et villae, casibus obnoxia sunt. ac licet multa videantur, plerique haudquaquam artibus tuis pares plura tenuerunt. pudet referre libertinos, qui ditiores spectantur: unde etiam rubori mihi est, quod praecipuus caritate nondum omnes fortuna antecellis. Verum et tibi valida aetas rebusque et fructui rerum sufficiens, et nos prima imperii spatia ingredimur, nisi forte aut te Vitellio ter consuli aut me Claudio postponis, et quantum Volusio longa parsimonia quaesivit, tantum in te mea liber[ali]tas explere non potest. quin, si qua in parte lubricum adulescentiae nostrae declinat, revocas ornatumque. robur subsidio impensius regis? non tua moderatio si reddideris pecuniam, nec quies, si reliqueris principem, sed mea avaritia, meae crudelitatis metus in ore omnium versabitur.<sup>166</sup> quod si maxime continentia tua laudetur, non tamen sapienti viro decorum fuerit, unde amico infamiam paret, inde gloriam sibi recipere. his adicit complexum et oscula, factus natura et consuetudine exercitus velare odium fallacibus blanditiis.(14.55-56)

I hold this chief among your gifts, that I can meet your prepared speech immediately, you who have taught me not only to hold forth with not only foreseen words, but even extemporaneous speech. My great-great-grandfather Augustus Agrippa and Maecenas to enjoy their leisure after their labors, but when he himself was at an age whose authority would safeguard whatever he had granted of whatever sort. Nor did he strip either of

<sup>165</sup> This is but one of several echoes I find of Aper's tone and diction cf. *Dial.* 6.5.

<sup>166</sup> Note Nero's concern with what will be said, but not with what will be written.

them of the rewards conferred by him, which they had earned in war and other dangers; for in these things the youth of Augustus was spent; nor would I have lacked your weapons and hands in waging war; but as the current situation demanded, you nurtured my boyhood, then my youth, with reasoning, counsel, lessons. And indeed your gifts to me, while my life lasts, will be unending; what you have from me — the gardens and investments and villas — are susceptible to mishap. It may be that these things seem a lot, but many not at all your equal in skill have had more. It shames me to recall freedmen who are seen richer, for which reason it is even a source of blushing for me that you, chief in my affection, do not yet surpass all in fortune. BUT, to you strength of age still sufficient to affairs and the fruits of affairs, and I am entering the first stages of my command, unless perhaps you place yourself behind Vitellius, thrice consul, or me behind Claudius, and as much as life-long stinginess brought to Volusius, so much my generosity is unable to fulfill for you. But if in any way the slipperiness of my youth is trending downward, why not call back that adornment and strength, and guide more earnestly with your assistance? It will not be your temperance, if you give back your money, nor rest, if you leave your Princeps, but my avarice and fear of my cruelty that will be on the tongues of all. Even if your self-restraint should be most greatly praised, it would not be fitting for a wise man to receive glory for himself from when he prepares infamy for his friend. With these words he threw in an embrace and kisses. made by nature and by habit trained to veil his hatred with deceitful blandishments.

Although Nero's affection is false and bodes ill, his speech is unanswerable and ironically honest, at least at the end. Nero knows what people will say if Seneca returns his wealth and retires, and what people will say will be accurate.

Seneca, qui finis omnium cum dominante sermonum, grates agit; sed instituta prioris potentiae commutat, prohibet coetus salutantium, vitat comitantes, rarus per urbem, quasi valetudine infensa aut sapientiae studiis domi attineretur. (14.56)

Seneca gave thanks, which is the end to all conversations with a despot; but he altered his customs of previous power, forbade the gathering of morning well-wishers, avoided company, was seldom out and about in the city, as though he were being kept at home by some bitter illness or pursuits of philosophy.

After enjoying enormous wealth, privileged access, and influence, Seneca withdraws, and we see him shunning all the trappings, such as the the *coetus salutantium*, just as Maternus, in the *Dialogus*, had spurned the *fremitus salutantium* along with the rest. Seneca remains a mere shadow until his suicide scene in Book 15, surfacing before then only when he speaks too freely on Thrasea's behalf and effectively merges with the uncompromising, less complicated Stoic.<sup>167</sup>

In the *Octavia*, the circumstances surrounding the exchange between Nero and Seneca are different, due to the collapsing of time. Agrippina is dead, and Seneca opens the scene with a monologue, in which he bemoans his fate, and wishes he were back in exile. As he begins, we see a particular collocation similar to one at the *end* of the scene in the *Annales*, at Nero's dismissal:

Seneca: Quid, impotens Fortuna, *fallaci* mihi  
*blandita* uultu, sorte contentum mea  
 alte extulisti, grauius ut ruerem edita  
 receptus arce totque prospicerem metus?  
 (377-380)

Seneca: Why, unbridled Fortune, having flattered me with deceitful face, did you raise me up on high, when I was content with my lot, only to fall more heavily, to gaze out over so much to dread, received on high in the citadel.

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<sup>167</sup> 15. 23: *adnotatum est, omni senatu Antium sub recentem partum effuso, Thraseam prohibitum immoto animo praenuntiam imminentis caedis contumeliam excepisse. secutam dehinc vocem Caesaris ferunt, qua reconciliatum se Thraseae apud Senecam iactaverit, ac Senecam Caesari gratulatum. unde gloria egregiis viris et pericula gliscebant.* ("It was noted that, with the entire senate having poured into Antium for the recent delivery [of Nero's soon -to-be-deceased son], Thrasea, having been kept away, received with undisturbed mind the insult that foretold his imminent slaughter. They say that there followed an utterance from Caesar, in which he boasted before Seneca that he had been reconciled to Thrasea, and that Seneca had congratulated him. From then the glory and the dangers for the two outstanding men blazed up.")

Also in reverse order, Nero enters, having just issued orders to slay Sulla and Plautus, executions that happen just after the exchange in the *Annales*. Though this exchange opens with Nero parrying Seneca's rather banal aphorisms from his *De Clementia*, it moves into subject matter more akin to the dialogue in the *Annales* as they discuss Augustus. In the *Annales* Tacitus introduces Maecenas and Agrippa in terms of Augustus' granting them a comfortable retirement in their old age. Nero counters that they had earned their rewards through dangers and military experiences shared with the emperor, for, *in iis enim iuventa Augusti versata est* ("in these the youth of Augustus was spent").

I believe the mention, in both of the Tacitean speeches, are intended to remind the reader of the exchange in the *Octavia*, where both men come up, but then, after using the slaughter of Julius Caesar as justification, Nero launches into a detailed and damning litany of the bloody events that brought Augustus to power:

Quantum cruoris Roma tum uidit sui,  
 lacerata totiens! ille qui meruit pia  
 uirtute caelum, diuus Augustus, uiros  
 quot interemit nobiles, iuuenes senes  
 sparsos per orbem, cum suos mortis metu  
 fugerent penates et trium ferrum ducum,  
 tabula notante deditos tristi neci!  
 exposita rostris capita caesorum patres  
 uidere maesti, flere nec licuit suos,  
 non gemere dira tabe polluto foro,  
 stillante sanie per putres uultus graui.  
 Nec finis hic cruoris aut caedis stetit:  
 pauere uolucres et feras saeuas diu  
 tristes Philippi, \* \* \*  
 \* \* \* hausit et Siculum mare  
 classes uirosque saepe caedentes suos,  
 concussus orbis uiribus magnis ducum.  
 superatus acie puppibus Nilum petit  
 fugae paratis, ipse periturus breui:

hausit cruorem incesta Romani ducis  
 Aegyptus iterum, non leues umbras tegit.  
 Illic sepultum est impie gestum diu  
 ciuile bellum. condidit tandem suos  
 iam fessus enses uictor hebetatos feris  
 uulneribus, et continuit imperium metus.

(*Octavia*, 503-526)

How much gore of its own men did Rome, wounded so many times, see then! That one, who earned heaven with his dutiful *virtus*, how many men of noble rank did he take out, young and old, spattered throughout the globe, while they were fleeing their own Penates from fear of death and the sword of the three leaders [triumvirs], with the [proscription] list noting them as surrendered to a grim murder. The mournful fathers saw the heads of the slaughtered, exposed upon the rostra, nor were they permitted to for their own, nor groan with the Forum defiled ghastly ooze, the gore still dripping heavily from their decaying faces.. Nor did this stand as the end of the gore: grim Phillipi long feared the vultures and savage beasts; the Sicilian see also sucked down the fleets and men often slaughtering their own, the world shaken by the mighty strength of its leaders. Then the one defeated in battle [Antony] sought the Nile with his fleet readied for flight, he himself soon to perish: incestuous Egypt again drank down the gore of a Roman leader and now covers his not light ghost. In that place was buried a civil war waged long and impiously.<sup>168</sup> Now exhausted, he, the victor, sheathed his sword, blunted with savage wounds, and fear held his command together.

Tacitus has our friend Aper, in the *Dialogus*, put things more delicately than the author of the *Octavia*, just after Messalla arrives. In his argument that it is but a lifetime from Cicero to Vespasian, Aper states, at *Dial.* 17:

Nam ut de Cicerone ipso loquar, Hirtio nempe et Pansa consulibus, ut Tiro libertus eius scribit, septimo idus [Decembris] occisus est, quo anno divus Augustus in locum Pansae et Hirtii se et Q. Pedium consules suffecit. Statue sex et quinquaginta annos, quibus mox divus Augustus rem publicam rexit.

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<sup>168</sup> Note the contradiction: Augustus was first lauded as having earned his place *pia virtute*. Had Nero begun with sarcasm?

And, so that I may speak of Cicero himself, truly it was in the consulship of Hirtius and Pansa, he was killed, as Tiro his freedman writes, on the seventh of December, in which year Augustus installed himself and Quintus Pedius as consuls in place of Hirtius and Pansa. Add to that the fifty-six years, in which the soon deified Augustus ruled the Republic.

Tacitus here is subtle, though without the intertext from the tragedy that Maternus may have penned. As discussed in the chapter on Cicero, by twice mentioning the names of Hirtius and Pansa to place Cicero's death chronologically, Tacitus manages bring in not only Cicero's death — and the image it conjures of his head on the rostra — but also the deaths of Hirtius and Pansa at the Battle of Mutina, one of the bloodiest in the aftermath of Julius Caesar's death. It is after that battle that Octavian formed his alliance with Antony, who then proscribes Cicero. The phrasing of *mox divus Augustus rem publicam rexit* also jumps out at the reader, juxtaposing “rule” with “Republic” and leaving *mox* where it could be taken with *divus* or *rexit* or *divus Augustus*. It seems that every reign starts with a *primum facinus*, or *prima mors*, setting up the expectation for more to come.

Book 14, like the *Octavia*, ends with the death of Octavia herself. Tacitus reports her inability to accept her fate and summons the name of Germanicus, grandfather to both Octavia and Nero, as well as Agrippina (though here the Younger, one cannot but help recall her mother). Another bloodbath onstage: she bound, veins in all limbs severed; since her fear stanching her blood-flow, they place her in a steaming bath. And then, her severed head is brought to Poppaea — an image reminiscent of Salome and others.

Before Tacitus sets up the Pisonian conspiracy (14.65), he gives his readers a first-person *plural* reflection (not his usual first-person singular):

dona ob haec templis decreta que[m] ad finem memorabimus? quicumque casus temporum illorum *nobis* vel aliis auctoribus noscent, praesumptum habeant, quotiens fugas et caedes iussit princeps, totiens grates deis actas, quaeque rerum secundarum olim, tum publicae cladis insignia fuisse. neque tamen silebimus, si quod senatus consultum adulatione novum aut paenitentia postremum fuit. (14. 64)

And to what end do we record the gifts decreed to the temples on account of these things? Whoever will learn the misfortunes of those times by us or other authors, may they consider it assumed that, as often as the Princes ordered banishments or slaughters, there were thanks given to the gods, and what once had been signs of favorable events, then became signs of public calamity. However, if any decree of the senate was novel in its adulation or basest in its passivity, we will not be silent.

The effect is of a closing chorus.

#### Books 15 and 16: Deaths of Authors, Authorial Legacy

##### Death of Seneca

Although foreign affairs consume a fair amount of Book 15 (Corbulo is mentioned thirty-one times!), the real drama lies in the Pisonian conspiracy and its aftermath. Seneca reenters the narrative at 15.60, after the conspiracy has been uncovered and Piso has committed suicide. Betrayed by Nero's angel of death, ironically named *Natalis*, Seneca makes a half-hearted defense, but then states:

nec sibi promptum in adulationes ingenium. idque nulli magis gnarum quam Neroni, qui saepius libertatem Senecae quam servitium expertus esset. (15.61)

Nor was it his nature to be quick to flattery. And this was known to no one more than Nero, who had more often experienced Seneca's *libertas* than servility.



This is the new and nearly redeemed Seneca, and his death reflects the Stoicism he had always espoused, though not always followed. Still, it is hard not to recall the last colloquation of Seneca and *promptus*, when he *promptius* deferred to Burrus following the botched first attempt at murdering Agrippina.<sup>169</sup>

Though his death scene plays out over several paragraphs, and reflects true fortitude, it also shows the philosopher trying to emulate Socrates by taking poison — the sequence of steps necessary to extinguish his life gone on almost *ad absurdum*, diminishing the dignity of the scene. Tacitus gives him mostly mimetic indirect discourse, his only direct speech that to his wife. He bequeaths his *imaginem vitae*, but, as Tacitus has recorded it, his death provides a nobler *exemplum* than his life. Though he has Seneca recall his *praecepta sapientiae*, he also reminds us, just two lines later, that Seneca was also the *educator* and *praeceptor* of Nero. In Seneca we have a moralist and an adulterer, Stoic tutor to the least restrained Princeps, implicated in some of the Princeps foulest deeds, a ridiculously wealthy ascetic.

He was a prolific author, yet, in the *Annales*, his literary output receives almost no mention: at 13.3, Nero's *laudatio* at Claudius' funeral is modified by the participial phrase, *a Seneca composita* (written by Seneca); as Seneca falls from favor, his enemies claim he is publishing poems to compete with Nero; and finally and most notably, at his suicide scene, Tacitus gives him a speech that begins with *oratio obliqua* and moves to *oratio recta*. But then, when it comes to the man's dying words, Tacitus instead writes:

et novissimo quoque momento suppeditante eloquentia advocatis

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<sup>169</sup> *Annales* 14.7.

scriptoribus pleraque tradidit, quae in vulgus edita eius verbis invertere supersedeo. (15.63)

And even in his final moment, with his eloquence still abounding, having assembled his scribes he transmitted many words, which, having been published at large, I forbear from altering.<sup>170</sup>

Lest the reader not pick up on Tacitus' intentional omission, he repeats it pointedly just five sections later, with the speech of the Praetorian tribune Subrius Flavius.

Flavius, who, like Seneca, had been complicit and identified in the Pisonian conspiracy, pronounces the most unambiguous and stout condemnation straight to Nero's face:

"oderam te," inquit. "nec quisquam tibi fidelior militum fuit, dum amari meruisti: odisse coepi, postquam parricida matris et uxoris, auriga et histrio et incendiarius extitisti."

"I hated you," he said. "Nor was anyone of your soldiers more faithful to you, so long as you deserved to be loved: I began to hate you, after you stood forth as the murderer of your mother and your wife, a charioteer and stage-actor and arsonist."

Although he often uses direct discourse in the *Annales*, this is one of only four instances in the Neronian books where Tacitus claims not to have altered the speech.<sup>171</sup> This makes what he says next stand out all the more:

*ipsa rettuli verba*, quia non, ut Senecae, vulgata erant, nec minus nosci decebat militaris viri sensus incomptos et validos. nihil in illa coniuratione gravius auribus Neronis accidisse constitit, qui ut faciendis sceleribus

<sup>170</sup> The words *vulgus*, *invertere*, and *supersedeo* have loaded literal meanings, which assuredly Tacitus intended his audience to hear. *Vulgus* has the negative connotation of "the masses," quite as Quintilian would have seen it. *Invertere* means "to invert," quite literally, so what does that say for Tacitus' rendering of Seneca's *oratio recta* up to this point? *Supersedeo* means "to sit on/above" — did he have a hard time resisting the urge to have fun with even Seneca's dying words? Additionally, it is reminiscent of Sallust's dismissal of Cicero's *Oratio in Catilinam I* in his *Bellum Catilinae*, 31: *Tum M. Tullius consul, sive praesentiam eius timens sive ira conmotus, orationem habuit luculentam atque utilem rei publicae, quam postea scriptam edidit.* ("Then M. Tullius Cicero, wither fearing his presence or moved by anger, delivered an oration brilliant and of use to the Republic, the written version of which he published afterwards.")

<sup>171</sup> Roland Mayer "Ipsa Verba," 131.

promptus, ita audiendi quae faceret insolens erat. (15.67)

I report his very words, because they were not, as were Seneca's, published, nor was it any less fitting for the artless and robust feelings of a military man to be known. It was certain that nothing in that conspiracy had fallen more seriously on the ears of Nero who, ready as he was to commit crimes, was nonetheless unused to hearing what he did.

Could the contrast be more stark? Tacitus presents Subrius Flavus as a foil to Seneca, and records his final words. He makes clear that Seneca's final words were widely published, despite the centurion's interference — a victory over death that Tacitus records with some ambivalence.<sup>172</sup>

### Lucan and Petronius

The deaths of Lucan (15.70) and Petronius (16.18) provide Tacitus with two more venues for portraying authors and the connection between their deaths and literary legacies. Lucan, Seneca's nephew, wins no accolades for moral rectitude from the historian,

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<sup>172</sup> By the time Tacitus wrote the *Dialogus*, Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria* had been in circulation for a decade or more, and, no doubt, in the back of Tacitus' mind as his characters accounted for the same figures Quintilian rates in Book X of his *Institutio*. For Quintilian, Seneca and Cicero represented opposite ends of the spectrum. When he finally gets to Seneca, he has this to say: "Ex industria Senecam in omni genere eloquentiae distuli, propter vulgatam falso de me opinionem qua damnare eum et invisum quoque habere sum creditus. ... Tum autem solus hic fere in manibus adulescentium fuit... Cuius et multae alioqui et magnae virtutes fuerunt, ingenium facile et copiosum, plurimum studii, multa rerum cognitio, in qua tamen aliquando ab iis quibus inquirenda quaedam mandabat deceptus est. Tractavit etiam omnem fere studiorum materiam: nam et orationes eius et poemata et epistulae et dialogi feruntur. In philosophia parum diligens, egregius tamen vitiorum insectator fuit. Multae in eo claraeque sententiae, multa etiam morum gratia legenda, sed in eloquendo corrupta pleraque, atque eo perniciosissima quod abundant dulcibus vitiis. Velles eum suo ingenio dixisse, alieno iudicio. (Inst. Or. 10.1.125-1 (" have put off Seneca from my work on all types of eloquence, because of a opinion promulgated supposedly by me, falsely, by which I been believed to have him and even held him despised... At that time, Seneca was almost the only writer in the hands of the young ... Yet in other ways his talents were many and great—a quick and abundant wit, utmost zeal, and great knowledge of many matters, in which however he was sometimes deceived by those whom he had commissioned for certain research. He has written on almost every department of learning, for orations of his, as well as poems, letters, and dialogues are circulated. In philosophy, he was too little diligent, though an outstanding censurer of vices. There are many bright thoughts in him, and much should be read for the sake of morality, but in style of declaration he is mostly corrupt, even to extreme perniciousness, because he overflows in pleasing faults. You could wish that he had spoken with his own talent, with another's judgement.")

but he was a poet whose work would long outlive him. Not only was Lucan involved in the Pisonian Conspiracy, but Tacitus reports that Nero was jealous of his talent as a poet, had tried to rival him with no success, and so had suppressed his poem — the *Pharsalia*, the epic about the Civil War, in which Cato is the great hero.<sup>173</sup> At his death, Tacitus has Lucan reciting his own verses as he expires, struck by the similitude between his death and that of one of his characters in his poem.

Tacitus paints Petronius as an ambiguous character as well; Nero's *arbiter elegantiae, erudito luxu* ("arbiter of elegance, a man of polished luxury"), yet as proconsul in Bythnia, a highly dedicated and capable public servant.<sup>174</sup> He, too, accepts his death with equanimity, but, unlike Seneca's preaching, or Lucan's dramatic recitation, Petronius dies as leisurely as he lived. He ruptures his veins, then binds and unbinds them at will, as he entertains his friends: *audiebatque referentis nihil de immortalitate animae et sapientium placitis, sed levia carmina et facilis versus*.<sup>175</sup> For his last will and testament, he shuns the standard practice of leaving a sizable portion to the Emperor, and instead, *flagitia principis sub nominibus exoletorum feminarumque et novitatem cuiusque stupri perscripsit atque obsignata misit Neroni*.<sup>176</sup> Now *that's* having the last word! And then he broke his ring, so that its seal could not be used to implicate others.

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<sup>173</sup> 15. 49

<sup>174</sup> 16.18

<sup>175</sup> "He would hear no discussion of the immortality of the soul and the blessings of wisdom, but light poetry and facile verses." 16.19

<sup>176</sup> "He wrote down all of the vices of the Princes, complete with the names of his pathics and women, and the novelty of each defilement, and he sent it signed and sealed to Nero." 16.19

### Death of *Virtus Ipsa*

The next to fall is Thrasea Paetus, *virtus ipsa*, Seneca's friend and foil. His death brings us full circle back to the *Dialogus*. Author, not of a tragedy, but of a biography of Cato, one of his prosecutors compares him to Cassius, even as he charges him with all the things he has *not* done and has *not* said. The other prosecutor is Marcellus Epirius, with his *acri eloquentia*. Marcellus, in his speech, is also described as *torvus ac minax, voce vultu oculis ardesceret* (16.29). One cannot help but remember Tacitus' description of him at *Dialogus* 5, *accinctus ac minax*, while he has Maternus describe Aper as speaking with *vim et ardorem* (*Dial.* 24).

Though the *Annales* cuts off in the middle of his suicide scene, we know that his last words will be recorded, for his son-in-law and biographer, Helvidius Priscus is present, as is Arulenus Rusticus, who will, in turn, write a biography of Helvidius Priscus following his martyrdom. Who brings down Helvidius Priscus? Marcellus Epirius. Who, after the prosecution and death of Arulenus Rusticus, writes a gratuitous screed against him to gain favor with Domitian? Regulus. What we have, in the end, is triumphant defiance, a certainty that posterity will have a written record of the lives of *illustrium virorum* and their oppressors, because literature endures.

Tacitus, the mature, thoroughly disenchanted Tacitus has left us these two documents. By the end of his life he knew, as Michel Foucault knew, that, "the document is not the fortunate tool of a history that is primarily and fundamentally memory; history is one way in which a society recognizes and develops a mass of documentation with which

it is inextricably linked.”<sup>177</sup> As a member of the senate, Tacitus upheld the facade; as an author, he weighed and chose his words and subjects with painstaking deliberation. He knew then, as Lyotard would know nineteen hundred years later, that, “the threat of being deprived of speech is not contingent; it weighs constantly on the interlocutory right. This is precisely why the republic is indispensable.”<sup>178</sup> Tacitus was trying to tell us that, indeed, Cicero did not *eloquentiam tali exitu pensavit* in vain. We read and learn from both Cicero and Tacitus today, as they probably knew we would. Thus, as Aper said, at *Dial.*

23.6:

sic exprimitis adfectus, sic libertatem temperatis, ut etiam si nostra iudicia malignitas et invidia tardaverit, verum de vobis dicturi sint posteri nostri.

You express your emotions, you moderate your *libertas*, in such a way that, even if spite and envy may have impeded our opinions, our descendants will speak the truth about you.

We may never know the factual accuracy of much of the *Annales*, or whether the dialogue recorded by Tacitus has its grounding in an actual debate he once heard, but we do have his enduring testimony to what he saw as the truth — the truth about the Principate and its *principes*, and about the role of rhetoric and the historian in the face of imperial suppression. And what do we have from those who held power? For the most part, *silentium. Sic transit gloria mundi.*

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<sup>177</sup> Michel Foucault, *An Archaeology of Knowledge and The Discourse on Language* (New York: Random House: 1972), 7.

<sup>178</sup> Lyotard (1993):143

## Chapter VII

## Summary and Conclusion

If wisdom accompanies age, disillusionment often serves as the yoke. By the time Tacitus sat down to write his *Annales*, he had served under three emperors and was witnessing the turbulent, dubious accession of a fourth. While composing his *Histories*, he had had to relive and reexamine the years from the death of Nero to the death of Domitian. Along the way, he lost his optimism and appetite for writing about the “happy” present as he came to recognize that the patterns of despotism inherent in the Principate were inexorable and destined to be repeated. How does an imperial author go back on a promise? Perhaps he didn’t.

*Urbem Romam a principio reges habuere.* “Kings held Rome from the beginning.” “Held?” “From the beginning?” No. Tacitus is writing about the present. *Habuere* is meant to be taken as a true perfect, “Kings *have held* Rome from the beginning.” Did he choose *principio* over the more common *initio* or some other synonym simply to start off with a dactylic hexameter? The similarity to *princeps* is unavoidable; was the historian asking his reader, with the preposition *a*, to see agency rather than separation? A neologism, perhaps — “by a *princeps*-ish person,” but still a king. He then proceeds with a chronologically ordered compendium of the terms for power and the titles of those who wielded it. So the question remains: how to write honestly and safely of the present, once thorough disenchantment has set in? The answer is to hold up a mirror to

the present by writing of the past, the remoter the past the safer. Hence the *Annales*. The *Dialogus*, which also looks back, acts as prelude.

Through the first nine books of Pliny's *Epistulae*, we have a tantalizing shadow-record of Tacitus' progression from co-orator to author of the *Histories* and beyond, up until just Pliny's death ca. 110 CE. Through Pliny's overt anxiety regarding his placement in history and literature, we can read into the calculus of the more gifted, more discrete historian. We have no record of Tacitus' own correspondence, but the mutual intertexts provide much material by which to gauge the basis and the trajectory of their relationship. Pliny never leaves the path of *moderatio*, and his need to defend himself is perhaps driven by Tacitus' example. Though he longs to be included in Tacitus' *Histories*, all he can later ask is that he not become an object of even jesting *ultio*, "revenge," made permanent by the pen.<sup>179</sup> Was Pliny there referring to the *Dialogus*? Judging by Tacitus' deployment of Plinian intertext, I believe so. This sets the date for composition at no earlier than ca. 108-109, when Books 8 and 9 of the *Epistles* are thought to have been published.

The *Dialogus* sets out with a patently disingenuous pretext: Tacitus sets out to address the issue of the decline of public oratory and its causes by recounting a debate on that very matter that he witnessed in 75 CE, while still a youth, *iuvenis admodum*. Why does he go back more than thirty years to address a question posed about the present? Tacitus, as Pliny tells us, was the preëminent orator of his day. He witnessed the debate in the *Dialogus* as he was apprenticed to the *celeberrima tum ingenia fori nostri*, "the most

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<sup>179</sup> Pliny, *Ep.* 8.7: *nihil ex me interim missurus sum tibi in quo te ulciscaris* ("Meanwhile I am sending to you nothing of mine upon which you might take your revenge").



celebrated talents of our Forum at that time.”<sup>180</sup> The debates that ensue are themselves displays of rhetorical mastery, as they, in turns, decry and deny oratory’s demise. The *Dialogus* ends with no resolution, only questions and contradictions.

It is in the subtext and intertexts that we find the connections to the *Annales*. The choice of a Ciceronian dialogue, a format completely unlike Tacitus’ other four extant works, asks the reader to examine the context in relationship to the three works by Cicero upon which the *Dialogus* is modeled. Why the year 75 CE as the dramatic date of the *Dialogus*? How does it relate to the dramatic date of *De Oratore*, 91 BCE, or the dates of composition for the two other works, *Brutus* and *Orator*? The context of *De Oratore*, just before the Social Wars, holds significance by itself, but the fates of the orators, especially Antonius, hangs over the *Dialogus* and weighs upon its audience twice as heavily as it did upon the audience of Cicero: Tacitus’ audience knows not only the fates of the protagonists of *De Oratore*, but also those of the characters in the *Dialogus* (Helvidius Priscus and Epirus Marcellus are both executed under Vespasian, and probably Maternus as well), and, of course, of Cicero himself. Tacitus makes an explicit connection between the year of Cicero’s death — also the year of the Battle of Mutina — and the end of the Republic, twelve years before the Battle of Actium.

Cicero’s role in the *Dialogus* as an *exemplum* of oratory acts as a cover; his death and the intertexts Tacitus’ selects mark him as a referent to the perils of free speech. Even after Caesar’s Civil War, as he wrote *Orator* and *Brutus*, Cicero could not have foreseen the consecution of his final blaze of *libertas* — his head and hands impaled

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<sup>180</sup> *Dialogus* 2.

upon the *rostra* — *ingenium et manus*. Tacitus makes the connection between *manus*, *liber*, and *libertas* clear in both the *Dialogus* and the *Annales*, through the figures of Curvatus Maternus and Cremutius Cordus.

The menace that hangs over the bedroom of Maternus, the “stage” upon which the *Dialogus* takes place, mirrors the *metus*, “fear,” that suffuses the entirety of the *Annales*. Maternus’ initial defiance as he announces his plan to write a *Thyestes*, as he defends the virtues of poetry and assails the *lucrosa sanguinitas* of the contemporary practice of oratory, all but melts away upon the arrival of Vipstanus Messalla, brother-in-law of the notorious *delator* Regulus. Not only does the topic of *delatio* serve to connect the *Dialogus* to the *Annales*, but the character of Messalla functions on many different levels in the *Dialogus*: as an historical figure, he serves to remind the reader of the confrontations between Epirus Marcellus and Helvidius Priscus, alluded to at *Dial.* 5, and covered extensively in *Histories* 4. Both the *delator* Epirus Marcellus and the Stoic Helvidius Priscus play roles central to the fate of Thrasea Paetus in *Annales* 16. If one compares the speeches and responses of these characters in *Histories* 4 with their depiction in the *Dialogus*, one can see the shift in Tacitus’ attitude towards *moderatio*; it has shed its lustre.

In the *Dialogus*, Vipstanus Messalla sustains the shop-worn trope of oratorical decline, but his name works as a metonym for the real reasons behind that decline in the *Annales*: whereas Messalla Corvinus was one of the last great orators of the Republic, surviving into the days of Augustus, his progeny leads the rush to senatorial *servitium* under Tiberius. Thanks to Tacitus, Valerius Messalla has come down through history as synonymous with the art of *simulatio* and *dissimulatio*. Vipstanus Messalla, though

skilled in rhetoric, preaches Quintilianesque doctrine and, in some places, sounds a lot like ... Pliny.

Tacitus' concern with authorial legacy rather than oratorical prowess is reflected in both the debates within the *Dialogus*, but especially in the first, the one prior to Messalla's arrival. The literary history served up in this debate points to the self-conscious literariness throughout the *Annales*, beginning with that opening dactylic hexameter. As an author, Seneca is strangely silent in the *Annales*, but as a metonym for failed *eloquentia* and *moderatio*, followed by Stoic resilience, he speaks volumes. Yet we find him present in the figure of the historian Cremutius Cordus, whose trial and speech marks the centerpiece of *Annales* 4 and, arguably, the Tiberian hexad. As an historian, Tacitus' selection of Cremutius is an obvious one — an historian and a martyr to *libertas* whose prophetic last words mimic Tacitus' own desire to be remembered. But Cremutius is remembered because his daughter, Marcia, rescued his purged works from oblivion and had them republished. How do we know this? From Seneca's *Consolatio ad Marciam*, in which he not only praises her for this act of filial piety but also takes on the voice of Cremutius Cordus in a lengthy *prosopopoeia*. An examination of the *Consolatio*'s opening remarks and the closing *prosopopoeia* makes it clear that Tacitus had read Seneca's work — its themes resound not only in *Annales* 4, but throughout the *Annales* as a whole, especially in its attention to portents and the metaphorical and literal use of fire.

The menace that attends Messalla is aimed at Curiatius Maternus, due to his authorial *libertas*. He has written a *Cato*, and is planning to write a *Thyestes*. He has offended the ears of the powerful. His friends have come to plead with him, but the talk

changes abruptly when Messalla arrives. Thrasea Paetus, Stoic martyr of the *Annales*, wrote a biography of Cato. Seneca wrote a *Thyestes*. Yet neither is mentioned in the *Dialogus*. We assume Maternus pays for his *libertas*, if not under Vespasian, then under Titus or Domitian; the parallels with *De Oratore* make this almost a certainty. Did his works outlive him and his oppressors? His *Domitius*, which may have been targeting Nero under his *nomen gentile*, seems to have, and this paper agrees with earlier scholarship that determines that Maternus wrote the *Octavia*, whose parallels with *Annales* 14 are inescapable.

Maternus' intention to write a *Thyestes* is not the only piece that connects him to Seneca. They are both, of course, tragedians who wrote, among other things, a *Thyestes*, and thus representative of authorial legacy. Though Maternus is not nearly as morally ambiguous as Seneca, they both enact a loss of oratorical voice to imperial power: Maternus in the volte-face of his *peroratio*, and Seneca as his pupil Nero wrests his own voice back from his tutor in the paired speeches of *Annales* 14. If Maternus is, in fact, the author of the *Octavia*, then his connection to Seneca and the *Annales* becomes even more compelling; as closely entwined as *Annales* 14 is with the *Octavia*, they both share the same key intertexts with Seneca's *Oedipus*, intertexts that serve to highlight the contrasts between Jocasta and Agrippina, Oedipus and Nero, at the same time drawing attention to the rumors of incest between the Emperor and his mother (and his mother and her uncle ...).

Seneca's forced suicide in *Annales* 15 marks the beginning of a series of scenes wherein now-famous authors are forced to commit suicide. These scenes only end with

the extant text — at the death of Thrasea Paetus at 16.35. The irony of their dying words living on, as they “script” their final moments, is matched in salience only by the justice rendered the emperor who would have them extinguished. Tacitus has fulfilled his *praecipuum munus annalium*.

Yes, the *Annales* reads like a tragedy, or a series of tragedies. Tacitus’ reliance upon metaphor, dialogue, and other fictional indices asks the reader to act as audience and to perceive the contemporary truth reflected in the fictional/historical pretext. The tragedian Curiatius Maternus, when he announces his intention to follow up his *Cato* with a *Thyestes*, is making that announcement on behalf of Tacitus. Tacitus has finished his *Histories*, his *Cato* — dangerous enough, given the historical proximity of events. Now he, too, will go back in time to tell the story of a family whose cannibalistic evil rivals the House of Atreus, whose perversions and despotism will stand in for the corrupting and vitiating effects of imperial *potestas*. Do not be fooled by Maternus’ reversal in his *peroratio*; he, like Tacitus, is advising us to be on the alert for double-speak. Vespasian is *sapientissimus et unus*, his reign (and reins) *felix*; the glory days of *eloquentia* were bloody and perilous; far better the *tuta et praesentia quam vetera et periculosa*; *libertas* is mere *licentia*.

Maternus might be saying, “War is Peace. Freedom is Slavery. Ignorance is Strength.”<sup>181</sup> Tacitus, now an old man, sitting at his own desk, knows that, “Who controls the past, controls the future: who controls the present, controls the past.”<sup>182</sup> Q.E.D.

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<sup>181</sup> George Orwell, *1984*.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*

## Appendix

### Definitions of Terms

**Actant:** The role a character plays in terms of narrative structure; this can extend beyond the given text to intertext.

*Agricola: De Vita et Moribus Iuli Agricolae:* Commonly referred to as the *Agricola*, Tacitus's first work was a monograph on the life and career of his father-in-law, Gnaeus Iulius Agricola (40 CE-93 CE), the Roman general who conquered much of Britain under the Emperor Vespasian and became that province's governor in 77 CE. Tacitus wrote this work ca. 96 CE, shortly after the death of the emperor Domitian, under whose despotic reign Tacitus's career advanced. Besides being a *laudatio* of the man as a Stoic *exemplum*, the work includes geographic and ethnographic details about Britain and its noble inhabitants as well as scathing comparisons to the decadence at Rome. In this work Tacitus preaches the gospel of *moderatio*, and shows disdain for the Stoic "martyrs."

*Anagnorisis:* A moment of recognition for a protagonist, usually contiguous to the narrative's *peripeteia*.

*Analepsis:* A narrative device that operates as a trigger to retrieve and/or reinterpret the memory of an earlier event, either through a flashback, repeated metaphor, or other semiotic referent. cf. *prolepsis*.

*Annales: Ab Excessu Divi Augusti:* Known as the *Annales* because of its annalistic format, this work covers the years from the death of the emperor Augustus to that of Nero. The reign of Tiberius comprises the first six books, Caligula and Claudius the next six, and Nero the final (six?) books. Parts of Book V are missing, as well as Books 7-10, part of 11, the end of 16, and all of 17, and 18 — if they ever existed. This is the author's final work, begun after the *Historiae*, and probably still in progress at the accession of Hadrian in 117, the most widely accepted date for Tacitus's death.

*Antanaclasis:* The rhetorical device where the same word or term is repeated, but with a different meaning.

*Ataraxia:* The Stoic ideal of emotional equilibrium.

Audience: The reader.

Autopsy: Report from first-person witness.

Cato: A model of moral rectitude in the late Republic, Marcus Porcius Cato Uticensis was a senator, orator, adherent of the Stoic doctrine, and bitter enemy of Julius Caesar. At the end of the Caesarian Civil War (46 BCE), he committed suicide rather than live under Caesar. His name became a byword for republican resistance in the early Principate, and writing anything that honored him was considered subversive.

*Cursus honorum:* The hierarchical series of offices a Roman citizen held, culminating in consul.

*Demos:* The populace, as understood in an ethnic or nationalistic context.

*Dialogus de Oratoribus*: Date uncertain. The *Dialogus* is a Ciceronian-style dialogue ostensibly on the decline of Roman oratory and the causes of its decline. It ventures into the clash between the life and legacy of an orator versus that of a poet. Tacitus set the dramatic date of this work as 75 CE, when he was *iuvenis admodum* (“still a youth”), and casts himself as a silent witness to the heated three-way debate. The characters are three of the oratorical titans of their day. Tacitus borrows overtly from the *de Oratore*, *Brutus*, and *Orator* of Cicero, even as he occasionally subverts the great orator’s message.

*Dissimulatio*: The art of dissembling, of pretending not to be what you are, not to feel what you feel.

*Fama*: Reputation, fame, rumour; that which is said about you, from the verb *for, fari, fatus sum*; to speak. Not eternal. cf. *gloria*.

*Fas*: cf. *Nefas*.

*Germania: De Origine et Situ Germanorum*. Commonly referred to as the *Germania*. Tacitus wrote this work shortly after the *Agricola*. It is an ethnography that highlights the virtues of the German “race,” in stark contrast to moral and physical degeneration at Rome.

*Gloria*: Glory, or eternal renown.

*Histories: Historiae*. Probably completed by 108 CE, Tacitus’ *Histories* covers events in Rome and abroad from shortly after the death of Nero in 68 CE through the death of Domitian in 96. Of the original twelve or fourteen books, only the first four and the beginning of Book V survive, covering the years 68-70, including the



“year of the four emperors.” It differs from the *Annales* in style and content, though the voice of Tacitus is recognizable in both.

Historiography: The study of historical writing.

Imperial: Describing the system of the Roman Principate, an empire ruled by the *Principes*.

*Imperium*: Power held by means of command of an army; later, rule or empire.

Interpretant: “An interpretant is not only a sign which substitutes and translates an earlier sign; it adds something more — in some respect and capacity — to the sign it interprets. Through the process of interpretation, the content of the first sign grows.”<sup>183</sup> Eco, *Role of the Reader*, p. 43.

Intertextuality: The use of one text to add layers and to shape the meaning and reception of another text; this can be through allusion, quotation, borrowed symbols, etc.

“Intertextuality is the reader’s perception that a literary text’s significance is a function of a complementary or contradictory homolog, the intertext.”<sup>184</sup>

*Inventio*: In rhetoric, the discovery of probable or possible arguments of persuasion, especially where absolute proof is lacking or inaccessible.

*Libertas*: Freedom. Under the Principate, the meaning shifts to “free speech,” or “outspokenness.”

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<sup>183</sup> Umberto Eco, “Role of the Reader,” 43.

<sup>184</sup> Michael Riffaterre, “The Interpretant in Literary Semiotics,” in *Reading Eco, an Anthology*, Rocco Capozzi, ed. (Bloomington, Univ. Ind. Press, 1977), 173.

*Metonym*: The substitution and displacement of one object by another object or concept sharing contiguity with the original object.

Mimetic indirect discourse: Indirect discourse that mimics direct discourse, imitating patterns of speech and dialogue.

*Moderatio*: The belief that one can live a life of honorable service within and obedient to a corrupt system, and that to risk and lose one's life through outspoken opposition is to deny public service for personal glory.

Narratology: The approach to literary criticism that focuses on the structure and function of narrative, including theme, language, and symbols.

*Nefas*: That which is unholy or unspeakable; blasphemous. The opposite of *fas*.

*Oedipus* — In this paper, the tragedy by Seneca, not the better-known version by Sophocles.

*Oratio obliqua*: Indirect discourse.

*Oratio recta*: Direct discourse.

Parallax: The effect of displacement caused by viewing an object or situation from two different vantage points.

*Parodos*; In theater, a side entrance.

*Peripeteia*: In theater, a reversal of circumstance or a turning point in the drama.

*Pietas*: The combination of qualities a princeps finds desirable in his subjects — devotion and sense of duty to gods, family, and country.

*Politeia*: Citizenship, membership in a state, rather than a nationality.

*Princeps*: Emperor. Augustus took the title *Princeps* as more palatable to a people accustomed to a republic.

*Principate*: The name given to the government of the Roman Empire under the emperors from Augustus onwards.

*Proairesis*: a choice made through a deliberative process.

*Prolepsis*: A narrative device comprising an announcement of or allusion to a future event, in anticipation of an assumed future event. cf. *analepsis*.

Proscription. The practice in the Late Republic of posting a list of citizens considered outlaws, with the understanding that their property was forfeit and there would be a financial reward for their betrayal or murder.

*Prosopopoeia*. The rhetorical device wherein a speaker or author speaks or writes in the first person as another figure; impersonation.

*Quindecimvir*. A member of the *quindecimviri sacris faciundis*, one of the four major colleges of priests, whose original function was to guard and consult the Sybilline Books, but, in the early Empire, their chief purpose was to oversee the Secular Games.

Rhetoric: The art of persuasive composition, both spoken and written, reliant upon literary devices and centering on *ethos*, *logos*, and *pathos*.

Semanalysis. According to Riffaterre, the “transformation of a unit of meaning into a larger one (usually of a word into a text) through a successive actualization of that unit’s consecutive semes in the shape of words or phrases. Each abstract seme is

concretized descriptively and narratively (from definition to description, from description to consecution.”<sup>185</sup>

*Simulatio*. The art of pretending to be what one is not; to feign sentiment.

Thyestes: Many authors wrote tragedies by this name, Thyestes signified the cannibalistic evil inherent in the system of imperial succession, if not the imperial system itself. Thyestes was son of Pelops and Hippodamia and the brother of Atreus. The two brothers clashed and committed treachery against each other for the rule of Mycenae. Atreus killed his brother’s two sons and served them to him at a banquet, thus bringing a curse upon the House of Atreus. Atreus’ two sons, Agamemnon and Menelaus, later became the kings of Mycenae and Sparta, respectively, and were major protagonists in the Trojan war: Agamemnon as leader of all Argive forces, and Menelaus as the cuckolded husband of Helen. Agamemnon was murdered by his wife (sister of Helen) and his cousin Aegisthus, who was both son and grand son of Thyestes — and avenger: he killed Atreus after being raised in his uncle’s household as an anonymous abandoned infant.

*virtus*: The combination of qualities necessary to serve the Republic as a soldier/citizen — courage, resilience, honor, intelligence.

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<sup>185</sup> Michael Riffaterre, *Fictional Truth*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 129.

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