

SENTENTIA AND STRUCTURE IN TACITUS *HISTORIES* 1.12–49

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brightness falls from the air

The first set speech in the *Histories*, Galba's to his newly adopted heir, Piso Licinianus (1.15–16), has generated considerable scholarly controversy. Whether the reader is meant to take the aged emperor's words seriously may depend on the reader's beliefs as to Tacitus's judgment of him by the end of his reign. Even at the time of this speech, however, Galba's credit with Tacitus is rather low. The historian has already expressed scorn for the manner of the adoption (*comitia imperii transigit*, 1.14.1), and he consistently criticizes the *princeps*'s meanness over the donative and his passivity, especially when dealing with his greedy and unscrupulous advisors. N. P. Miller and Gwyn Morgan argue that Tacitus uses this section to show why the adoption was doomed to fail, since Galba had already alienated virtually all the responsible elements at Rome.¹

I argue elsewhere that the speech, whose length and crucial placement suggest that it is not to be ignored, in fact announces themes central to the Galban narrative that extend through the first three books of the *Histories*.² A key device in conveying these themes is the *sententia*. Tacitus uses

1 Miller 1977 and Morgan 1993b. Scholarly debate has focused on determining Tacitus's views on the issue of hereditary vs. adoptive succession, since he also gives Mucianus a speech to Vespasian (2.76–77) arguing for hereditary monarchy. See Sage 1990.921–22, Syme 1958.207–08, and Heubner 1963.47–49.

2 Keitel 1991.2775–76. For a thoughtful discussion of the implications of the *sententiae* of 1.15.3–4 for Tacitus's political thought, see Shotter 1991.3281–85 and 3315–26.

gnomic *sententiae*, the type Quintilian calls a “universal pronouncement” (*haec vox universalis*, *Inst.* 8.5.3), to articulate the principal features of the moral and political breakdown of Roman society—leaders, armies, and citizens—during civil war.³ In this paper, I will demonstrate the importance of two of the gnomic *sententiae* in Galba’s speech for the narrative of his downfall and point out the means by which the historian makes these observations persuasive. Finally, comparison with the accounts of Suetonius and Plutarch strongly suggests that Tacitus inserted the maxims and used them as a key structural component.⁴

The crucial maxims appear as part of a cluster at *Histories* 1.15.3–4, Galba’s warning to Piso about the dangers his new high station holds:

fortunam adhuc tantum adversam tulisti: secundae res acrioribus stimulis animos explorant, quia miseriae tolerantur, felicitate corrumpimur. fidem libertatem amicitiam, praecipua humani animi bona, tu quidem eadem constantia retinebis, sed alii per obsequium imminuent: inrumpet adulatio, blanditiae [et] pessimum veri adfectus venenum, sua cuique utilitas. etiam [si] ego ac tu simplicissime inter nos hodie loquimur, ceteri libentius cum fortuna nostra quam nobiscum; nam suadere principi quod oporteat multi laboris, adsentatio erga quemcumque principem sine adfectu peragitur.⁵

To this point you have endured only adversity. Prosperity tests the spirit with keener goads because miseries are endured, but we are corrupted by good fortune. You will retain loyalty, frankness, friendship, the chief blessings of the human spirit, with the same constancy, but others will

3 On the *sententia*, see also Arist. *Rhet.* 1394a–95b, *Rhet. Her.* 4.24–25, Sinclair 1995.33–77, and Kirchner 2001.20–43.

4 Tacitean *sententiae* have received serious attention by Plass 1988, Kirchner 2001, and Stegner 2004. As a result, *sententiae* are now regarded not as mere rhetorical ornament, but as a basic tool of historical analysis; see, for example, Kirchner 2001.146. Sinclair 1995 analyzes Tacitus’s use of *sententiae* in the socio-political context of the early empire: “In his *sententiae* Tacitus finds a voice expressing incontestable authority projected as the epitome of urbanity and political savvy” (4).

5 The text of the *Histories* is Heubner 1978; of Plutarch, Perrin; of Suetonius, Ihm; of Dio, Cary. The translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

diminish them through obsequiousness. Flattery, fawning, and the worst poison of true feeling, self-interest, will burst in. Although you and I are speaking very frankly, the rest speak more willingly with our status than with us; for to advise a *princeps* of what he ought to do is a great task, but adulation toward whoever is *princeps* is accomplished without real feeling.

Although the common source indicated that Galba also spoke when introducing Piso to the senate and to the praetorians, Tacitus chooses an essentially private setting for Galba's only speech.⁶ This setting, with only a few of Galba's intimates present, naturally facilitates a frank discussion of the dangers of *adulatio* for a *princeps*. But the setting also introduces a bitter irony, since among those present were Titus Vinus and Cornelius Laco (1.14.1), who individually and together contributed to their friend Galba's ruin (1.6.1).⁷

Commentators point out the kinship between this passage and Pliny *Panegyricus* 85.1 ("amicitia, cuius in locum migraverunt adsentationes, blanditiae et peior odio amoris simulatio," "friendship into whose place have moved adulation, flattery, and, worse than hatred, the pretence of friendship") and Cicero *de Amicitia* 91 (*nullam pestem . . . assentationem*), which describe in very similar language the ruinous effect of flattery on friendship. It is worthwhile, however, to look at the entire Ciceronian passage (*de Amicitia* 91–92):

ut igitur et monere et moneri proprium est verae amicitiae, et alterum libere facere, non asperere, alterum patienter accipere, non repugnanter, sic habendum est nullam in amicitiiis pestem esse maiorem quam adulationem, blanditiam, assentationem; quamvis enim multis nominibus est hoc vitium notandum, levium hominum atque fallacium, ad voluptatem loquentium omnia, nihil ad veritatem. cum

6 Tacitus, Suetonius, and Plutarch are generally believed to have followed a common source for their accounts of the civil wars of A.D. 69. Mommsen 1870 argued for Cluvius Rufus, Fabia 1893 for Pliny the Elder. Syme 1958.674–76 summarizes the arguments. See also Martin 1981.189–98.

7 Kirchner 2001.138 notes that this passage shows Galba as a leader of firm principles, but one who is out of touch with what is happening around him.

autem omnium rerum simulatio vitiosa est—tollit enim iudicium veri idque adulterat—tum amicitiae repugnat maxime; delet enim veritatem, sine qua nomen amicitiae valere non potest.

Given, then, that it is proper to true friendship both to give and receive advice, the former freely but not harshly, the latter with patience and not unwillingly; in the same way, one must believe that there is no greater plague for friendships than flattery, fawning, obsequiousness—however many names one uses to describe it, it is to be disapproved of as a fault that belongs to unreliable and deceitful men, who say things in order to please, regardless of the truth. Any sort of pretence is wrong; it removes one's capacity to see the truth and substitutes a counterfeit version of it; but above all it is incompatible with friendship, as it destroys that truthfulness without which the name of friendship cannot mean anything. (trans. J. Powell)

Tacitus, too, will examine the deleterious effects of flattery on truth telling and on the ability even to perceive the truth. The historian had already sounded this theme in the first chapter when he discussed the decline of history writing after the establishment of the principate.⁸

Tacitus expands his antithesis (and his generalization) to include *fides*, “loyalty,”⁹ and *libertas*, “frankness or candor,” on the one hand, and “self interest,” *utilitas*, on the other. In doing so, he draws on commonplaces of the Roman philosophical tradition, such as Cicero *de Officiis* 3.20.82 (no advantage is worth losing your good name or *fides*); 3.10.43 (self-gratification through wealth or political success should never be given precedence over friendship); 3.33.118 (friendship, among other good things, cannot

8 1.1.1: “postquam bellatum apud Actium atque omnem potentiam ad unum conferri pacis interfuit, magna illa ingenia cessare; simul veritas pluribus modis infracta, primum inscitia rei publicae ut alienae, mox libidine adsentandi aut rursus odio adversus dominantes” (“After the battle of Actium had been fought and when it was in the interests of peace that all power be bestowed on one man, those great talents withdrew. Truth was shattered at once by several means, first by ignorance of the state, as belonging to another, then by a desire for flattery, or again by hatred toward the rulers”).

9 On *fides* in the *Histories*, see Damon 262–66 in this volume.

exist if it is pursued for self-interest or pleasure). By thus expanding the antithesis and having Galba state it as a gnomic *sententia*, Tacitus prepares the reader to consider its implications more generally, beyond the narrow confines of Galba's circle of advisors.

Tacitus repeatedly alludes to *fides*, *amicitia*, *adulatio*, and self-interest in the narrative of 1.12–49 and shows the breakdown of traditional values among all groups involved in the struggle for power at Rome. In the preface, the historian has already put *fides* and *amicitia* before the reader as values both threatened and affirmed by the events he will relate. When normal relations break down under the threat of delation (or of civil war), slaves betray masters, freedmen their patrons, and those who have no enemies may be done in by their friends (1.2.3): “*corrupti in dominos servi, in patronos liberti; et quibus deerat inimicus, per amicos oppressi.*” On the other hand, the same years showed *bona exempla*, among which was the loyalty (*fides*) of slaves even under torture (1.3.1).

We should note, too, that the breakdown of traditional ties of friendship and loyalty, while associated here with the principate, is also the hallmark of stasis according to Thucydides and Sallust. Sallust describes the breakdown of *fides* and friendships stained by hypocrisy and self-interest as part of the deterioration of Roman society after 146 B.C.E. (*Cat.* 10.5):

namque avaritia fidem probitatem ceteras artis bonas subvortit; pro his superbiam, crudelitatem, deos neglegere, omnia venalia habere edocuit. ambitio multos mortalis falsos fieri subegit, aliud clausum in pectore, aliud in lingua promptum habere, amicitias inimicitiasque non ex re, sed ex commodo aestumare, magisque voltum quam ingenium bonum habere.¹⁰

For greed destroyed loyalty, uprightness, other good qualities; in their place it taught arrogance, cruelty, to neglect the gods, to consider everything for sale. Ambition forced many men to become false, to keep one thing in their hearts, another ready on their tongues, to reckon

10 Seager 1977.47: “So the decline of *amicitia* exemplifies and illuminates that erosion of moral values, that undermining of society's traditional foundations which Tacitus saw as the bane of the principate.” For Tacitus's view of the principate as a kind of stasis, see Keitel 1984.

friendship and enmity not according to themselves but according to expediency, to keep up a good front rather than a good character.

Sallust, in turn, drew on Thucydides' account of stasis at Corcyra, where the historian says that family ties were a weaker bond than membership in the same party, and party members trusted each other not as members of the same fellowship but as partners in crime (Thuc. 3.82.6). As conditions deteriorated in Greece, no guarantee could be given, no oath sworn, that people would trust (Thuc. 3.83.2). Finally, both Thucydides and Sallust remark on the fair names those in political life invoke to mask their self-interest (*Cat.* 38.3, Thuc. 3.82.8).

In the opening section of the Galban narrative (1.12–20), the *princeps*'s friends and underlings epitomize the breakdown of *fides* and *amicitia* and the substitution of self-interest of which Galba speaks.¹¹ Tacitus's account of the role of Vinus, Icelus, and Laco agrees with Plutarch's in its broad outlines. In their obituaries, both writers fault Galba for permitting the misdeeds of these men. Plutarch blames his complacency, Tacitus his complacency and ignorance (1.49.3, Plut. *Galb.* 29.4). Both speak of the odium Vinus, in particular, incurred, especially when he prevented the well-deserved punishment of Nero's henchman Tigellinus (1.72.3, Plut. *Galb.* 17). Both writers depict conflicts among the *amici* over whom Galba should adopt and how he should respond to Otho's attempted coup. But Laco and Icelus play no part in Plutarch's narrative, while Vinus's misdeeds are fully chronicled.¹² Tacitus, on the other hand, stresses from the outset the disastrous effect both Vinus and Laco have on Galba's rule (1.6.1): "invalidum senem Titus Vinus et Cornelius Laco, alter deterrimus mortalium, alter ignavissimus, odio flagitiorum oneratum contemptu inertiae destruebant" ("Titus Vinus and Cornelius Laco destroyed the weak old man, the one the

11 For the structure of 1.12–49, I follow the schema of Wille 1983.324–26.

12 Plutarch recognizes Laco's influence in passing references such as Nymphidius's criticism of Vinus and Laco to the praetorians (Plut. *Galb.* 13.2). Likewise, in his obituary of Galba, Plutarch names both Vinus and Laco and their freedmen as those to whom Galba had so unwisely entrusted himself (Plut. *Galb.* 29.4). Morgan 1993b.575 argues that Tacitus reduced Icelus's role (cf. Plut. *Galb.* 7.3 and 20.4) to heighten the struggle between Laco and Vinus. In fact, Icelus contributes little to the narrative in the biographers. Ammann 1931.27 believes that Tacitus downplayed Icelus to avoid having to go into events before January 69. Fabia 1893.93 believes that Laco and Vinus were closely linked in the common source.

worst of men, the other the laziest; Galba was burdened by the hatred for Vinusius's crimes and the contempt for Laco's sloth").¹³

Tacitus begins the adoption sequence with references to popular hatred of Vinusius and the greed of Galba's friends who take advantage of his age and credulity to enrich themselves (1.12.3):

multi stulta spe, prout quis amicus vel cliens, hunc vel illum ambitiosis rumoribus destinabant, etiam in Titi Vinii odium, qui in dies quanto potentior, eodem actu inuisior erat. quippe hiantes in magna fortuna amicorum cupiditates ipsa Galbae facilitas intendebat, cum apud infirmum et credulum minore metu et maiore praemio peccaretur.¹⁴

Many with foolish hope, according as they were someone's freedman or client, marked out this one or that with self-seeking rumors, also because of hatred of Titus Vinusius, who as he grew more powerful daily, was the more hated with the same force. Indeed, Galba's malleability only increased the gaping greed of his friends in their good fortune, since one could commit crime with less fear and greater reward when dealing with an infirm and credulous man.

Tacitus then describes the internal factionalism among these friends over Galba's choice of a successor (1.13.1):

potentia principatus¹⁵ divisa in Titum Vinium consulem, Cornelium Laconem praetorii praefectum; nec minor gratia Icelo Galbae liberto, quem anulis donatum equestri nomine Marcianum vocitabant. hi discordes et rebus

13 Tacitus has apparently used an additional source for Laco. Townend 1964.354 and 356 believes it was Cluvius Rufus. Damon 2003.107 notes that Tacitus omits two details given by Suetonius and Plutarch, including Laco's loyal defense of Galba in the palace, because they conflict with his picture of Laco "as both significant and pernicious."

14 Plut. *Galb.* 16.4 makes a similar observation about Vinusius alone. Likewise, Plutarch refers to the hasty greed of Vinusius only (*Galb.* 17.3, 16.3).

15 On *potentia principatus*, see Damon 270–71 in this volume.

minoribus sibi quisque tendentes, circa consilium eligendi
successoris in duas factiones scindebantur.

The real power of the principate was shared by Titus Vin-
ius, the consul, and Cornelius Laco, the praetorian prefect.
The freedman of Galba, Icelus, had no less power, he
whom they called “Marcianus” when he had been given
the equestrian rings. These, discordant and each making
an effort for himself in lesser matters, were split into two
camps over the choice of a successor.

Plutarch, on the other hand, has the majority of advisors favor Otho (Plut.
Galb. 23.1). The Tacitean diction (*in duas factiones scindebantur*) indicates
a more definite split among the advisors, as if Galba faced budding factional
strife in his own household as well as in the state. There is also a hint of
every man for himself (“et rebus minoribus sibi quisque tendentes”).¹⁶

Tacitus attributes to Galba a genuine *cura rei publicae* in choosing
Piso over Otho (1.13.2): “credo et rei publicae curam subisse, frustra a Nerone
translatæ, si apud Othonem relinqueretur. namque Otho pueritiam incuriose,
adulescentiam petulanter egerat, gratus Neroni aemulatione luxus” (“I believe
that a real concern for the state had come over Galba, since the state would
have been transferred in vain from Nero if it were to be left to Otho. For the
latter had spent a heedless boyhood and a wild youth, and had been pleasing
to Nero by his rivalry in extravagance”).¹⁷ And Galba lists Piso’s own patrio-
tism (1.15.1: *amor patriæ*) as a factor in his choice. Tacitus’s first-person
endorsement of Galba’s patriotism is striking, as he is merely repeating an
idea most likely discussed in the common source. Thus the historian signals
another important theme related to the *sententia* of 1.15.4. As D. C. A. Shot-
ter observes (1991.3324): “*Cura rei publicae* is a term of wider application
than *fides*: indeed *fides* in most cases is to be subsumed into it.”

But while Galba rails against the poison of self-interest, the adoption

16 Suet. *Galb.* 14.2 says that Galba was completely under the sway of the three men, but does
not differentiate between them or discuss them further. For Suetonius’s consistent lack of
interest in minor characters, see Townend 1964.351 and Baldwin 1983.534.

17 Morgan 1993b.572 notes the contrast between Galba’s *rei publicae curam* and Otho’s ir-
responsible boyhood (*incuriose*) as part of a larger discussion of the ways in which Tacitus
heightens the contrast between Otho and Galba. On Galba’s concern for the state, which
he always put above all other considerations, cf. Plut. *Galb.* 21.1.

scene is encircled by passages describing the low motives of his advisors (as we have seen), of the general public, and of senators. Tacitus uses the phrase *cura rei publicae* (or *publica cura*) twice more in 1.12–20 to link senate and people together in their low motives. Galba's concern for the public good (1.13.2) is juxtaposed with Tacitus's denial that the people at Rome have any genuine concern for the state as they speculate over Galba's choice of an heir (1.12.3): "*paucis iudicium aut rei publicae amor.*" The senators show their approval of Piso (1.19.1): "*et patrum favor aderat: multi voluntate, effusius qui noluerant, medii ac plurimi obvio obsequio, privatas spes agitantes sine publica cura*" ("The senators showed their approval, many from goodwill; those who had opposed the adoption were more effusive; the majority, uncommitted, with ready servility, cherishing their private hopes, without concern for the state"). Finally, the historian notes the praetorians' lack of patriotic concern as they prepare to desert Galba for Otho. They decide not to carry Otho off to the camp one night "*non rei publicae cura, quam foedare principis sui sanguine sobrii parabant, sed ne per tenebras, ut quisque Pannonici vel Germanici exercitus militibus oblatus esset, ignorantibus plerisque, pro Othone destinaretur*" (1.26.1) ("Not out of concern for the state, which they were preparing in their sober senses to defile with the blood of their emperor. But they feared that, in the darkness, anyone who had come across the Pannonian or German troops might be proclaimed in Otho's stead").

All of these passages, along with references to the praetorians' apprehensions about Galba (1.5.2), make his plans for the adoption seem inauspicious. Plutarch prefaces the adoption with the attitudes of Galba's advisers only. Tacitus had earlier summed up Galba's situation with his saying that he selected his soldiers, he did not buy them, which the historian glosses (1.5.2): "*Galbae vox pro re publica honesta, ipsi anceps*" ("an honorable utterance in the interest of the state, but dangerous to himself").

Tacitus elucidates his theme in the same fashion through succeeding sections of the Galban narrative. In chapters 21–28, the historian recounts Otho's reaction to the news that Galba has decided to adopt Piso rather than himself and his decision to defect from Galba and seize power. Tacitus's emphasis in these chapters is not on Otho's egregious betrayal of his friend but rather on the boldness of the few who undertook this shameful act. Tacitus reserves until later his full scorn for the treachery of all involved, as the common source may have also.¹⁸

18 Cf. Keitel 1987. See also Damon 2003.148.

In chapters 29–35, Tacitus describes the reaction of Galba and his advisers to news of the revolt and their countermeasures. He follows the same basic outline of the action as Plutarch, but he fleshes it out in a quite different manner.¹⁹ Both report the reaction of Galba and his advisers to the news of the sedition; Piso goes out to speak to the cohort on duty at the Palace (1.29–30, Plut. *Galb.* 25.4); envoys are sent to other troops in the city; Galba's advisers then have a heated debate about whether he should go out to quell the sedition (1.32.2–33, Plut. *Galb.* 26.1). A rumor that Otho has been killed then leads the emperor to a confrontation with a soldier who boasts to him of the killing. According to Tacitus, Galba has apparently already decided to go outside before this news arrives; in Plutarch, he then decides to go out to make a sacrifice to Jupiter (1.34.1, Plut. *Galb.* 26.2). Both writers comment on the detachment of the crowd that looks down on the action in the Forum from the buildings above as if at a spectacle.²⁰ It seems safe to assume that these basic facts were given by the common source. Unlike Plutarch, Tacitus concentrates in almost every chapter on the low motives of all involved: the plebs, Galba's intimates, and members of the upper classes. The historian alludes three times to the difficulty of distinguishing true from false—not because of the confusion natural in such a situation, though at one point he suggests this (1.31.1)—but largely because of the dishonest *adulatio* of all the parties involved. In each passage, the word *veritas* or *vera* appears, only to be disallowed by Tacitus. Galba alone proves *adversus blandientes incorruptus* (1.35.2). None of this attribution of motive appears in Plutarch.

Tacitus juxtaposes the growing revolt in the praetorian camp in which the centurions and tribunes, following the lead of the officer in charge, prefer the advantage of the moment to the incalculable risks of honor (1.28: “anteponere ceteri quoque tribuni centurionesque praesentia dubiis et honestis”) with Galba continuing the sacrifice to gods of an empire now no longer his (“ignarus interim Galba et sacris intentus fatigabat alieni iam imperii deos,” 1.29.1). Morgan observes of this collocation: “The description

19 See Fabia 1893.27–29 and 138–39 n. 2 for differences between the two accounts. Suet. *Galb.* 19.1–2 reports that Galba decided to remain inside and strengthen his position by summoning legionaries from different parts of the city, but he was lured out by false reports circulated by the conspirators. Suetonius records only the advice of those who urged the *princeps* to go out.

20 See also Pomeroy 185–89 in this volume.

of the gods as ‘*alieni iam imperii*’ must reflect on the praetorians, officers and men, inasmuch as the *imperium* whose ruler they were sworn to protect passed now to another because of their lack of loyalty and determination.” Piso’s appeal to the *fides* of those praetorians on duty at the Palace (1.30.2 and 3) underlines his unrealistic view and ill-fated situation.²¹

News reaches Galba, first, that a senator has been taken to the praetorian camp, then that it is Otho, but some distort the truth of this for their own ends (1.29.1): “*simul ex tota urbe, ut quisque obuius fuerat, alii formidine augentes, quidam minora vero, ne tum quidem obliti adulationis*” (“Immediately people who had met Otho came in from all over the city; some, out of fear, exaggerated the truth, some told less than the truth, not forgetting even then to flatter”). Later Tacitus stresses the sycophancy of the plebs and slaves who now fill the Palatine (1.32.1):

universa iam plebs Palatium implebat, mixtis servitiis et dissono clamore caedem Othonis et coniuratorum exitium poscentium, ut si in circo aut theatro ludicrum aliquod postularent: neque illis iudicium aut veritas, quippe eodem die diversa pari certamine postulaturis, sed tradito more quemcumque principem adulandi licentia adclamationum et studiis inanibus.

The whole mass of people with slaves among them was now filling the Palatine, and there were discordant cries demanding the slaughter of Otho and the death of the conspirators as if they were calling for some show in the circus or theater. They had no judgment or sincerity, in that, on the same day, they would demand the opposite with equal enthusiasm. This was the accepted tradition of flattering whoever was *princeps* with unruly shouts of approval and empty enthusiasm.

Plutarch states that when Otho’s troops drove the crowd from the Forum, they occupied the buildings and prominences about it as if to get a view of a spectacle (Plut. *Galb.* 26.4). In the same section, Plutarch reports

21 Morgan 1993a.284. For Piso’s speech in the larger narrative context, see Keitel 1991.2776–78.

that no one came to the aid of their emperor except Sempronius Densus, that he alone of all those present that day was worthy of the Roman empire (Plut. *Galb.* 26.5). Tacitus has moved the image of the crowd as detached spectator farther from the murder of Galba and made of it a damning generality about *adulatio* and lack of *fides*.²²

A rumor reaches the Palace that Otho has been killed. It was suspected that this was a ruse to lure the emperor from the Palace (1.34.2). More disturbing to the historian was the reaction of the so-called responsible classes (1.35.1):

tum vero non populus tantum et imperita plebs in plausus et immodica studia, sed equitum plerique ac senatorum, posito metu incauti, refractis Palatii foribus ruere intus ac se Galbae ostentare, praereptam sibi ultionem querentes, ignavissimus quisque et, ut res docuit, in periculo non ausurus, nimii verbis, linguae feroces; nemo scire et omnes adfirmare, donec inopia veri et consensus errantium victus sumpto thorace Galba inruenti turbae, neque aetate neque corpore resistens sella levaretur.²³

Then, indeed, not only the populace and ignorant mob burst into applause and unbridled enthusiasm, but many knights and senators, incautious once they had lost their fear, broke down the Palace doors, rushed in, and showed themselves to Galba and complained that vengeance had been snatched away from them. All the most cowardly, as events proved, were not to be daring in danger, but were excessive in words, fierce in tongue; no one knew and all affirmed, until overcome by a lack of truth and the consensus of error, Galba put on his breast plate and, unable to resist the crowd rushing in because of his age and infirmity, was raised up in his chair.

22 Shotter 1991.3298 n. 190 notes that the language of 1.32.2 echoes that of Galba at 1.15.4. Bartsch 1994.56 speculates that Tacitus and Plutarch may have come to such a “dramatizing perspective” independently, as products of an era when a death, “thanks to the amphitheaters, smacked of spectacle even when it was not a question of a fatal charade.”

23 I read *resistens* rather than Heubner’s *sistens*, following Damon 2003.173: “It is not Galba’s ability to stand that is important here, but his ability to withstand the pressures, both physical and psychological, that surround him.”

Although they appear to be more involved than the crowd watching from the heights, the upper classes are linked to them by their self-serving *plausus et immodica studia*. Tacitus then contrasts Galba's bravery with the cowardly self-seekers when Galba rebukes Julius Atticus, a soldier who boasts of having killed Otho (1.35.2): "et Galba 'conmilito', inquit, 'quis iussit?' insigni animo ad coercendam militarem licentiam, minantibus intrepidus, adversus blandientes incorruptus" ("Galba said, 'Comrade, who ordered you?' with striking determination to check the license of the troops, not afraid of threats, incorruptible in the face of flattery"). Tacitus omits the soldier's fawning reply ("Loyalty and the oath I swore") and the *adulatio* of the crowd as described by Plutarch (Plut. *Galb.* 26.2). Tacitus keeps the focus instead on Galba's courage and old-fashioned military strictness. Moreover, Galba's resolution and composure here contrast strongly with the idle boasts of senators and equestrians who fail him in the event.²⁴

Étienne Aubrion observes that, in every council scene in the *Histories*, a decision is made more on the basis of passion than reason. Not surprisingly, Tacitus devotes more space to the debate among Galba's *amici* than any other ancient source and alludes to the hostility and disarray among the emperor's advisers and its ruinous consequences.²⁵ Plutarch summarizes the two courses of action: hole up in the Palace or go out, and notes that Laco and Celsus chided Vinus vehemently for not permitting Galba to go out (Plut. *Galb.* 26.1). Tacitus, on the other hand, presents the arguments of both sides and adds a bitter note of rivalry and intrigue between the two factions. Those who urge Galba to go out predict accurately the worthlessness of his "brave friends" if he decides to remain in the Palace (1.33.1): "non exspectandum ut compositis castris forum invadat et prospectante Galba Capitolium adeat, dum egregius imperator cum fortibus amicis ianua ac limine tenus domum cludit, obsidionem nimirum toleraturus," "They should not wait for him [Otho] to put the camp in order, invade the Forum, and approach the Capitol while Galba looked on, while the illustrious emperor

24 Suet. *Galb.* 19.2 and Dio 64.6.2 do not report the soldier's reply. Fabia 1893.28 believes that the soldier's reply was in the common source; to Tacitus, the essential point was Galba's severity in military discipline. See also Chilver 1979.96 and Damon 2003.173.

25 Aubrion 1985.652. See also Chilver 1979.96. For this *consilium* in its larger context, see Keitel 1991.2790–92. According to Suetonius (*Galb.* 19.1), Galba wanted to remain on the defensive with the help of legionaries, while in Plutarch (*Galb.* 26.1), Galba wanted to go out, though Plutarch implies that the issue was not settled until the false report came. See Chilver 1979.94–95. Tacitus gives Vinus "bland rhetoric" and unrealistic plans to establish the basis of his claim that Vinus has already gone over to Otho. So Damon 2003.166.

with his friends—brave as far as the door and the threshold—shut up the house, ready to endure, without doubt, a siege.”

Tacitus confirms this prediction in his account of the boastful senators and *equites* at 1.35.1 (above p. 230 and at 1.39). When Vinus opposes Laco and Icelus, they attack him: (1.33.2): “repugnantem huic sententiae Vinium Laco minaciter invasit. stimulante Icelo privati odii pertinacia in publicum exitium” (“When Vinus objected to this view, Laco menacingly assailed him, with Icelus egging him on, who persisted in a private quarrel to the ruin of the country”). Tacitus has prepared us for Laco’s reaction here. Earlier he had blamed Laco for misleading Galba about the severity of the revolt. Laco was ignorant of the troops’ attitude and jealous of anyone else’s advice, however good (1.26.2).²⁶

The breakdown of *fides* and the failure of *amicitia* culminate in the events leading up to Galba’s murder (1.36–43).²⁷ To be sure, the common source must have presented the basic facts of this collapse of loyalty and friendship toward Galba. Both Plutarch and Tacitus describe the overthrow of Galba’s statue in the Forum by the praetorians as they prepare to murder him. Both show Galba dying alone (Tacitus) or defended by one centurion (Plutarch). In both accounts, Galba tells the soldiers to kill him if it will benefit the state. Both recognize that Vinus may have betrayed Galba to Otho (1.42, Plut. *Galb.* 12.3).²⁸ But Tacitus, through choice of detail and structure, lends more weight to these themes than does Plutarch. Plutarch reports contradictory advice shouted to Galba as he is tossed hither and thither in his *sella* in the Forum once news arrives that Otho is in control of the praetorians. Some urge him to turn back, others to go forward, others that he use caution (Plut. *Galb.* 26.3). Tacitus concentrates instead on the members of the emperor’s entourage (1.39.1): “iam Marius Celsus haud laeta rettulerat, cum alii in Palatium redire, alii Capitolium petere, plerique rostra occupanda censerent”²⁹

26 Cf. Laco’s *socordia* when Otho was bribing the praetorians (1.24.2). Note also that Tacitus says nothing about Laco, Vinus, and some of the imperial freedmen defending Galba with swords from the crowd that poured up from the Forum (Plut. *Galb.* 25.4).

27 On the murder of Galba, see also Pomeroy 185–87 and Pagán 205–06 in this volume.

28 Suetonius (*Galb.* 19.2 and 20.1) has Galba dying alone and undefended. He also (*Galb.* 20.1) gives two versions of Galba’s last words: in one, he promises to pay the donative, in the other, he offers his neck and tells the soldiers to do their duty. For comparisons of Plutarch’s and Tacitus’s accounts, see Fabia 1893.29–32, Courbaud 1918.79 and 89, Heubner 1935.14, and Morgan 1993b.288–91.

29 Chilver 1979.99.

(“Marius Celsus had already reported bad news when some urged that he return to the palace, others that he seek the Capitol, and most that he must seize the rostra”). The historian then adds a familiar note of backbiting: “plures tantum sententiis aliorum contra dicerent” (“The majority merely disagreed with other people’s proposals”).

Tacitus also elaborates on the quarrel between Laco and Vinus. At this point, unbeknownst to Galba, Laco considered killing Vinus (1.39.2): “sive ut poena eius animos militum mulceret, seu conscius Othonis credebatur, ad postremum vel odio” (“whether to soften the soldiers’ anger with his punishment, or because he believed he was Otho’s accomplice, or, finally, because he hated him”). Laco hesitates for various reasons, one of which is the weakening spirit of those around the emperor (1.39.2): “languentibus omnium studiis, qui primo alacres fidem atque animum ostentaverant” (“with the enthusiasm flagging of all those who, at first, had eagerly paraded their loyalty and vigor”).³⁰ Thus just before Galba’s murder, the historian recapitulates three immediate causes of his failure: the bitter divisiveness and jealousy of his inner circle, where Laco prosecutes a private feud with Vinus, the possibility that one of his friends has betrayed him, and the false bravado of the upper classes, who had earlier rallied to Galba and boasted of their courage, but who now desert him in his hour of need. Moreover, by including an alternate version of Galba’s last words (the promise to pay the donative), Tacitus recapitulates another crucial factor in his fall. The two versions of Galba’s last words reveal his strengths and weaknesses as a leader, why he deserved his men’s *fides* and why he lost it.³¹

The praetorians’ lack of *fides* toward Galba has already been abundantly illustrated in the preceding narrative. In the praetorian camp, they exhort each other to desert Galba for Otho. Theirs is not the idle flattery of the urban plebs (1.36.2: “non tamquam in populo ac plebe variis segni

30 Tacitus and Plutarch both take the metaphor of the stormy sea from the common source but use it differently. Tacitus applies it to the crowd, as does Plutarch, and also to Galba’s advisers (*languentibus*); see Chilver 1979.99 and Morgan 1993b.278. *Ostentarent* at 1.39.1 recalls the pretentious and empty show of support for Galba at 1.35.1.

31 1.41.2: “extremam eius vocem, ut cuique odium aut admiratio fuit, varie pro[di]dere, alii suppliciter interrogasse, quid mali meruisset, paucos dies exsolvendo donativo deprecaturum: plures obtulisse ultro percussoribus iugulum: agerent ac ferirent, si ita [e] re publica videretur” (“His last words were given variously, depending on the hatred or admiration of each. Some reported that he had asked in appeal what harm he had done, that he had begged for a few days in which to pay the donative. More said that he had offered his throat willingly to the killers and told them to go ahead and strike if it seemed best for the state”).

adulatione vocibus”), but the vigorous recruitment of other soldiers to Otho’s side. As Morgan observes (1993b.276), the transition from Galba’s resistance to flattery to the praetorians’ unwavering attitude in the camp in the next chapter is from like to like. (Here it is Otho who practices *adulatio* [1.36.3]: “nec deerat Otho protendens manus adorare volgum, iacere oscula, et omnia serviliter pro dominatione,” “Nor did Otho fail to salute the crowd, holding out his hands, throwing kisses, and doing everything like a slave to become the master.”) The troops’ disloyalty to their emperor is summed up by Tacitus in a bitter simile as Otho dispatches them to the Forum (1.40.2):

igitur milites Romani, quasi Vologaesum aut Pacorum
avito Arsacidarum solio depulsuri ac non imperatorem
suum inermem et senem trucidare pergerent, disiecta
plebe, proculcato senatu, truces armis, rapidi equis fo-
rum inrumpunt.

And so Roman soldiers proceeded as if they were to de-
pose a Vologaesus or Pacorus from the ancestral throne
of the Arsacids and not to butcher their emperor, unarmed
and old. They scattered the crowd, they trampled the sena-
tors, savage in arms and swift on horseback, they burst
into the Forum.

Plutarch and Dio both express outrage at Galba’s murder. Plutarch is horrified when a soldier impales Galba’s severed head and runs about with it like a bacchanal. The biographer calls Galba “an aged man who had been a temperate ruler, a high priest, and a consul” (Plut. *Galb.* 27.3). In Dio, the soldiers, in the presence of crowds of plebeians and many senators, cut down “this old man, their consul, high priest, Caesar, and emperor” (64.6.3). Thus Tacitus may well have reworked a similar statement of outrage in the common source. But he stresses, as Plutarch does not, the inversion of the scene, as Roman soldiers prepare to set on their own *imperator* as if he were a foreign king.³²

32 Townend 1964.360–61 believes that Tacitus took the simile from Pliny the Elder, his principal source. Although, as Chilver 1979.99 observes, the common source was deeply moved, the simile could just as likely be the historian’s own. The *urbs capta* theme, Rome and Italy as the perverse prizes in civil war, is often used by Tacitus in *Histories* 1–3, but does not appear in Suetonius or Plutarch. Miller 1977.19 rightly calls the simile the key to the whole scene.

While Plutarch recounts the deaths of Galba, Piso, and Vinus in that order, Tacitus puts Vinus's murder right after Galba's. This is not only the likely chronological order, it also achieves several thematic effects. In this way, Galba's death *pro re publica* is sandwiched between references to his associate's treachery (1.39 and 42; Fabia 1893.114–15). When recounting versions of Vinus's death, he reports Vinus's last words, that Otho had not ordered his death. Thus Tacitus suggests that Vinus had indeed betrayed Galba (1.42): "quod seu finxit formidine seu conscientiam coniurationis confessus est, huc potius eius vita famaue inclinat, ut conscius sceleris fuerit, cuius causa erat" ("Whether he invented this out of fear or confessed his complicity in the plot, his life and reputation incline me to think that he was complicit in the crime whose cause he was"). There follows the murder of Piso, who was bravely defended by Sempronius Densus. He offers one of the *bona exempla* promised by Tacitus in the preface (1.43.1): "insignem illa die virum Sempronium Densum aetas nostra vidit" ("Our age saw a remarkable man on that day, Sempronius Densus").³³

By putting Piso's death last, Tacitus can close the segment on the murders (1.40–43) as he began it, with a reference to the killers' impiety. They are unrestrained by the sight of the holy places that they will defile with bloodshed (1.40.2): "nec illos Capitoli adspectus et imminentium templorum religio et priores et futuri principes terruere, quo minus facerent scelus, cuius ultor est quisquis successit" ("Neither the sight of the Capitol nor the sanctity of the temples looming above, neither prior nor future emperors, deterred them from committing a crime whose avenger is whoever succeeds next to the throne"). Likewise, Piso's life is not prolonged by the sanctity of the Temple of Vesta, where he takes refuge, but by his hiding place, the room of a state slave who pitied him (1.43.2). Plutarch mentions the sites of the two murders, but makes no comment on the *religio* the settings ought to inspire.³⁴

With this structure, Tacitus also creates an alternating pattern of virtue and vice, of good examples and bad, that is absent from Plutarch.

33 Fabia 1893.30 believes that Tacitus's version is correct. Townend 1964.358–59 argues that Tacitus, in order to isolate Galba at his death, as Suetonius does, has shifted Sempronius Densus from Galba to Piso while retaining the idea that Sempronius was the only worthy person at the scene. Chilver 1979.100–02 believes Tacitus had more than one source before him. See also Damon 2003.186. Morgan 1993b.289 rightly observes that: "Densus is so positioned as to provide Tacitus with an alternation of brave and cowardly deaths."

34 According to Scott 1968.57–58, Tacitus wants the reader to see Galba's death at the Lacus Curtius as a *devotio*. But see Sage 1990.944.

Galba's futile if honorable death is juxtaposed with Vinus's dishonorable one. Sempronius Densus's brave defense of Piso follows. Piso is then killed by a soldier who had been given citizenship by Galba (1.43.2). The concepts of *fides*, *amicitia*, *cura rei publicae* and their opposites all pass in review.³⁵

In the last section of the Galban narrative (1.44–49), Tacitus recounts the first acts of Otho's reign (44–47) and closes with the obituaries of Piso, Vinus, and Galba (48–49).³⁶ Tacitus apparently follows the common source closely, to judge by Plutarch, but his changes and amplifications all serve to enhance his picture of the inversion of values, especially of *fides* and *amicitia*. This theme, vital to ancient thinking on civil strife since Thucydides, is first sounded by Tacitus in Otho's attack on Galba in his speech to the praetorians (1.37.4):

quae usquam provincia, quae castra sunt nisi cruenta et maculata aut, ut ipse praedicat, emendata et correcta? nam quae alii scelera, hic remedia vocat, dum falsis nominibus severitatem pro saevitia, parsimoniam pro avaritia, supplicia et contumelias vestras disciplinam appellat.

What province anywhere, what camp is not bloody and polluted or, as he himself declares, “reformed and corrected”? For what others call crimes, he calls remedies, while he falsely calls savagery “strictness,” avarice “frugality” and your punishments and insults “discipline.”³⁷

A closer examination of Otho's charges and the language he uses to make them shows that he, not Galba, is the perverter of language and values. Of all Otho's accusations against the emperor, only the charge of cruelty is borne out by Tacitus's own narrative. Tacitus is particularly distressed by the

35 Cf. Morgan 1993b.290: “It would be ill-advised to think fortuitous this sequence of determined loyalty, spontaneous kindness, deliberate ingratitude and precipitate treason.” For other examples of Tacitus's artful arrangement of narrative blocks, see Martin and Woodman 1989.17–18 and Ginsburg 1981.

36 Wille 1983.326 keeps 1.47 as an isolated chapter. In fact, it responds thematically to 1.44 and should be regarded as rounding off a section, as Seyfarth 1933.47–48 saw.

37 While Heubner 1963.87 cites many Latin passages on this theme, Chilver 1979.97 adds that all earlier Latin authors were surely conscious of Thucydides 3.82.4.

slaughter of the unarmed *classarii* on the outskirts of Rome (1.6.2, 31.2, 87.1). The other charges do not hold up (see Keitel 1991.2778–80).

In the Galban narrative itself, the word *saevitia* appears once more, to describe the praetorians' barbarous mutilation of Galba's corpse (1.41.3): "ceteri crura brachiaque (nam pectus tegebatur) foede laniavere; pleraque vulnera feritate et saevitia trunco iam corpori adiecta" ("The rest foully mutilated his arms and legs [his breast was protected]. More wounds were inflicted with savage brutality on the already headless corpse").³⁸ Ironically, Galba does exercise *severitas* over his troops and this, according to the historian, contributes to his undoing. The praetorians chafed at his discipline after years of slackness under Nero (1.5.2): "laudata olim et militari fama celebrata severitas eius angebat aspernantes veterem disciplinam atque ita quattuordecim annis a Nerone adsuefactos, ut haud minus vitia principum amarent quam olim virtutes verebantur" ("His strictness, once praised and much talked about among the troops, now irked them. They rejected the old discipline and had been so conditioned by fourteen years under Nero that they loved the vices of the emperors no less than they once feared their virtues").³⁹ Tacitus states that Galba might have won over the praetorians when he adopted Piso with even a token payment of the promised donative (1.18.3): "constat potuisse conciliari animos quantulumcumque parci senis liberalitate: nocuit antiquus rigor et nimia severitas, cui iam pares non sumus" ("It is generally agreed that the stingy old man could have won over their minds with the slightest generosity; his old-fashioned rigor did harm and his excessive strictness, to which we are no longer equal"). Galba does not pervert traditional values, but, at times, adheres to them too closely for current morals.⁴⁰

Content and diction in nearby chapters refract the themes and diction of Otho's speech to show the reader this perversion of values in action. Not surprisingly, all groups in Rome are shown using such debased language. Tacitus twice uses the word *laetitia* to underline the perverse atmosphere in Rome after Galba's murder. Otho is especially delighted by the news of

38 Tacitus uses *feritas* only twice more, both times of non-Roman tribes (*Ger.* 43 and 46).

39 Galba's inconsistency is no less damaging. So at 1.5.2, Tacitus explains why Galba's claim that he did not buy his soldiers was *anceps* for him: "ne enim ad hanc formam cetera erant," "for other things were not up to this standard."

40 Suetonius is much more insistent on Galba's *saevitia*, already apparent during his provincial commands in Africa and Spain. For a comparison of this and other themes in Plutarch's and Suetonius's treatments of Galba, see Braun 1992.

Piso's death (1.44.1): "nullam caedem Otho maiore laetitia exceperisse, nullum caput tam insatiabilibus oculis perlustrasse dicitur" ("Otho is said to have learned of no slaughter with greater joy, to have scrutinized no head with such insatiable eyes").

Tacitus stresses this idea twice more in this chapter, first when he analyzes why Otho took such joy in the death of Piso (1.44.1):

seu tum primum levata omni sollicitudine mens vacare
gaudio coeperat, seu recordatio maiestatis in Galba, amicitiae
in Tito Vinio quamvis immitem animum imagine tristi
confuderat, Pisonis ut inimici et aemuli caede laetari ius
fasque credebat.

Perhaps, then, for the first time his mind was free for joy once all care had been lifted, or the recollection of his treason toward Galba, his friendship toward Vinus had troubled his spirit, however cruel. Yet he believed it just and right to rejoice in the slaughter of Piso as an enemy and rival.⁴¹

This section closes on the same note of perversity (1.47.1): "exacto per scelera die novissimum malorum fuit laetitia" ("The day had been spent in crime. The last of the evils was joy"). After the senate meeting, Otho walks through the Forum, which is still strewn with corpses. The common source must have expressed horror at this too, though the emphasis is different in Plutarch. He focuses on the perfidy of the senate, which bestows the titles "Augustus" and "Caesar" on Otho as the consuls lie unburied outside (Plut. *Galb.* 28.1), while Tacitus underlines the perversity of Otho.⁴²

41 The *prudentes* assess Octavian's behavior in similar language at *Annals* 1.10.3: "sane Cassii et Brutorum exitus paternis inimiciis datos, quamquam fas sit privata odia publicis utilitatibus remittere" ("To be sure, the deaths of Cassius and the Bruti could be conceded to paternal enmities, although it is right to sacrifice private feuds to the public good"). Ash 1999a.84–85 argues that Tacitus links Otho to Nero through the motif of gazing at the victim's head. Gazing at and abuse of the victim's head were well-established parts of the Roman repertoire of civil war perversions by A.D. 69. For the representation and significance of the abuse of Cicero's head, see Richlin 1999; for that of Pompey's head, see Eldred 2002.77–79.

42 Fabia 1893.36 believes Plutarch's version is the more probable, that Otho went to the Capitol the next morning, not on the evening of January 15, as Tacitus suggests but does

There follows the revolting scene when the soldiers parade the heads of the victims around the camp. Tacitus and Plutarch both report that many falsely claimed credit for the murder of Galba. Plutarch records that 120 *libelli* (Tacitus says more than 120) claiming a reward were later found by Vitellius, and their writers put to death (Plut. *Galb.* 27.5). But Tacitus elaborates on the soldiers' boasting to stress the perversion of values (1.44.2): "certatim ostentantibus cruentas manus qui occiderant, qui interfuerant, qui vere, qui falso ut pulchrum et memorabile facinus iactabant" ("Those who had killed, those who had been present, those who spoke the truth, those who lied, vied in displaying their bloody hands; they bragged of a beautiful and memorable deed"). The biographer limits his account to one man, Fabius Fabulus, who cut off Galba's head and put it on his spear at the urging of his friends that he not conceal his deed of valor (Plut. *Galb.* 27.3), and ran about with it like a bacchanal. This apparently does not take place in the praetorian camp. Tacitus, on the other hand, generalizes this scene and has the soldiers carry all the victims' heads around.⁴³ Tacitus stresses not the bloodthirsty exaltation of the possible murderer of Galba, but *all* the troops' violation of *fides* and *pietas* as they carry the heads "inter signa cohortium iuxta aquilam legionis," "among the standards of the cohorts and next to the eagle of the legion" (1.44.2). The violation of Roman norms is more pronounced, the troops' abandonment of their *fides* made more emphatic.⁴⁴ We saw a similar amplification by Tacitus of the collective perversion and guilt of the praetorians in the Arsacid simile (1.40.2). Tacitus juxtaposes this scene with Otho's celebration of Piso's death as *ius fasque*. Otho and his men are thus linked in their perverse values.

not state. Courbaud 1918.88 argues that Tacitus made the change for dramatic effect, to have Otho pass by the corpses in the Forum. Townend 1964.361 believes this detail came from Cluvius Rufus, though Tacitus omitted the evening sacrifice as improbable.

43 Suet. *Galb.* 20.2 also mentions Galba's head being abused in the camp, but quotes a different verbal insult. Ash 1997.200–201 argues that Plutarch uses the Bacchic simile to stress the collective madness of the military in the civil war. While Tacitus intensifies the scene in the camp and notes Otho's perverse joy, he holds in reserve the imagery of a Bacchanalia or Saturnalia for a civil war scene until the murder of Vitellius in Rome (3.83). That climactic passage does indeed show the "world out of bounds"; so Barton 1993.157.

44 Syme 1958.189 argues that Tacitus passed over the story of Fabius Fabulus holding Galba's bald head (Plut. *Galb.* 27.2) to avoid the "ugly detail," as he often does when describing personal appearance. Chilver 1979.101 thinks that Tacitus, having established the unbridled license permitted to the common soldier, is not interested in elaborating further. But Rhiannon Ash reminds me of Tacitus's description of the head of the pseudo-Nero (2.9.2).

Plutarch, on the other hand, puts the Bacchanal scene right after Galba's murder, before Otho learns of any of the deaths.⁴⁵

The degradation of *fides* and *amicitia* that Otho and the troops embody in 1.44 continues in the next chapter. The praetorians demand the death of Marius Celsus, whom Tacitus calls "Galbae usque in extremas res amicum fidumque," "friendly and loyal to Galba to the very end" (1.45.2). The historian claims that the troops hate his virtues as if they were vices (1.45.2): "industriæ eius innocentiaque qualis malis artibus infensi." The praetorians seemed to demand not only loot and slaughter, but the death of all the best men (1.45.2). Otho manages to forestall them by arresting Celsus on the pretext of saving him for worse punishments. Tacitus lays heavy emphasis on the inversion of morals in this scene, whereas Plutarch treats the episode more prosaically: the troops hate Celsus because he had urged them to defend Galba, and Otho saves Celsus by claiming he needs to question him further (Plut. *Galb.* 27.6).⁴⁶ Again, Tacitus juxtaposes events in a telling way. Celsus's near destruction on a charge of loyalty is placed between the disloyalty of Otho and the praetorians to Galba (1.44) and the appointment of two praetorian prefects, Plotius Firmus and Licinius Proculus, both suspected of having plotted against Galba earlier (1.46.1). We are meant to see how isolated an instance was the loyalty of Celsus.⁴⁷

In this final section of the Galban narrative, Tacitus repeats in a similar fashion the idea that *adulatio* and a disregard of the truth infect all classes of society. As at 1.29–35, Tacitus states this idea three times in a short span. Again, he takes the kernel of his presentation from the common source but amplifies it through duplication of scenes and attribution of motive. There is only one such scene at this point in Plutarch, the senate's loathsome haste to decree imperial honors for Otho on the day of Galba's murder (Plut. *Galb.* 28.1): "A senate was at once convened. And as if they were now other men, or had other gods to swear by, they united in swearing an oath to support Otho—an oath which he himself had sworn in support of Galba, but had not kept" (trans. B. Perrin).

45 Seyfarth 1933.25 observes the transposition. Note, too, that Plutarch does not depict Otho gloating over Piso's head, though he had asked the troops to bring it to him.

46 For Celsus as a possible source, see Chilver 1979.72.

47 Shotter 1978.199 and 1991.3323 rightly describes Celsus as the embodiment of those virtues of which Galba speaks to Piso at 1.15.4. Plass 1988.46–47 analyzes antithetical epigrams dealing with false language and values, those that describe evil masquerading as good, and their corollary "good treated as evil."

Tacitus retains this motif, but transposes it to a scene where the senators and people rush to the praetorian camp to embrace the new *princeps* (1.45.1):

alium crederes senatum, alium populum: ruere cuncti in castra, anteire proximos, certare cum praecurrentibus: increpare Galbam, laudare militum iudicium, exoculari Othonis manum: quantoque magis falsa erant quae fiebant, tanto plura facere.

You would think it another senate, another people: all rushed to the camp, they passed those closest to them, they vied with those before them; they reproached Galba, they praised the judgment of the soldiers, they kissed Otho's hand; the more false were the things done, the more they did them.⁴⁸

Through repeated themes and diction, Tacitus links this with the equally unflattering picture of the senate's behavior (1.47.1):

vocat senatum praetor urbanus, certant adulationibus ceteri magistratus, adcurrunt patres: decernitur Othoni tribunicia potestas et nomen Augusti et omnes principum honores, adnitentibus cunctis abolere convicia ac probra quae promisce haesisse animo eius nemo sensit.

The urban praetor summoned the senate. The other magistrates vied in flattery, the senators ran up; tribunician power and the name "Augustus" and all the honors of the emperor were voted to Otho, with all striving to efface their former insults and abuse. No one sensed that these, from many sources, had stuck in Otho's mind.

Tacitus began this portion of the narrative by describing the no-less-false behavior of the praetorians trying to curry favor with Otho in the camp

48 Burkart 1945.29 observes that, after the scene of upper-class *adulatio* over Otho's "death" (1.35), the reader will not be surprised by their behavior toward Otho after Galba's death.

(1.44.2, quoted above, p. 239). In each case, the participants vie for favor with Otho (*certatim*, *certare*, and *certant*). In two, people rush to do obeisance (*ruere* and *adcurrunt*). In each, asyndeton, combined with alliteration and tricola, convey the breathless haste of the participants.⁴⁹ Those involved in each episode are described as lying or acting hypocritically.⁵⁰

As Galba's rule draws to its close, Tacitus has repeatedly reminded the reader of the instability of the regime that replaces his, indeed of any regime that comes to power in this way. The historian alludes to the fall of Otho indirectly when he explains why the praetorians chose Flavius Sabinus as *praefectus urbi* (1.46.1): "iudicium Neronis secuti, sub quo eandem curam obtinuerat, plerisque Vespasianum fratrem in eo respicientibus" ("following Nero's decision, under whom he had held the same office, with many of them taking account of his brother, Vespasian"). The fickle *adulatio* of the crowd about to change sides has already been noted at 1.32. (above, p. 229). Tacitus prefaced the murders of Galba, Vinius, and Piso with a generality about the inevitable avenging of an emperor's death by a subsequent *princeps* (1.40.2, above p. 235). Likewise, Tacitus notes that Vitellius later rounded up and had killed all those who claimed a reward for Galba's murder (1.44.2):

plures quam centum viginti libellos praemium exposcentium ob aliquam notabilem illa die operam Vitellius postea invenit, omnesque conquiri et interfici iussit, non honore Galbae, sed tradito principibus more munimentum ad praesens, in posterum ultionem.

Vitellius afterward found more than 120 petitions from those demanding a reward for some noteworthy service that day, and he ordered all to be hunted down and put to death, not to honor Galba, but in the custom traditional for emperors, as a protection for the present and vengeance for the future.

Vitellius only punishes the killers of Galba to protect himself in the present and to ensure vengeance on his future killers, whose existence, couched in

49 Cf. Damon 256–57 in this volume on the impact of asyndeton at *Histories* 2.82.1–2.

50 Fabia 1893.34 believes that Plutarch conflated three incidents in the common source into one. Burkart 1945.24–35 notes that Tacitus in *Histories* 1 links the low motives of all groups in Rome, but she seldom discusses how he does this.

such a general statement, cannot be doubted.⁵¹ Neither of the generalities in 1.40.2 and 1.44.2 appears in Plutarch. Tacitus thus suggests with both economy and effectiveness the futility of civil strife and a seemingly endless cycle of violence that follows the apparent victory. What else can one expect once people abandon their traditional social obligations?

I hope I have demonstrated that Tacitus uses *sententiae*, especially those on *fides*, *amicitia*, *adulatio*, and self-interest, to structure his account of Galba's fall and Otho's rise. *Sententiae*, mostly likely added by Tacitus himself, are a crucial means by which the historian shapes the core of fact that he took from the common source to bring out the themes inherent in it. In so doing, Tacitus has not done violence to the received tradition. His means are simple, yet compelling. A key word, sometimes from the maxim, sometimes related to it, will signal the theme of a section and appear often in it, as do words for truth and falsity in 1.29–35. Tacitus amplifies in other ways as well. He has three scenes of adulation involving praetorians, senate, and people after Galba's death, while Plutarch has just one. He constructs the scene at the praetorian camp to link Otho and the troops in perverse and futile joy at their destruction of Galba and Piso. Tacitus's own hand is most likely also apparent in the Arsacid simile at 1.40, in the cause he adduces for the troops' anger at Marius Celsus (1.45), and in the position and interpretation of the simile of the crowd above the Forum as spectators at games (1.32). Finally, Tacitus uses telling collocations, such as his ordering of the murders of Galba, Vinus, and Piso, to underline the themes of the generalities.

As we have seen, Tacitus devotes a good deal more space to the feuds of Galba's friends and the treachery of Vinus than do the other ancient accounts. His whole narrative makes clear that these were only partially responsible for Galba's ruin, which was already well advanced by the time the *Histories* begins. The generalities of Galba's speech, as I have argued is true of all the speeches in Book 1, function also as warnings of what is to come in the later narrative.⁵² The brief reigns of Otho and Vitellius are plagued

51 Tacitus's own narrative does not entirely bear out this *sententia*. Vitellius had originally revolted from Galba, and he neither protected himself nor was avenged. No one avenged Otho, but Gaius, Nero, and Domitian each had an avenger. See Damon 2003.183 and 189.

52 Keitel 1991.2775–76. It is worth reiterating that we should not discount the sentiment because the speaker is ineffective in implementing it himself.

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by dissension and disloyalty, flattery and hypocrisy among their advisers and commanders. Trouble of the same sort is brewing among the Flavians as Antonius and Mucianus jockey for influence with the new emperor.

The revolt of Otho and the destruction of Galba, then, function very much as paradigms for the account of 69 as a whole. Fundamental themes, distilled in generalities, are set out very fully in nearly every block of the narrative. Tacitus continues this technique through his account of the entire civil war, but less intrusively. Like Thucydides in his analysis of stasis at Corcyra, Tacitus, having done it once, need only allude to those basic themes as the narrative progresses. Clearly, Tacitus aims at a broad portrayal of a whole society suffering from a breakdown of traditional loyalties and values. The ideas embodied here in maxims may well have looked beyond the civil war narrative to problems that arose in the Flavian principate as well (as Tacitus signals in the preface), and at the close of the *Histories*, to the breakdown of *fides* and *amicitia* in the reign of terror under Domitian and to his death at the hands of his own *amici* (Suet. *Dom.* 14.1).

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