A CORRESPONDENCE COURSE IN TYRANNY: THE *CRUENTAE LITTERAE* OF TIBERIUS

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Three of Pliny's letters to Tacitus offer material for history. The famous letters (6.16 and 6.20) on Pliny the Elder's death at Vesuvius both purport to respond to the historian's requests for information; both end with a self-deprecating reflection that their contents may not suit an epistle, let alone a history. Conversely, in 7.33, Pliny writes unprompted about his own courageous honesty during the prosecution of Baebius Massa, an anecdote which he hopes to see included in Tacitus's work. Pliny's letter is to supplement and enliven the material he acknowledges is available in the *acta*,[1] and the gem to catch Tacitus's eye is a quotation (*sic enim scripsit*) from a letter of Nerva (7.33.9). This snippet vouches for the story's credibility and spotlights Pliny as honoured correspondent of Good Emperors and as a traditionally exemplary subject for history (*exemplum . . . simile antiquis*); the letter also neatly records both event and imperial approval in Pliny's "autobiographical" collection.[2] All three letters testify to a symbiotic (if slightly uneasy) relationship between the two modes of commemoration.

Rhiannon Ash, in a recent discussion of the "common ground between the two genres" (2003.222), shows how Pliny transposes into his epistles some appealing topoi of contemporary historiography such as *exitus* stories; the always-versatile letter form has evolved into a medium for writing specific kinds of history outside the confines of a conventionally historiographical work. It seems worth asking, in turn, how a contemporary historian might deploy the epistolary genre. The incidents narrated in 6.16,

1 *Epist.* 7.33.3. On Tacitus's use of the *acta,* see Syme 1958.280–83, Martin 1981.201.
2 On Pliny's cultivation of his own standing in this letter, see Gibson 2003.242.

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6.20, and 7.33 do not survive in Tacitus's account, and the letters give no indication that Pliny expected Tacitus to quote them directly.[3] Nevertheless, in the light of Tacitus's apparent interest in epistolary material, this paper asks how letters (especially imperial letters) function as a component of (rather than a source for) Tacitean historical narrative. Pliny's tenth book, after all, could well have been published and available to Tacitus by the time he was writing the first hexad of the *Annals* (although its date of publication is famously uncertain), and might have suggested the special utility of the epistolary exchange as a mirror of an emperor's character and expertise.

Letters appear in historiography from Herodotus onwards, but even a cursory reading of the *Annals* reveals an unusually high proportion of letters in Tacitus's Tiberian narrative. Approximately seventy-six percent of the references to letters in the *Annals* fall in the Tiberian books; in the majority of cases, particularly in later books, the emperor is either author or addressee.[4] No surprise, one might say; during Tiberius's protracted absence from Rome, all communication with the ruler will naturally have been by letter; even when the ruler was present, Tacitus tells us, consultations were routinely conducted in writing.[5] Nevertheless, Tacitus's Tiberian narrative remains epistolographically dense to a degree which is unusual among other biographers and historians of Tiberius's regime and even within Tacitus's own oeuvre; this calls for interpretation.

This paper makes no claim to reconstruct a letter collection (Tiberius *ad familiares* or *ad senatum*).[6] Although some of *Augustus's* letters were

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3 On the face of it, epistolary material is too insignificant to be anything but a stagehand for the grand drama of history. Pliny worries in 6.20.20 that his story is unworthy *even of a letter*, while in 6.16.22, he explicitly offers the letter as source material to be plundered (*tu potissima excerpes*). Were Tacitus to write up the relatively minor incident of 7.33, it would acquire fame and stature ("haec . . . notiora clariora maiora tu facies," 7.33.10), but the only letter Pliny might hope he would mention is that of Nerva, not Pliny's own letter into which it is set.

4 As Martin 2001.17 points out, this epistolary habit becomes particularly characteristic of Book 6: "Communication between Capreae and Rome was by letter only and, despite frequent mention of letters between Tiberius and the senate, there are few instances where we are given any extended indication of their content or tone. In this sphere Tacitus's text requires careful study."

5 "Moris quippe tum erat quamquam praesentem scripto adire," 4.39.1.

6 On the authenticity of Tacitus's Tiberian letters, see the discussions of the exchange between Tiberius and Sejanus at 4.39ff. in Syme 1958.404, 1958.702, and Levick 1976.164–65 (with n. 86). Syme is satisfied that the letter to Sejanus was a Tacitean invention (based on careful study of authentic documents), while Levick essentially accepts the passage as a report of a genuine letter: "The second letter encapsulates words and phrases character-

known, and Suetonius quotes several (including many to or about Tiberius[7]) in his lives of both emperors, neither Tacitus nor Suetonius expect readers to seek out Tiberius's letters to verify historical or biographical narrative;[8] on the contrary, on one occasion when Tacitus quotes both a letter and a speech of Tiberius on the same subject, he informs his reader that the speech is still available, but remains silent about the survival of the letter (2.63.2–3).

It seems, however, that Tacitus has made a deliberate literary decision to depict his protagonist as a writer of letters and to punctuate and illustrate his Tiberian narrative with those letters—as he does with the speeches. Two passages will serve for initial illustration. At 1.7.5, he suggests that Tiberius's preference for letters over speeches is (even from the beginning, when his mother's letter calls him home) a matter of guileful temperament: Tiberius's decisiveness and commanding ease in the first letter to the army contrasts with his hesitancy of speech before the senate ("He sent a letter to the armies as though the principate were acquired—in no respect reluctant except when he spoke in the senate"). Tiberius is playing to two audiences: the army, over which he wishes to assert swift control (as *princeps* even before the fact), and the senate, whom his apparent hesitancy allows him to gauge without self-revelation.

That letters are particularly characteristic of Tiberius's regime in Tacitus's narrative is most explicitly (and controversially) signalled at 3.44.2–3. Tacitus reports that many rejoiced at the Gallic uprising of Sacrovir and Florus because they hated the current political situation and loathed the emperor who remained obsessed with informers' *libelli* even in a national emergency; they particularly welcomed the emergence of men "qui cruentas epistulas armis cohiberent":

> optumus quisque rei publicae cura maerebat: multi odio praesentium et cupidine mutationis suis quoque periculis

istic of Tiberius; either Tacitus so thoroughly understood his subject that consciously or unconsciously he could clothe an invented letter in language suitable for its purported author, or he faithfully preserved expressions actually found by him or his source in original documents" (Levick 1976.165).

7 E.g., Suet. *Aug*. 71.2–3, 76.2; *Tib*. 21.4–7, 51.1.

8 Suetonius quotes only one Tiberian letter (Suet. *Tib.* 67.1)—one which appears at greater length within a more complex narrative sequence at Tacitus *Ann*. 6.6.1. His accounts of several incidents also found in Tacitus eschew reference to the letters which are the jewels of the Tacitean narrative, such as Tiberius's epistolary response to the death of Livia (5.3.1; cf. Suet. *Tib*. 51.2). Velleius's Tiberian narrative also ignores letters.

> laetabantur increpabantque Tiberium quod in tanto rerum motu libellis accusatorum insumeret operam . . . extitisse tandem viros qui cruentas epistulas armis cohiberent. miseram pacem vel bello bene mutari.
>
> Every respectable Roman citizen deplored his country's difficulties. But many disliked the existing regime and hoped for change so greatly that they even welcomed danger for themselves. They criticized Tiberius for devoting attention to accusers' reports during so dangerous a rebellion. . . . Here, at last, are men to put a forcible stop to these bloodthirsty imperial letters—and even war is a welcome change from the miseries of peace![9]

Woodman and Martin (1996.342–43) rightly highlight the paradox of rebels curbing the establishment's bloodthirsty/bloodstained letters with arms, but, as Ronald Syme points out (1958.701), the phrase *cruentae litterae* is "out of place and season," since it seems inappropriate to the letters we have seen so far in the narrative; indeed, this passage has reversed the pattern of the early reign, when the threat of arms (i.e., the German mutiny) was contained by letters.[10] Although the first crime of the new regime, Agrippa Postumus's murder (1.6.1–3), is orchestrated by letter (probably, though not certainly, at Tiberius's instigation, says Tacitus), thereafter the letters of Books 1–3, although often aggressive, are not particularly sanguinary and do not immediately engender deaths and suspicions like those of the later books.[11] The turning point will come when constraints imposed first by Livia and then by Sejanus fall away (4.41.2, 5.3.1), allowing the grim emperor's epistolary voice to be fully heard at last in Book 6.

So Tacitus's reference to *cruentae litterae* at 3.44.3 seems largely

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9 All translations from the *Annals* are those of Woodman 2004.

10 It is worth noticing that it is unclear who is responsible for these bloody letters: *cruentae litterae* is usually understood, as it is here in Woodman's translation, to refer to *Tiberius's* letters, but, in fact, the phrase is ambiguous and, in this context, could describe the informers' *libelli* of which Tiberius is an avid reader.

11 The letters in Book 1 from or to Tiberius, in particular, tend to be pacific: Drusus's brutal executions of the ringleaders of the mutiny at 1.29 happens at the same time as—and despite—a promised letter to Tiberius urging mercy, though Germanicus's letter to Caecina at 1.48 (which produces an unintended massacre among the soldiery) does raise the threat of indiscriminate executions. *Rumoured* letters tend to be more sinister (e.g., 1.6.1, 3.16.1).

proleptic,[12] but it acknowledges the bustling epistolary activities of Tacitus's protagonist in a world in which this genre (more normally associated with the furtherance of *amicitia*) becomes the medium of communication for informers and vengeful paranoiacs. Furthermore, this passage highlights just how unusual Tacitus's own narrative has been forced by its material to be: histories are supposed to be about wars and bloodshed, and letters in historical texts should serve (as in the *Histories*) only as conduits for information or for tactical instructions. Here history narrates—and partly consists of—epistolary bloodshed, as it were, during a horrifying peacetime. 3.44.3, then, expresses paradoxical relief at exchanging war (normal historical material) for the peacetime abnormalities of Tiberius's correspondence course in tyranny.

Those abnormalities are numerous and complex, and require discussion, but it seems worthwhile first to offer an annotated sketch of the developing "epistolary narrative" in each book of the Tiberian narrative.[13] My paper will then consider the degree to which the letters of Tiberius—the "internal epistolographer," as it were—confound normal expectations of the genre (particularly in their enactment of *amicitia*), and, finally, it will look more closely at Tiberius's epistolary persona, suggesting that Tacitus (drawing upon another strand of the epistolary genre) endows upon the emperor a satirist's voice in the mocking, invective-laden letters he attributes to him.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE TIBERIAN EPISTOLARY NARRATIVE

Books 1–2

1.5.3: Livia recalls Tiberius.
1.6.1–3: Sallustius's *codicilli* ordering Agrippa Postumus's murder.
1.7.5: Tiberius to the army *tamquam adepto principatu.*

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12 On Tacitus's habit of offering readers a preview of later material, see, e.g., O'Gorman 2000.79. On foreshadowing, see also Pagán 197–99 in this volume.

13 This account is intended to show the overall trend of the letters in each book. It is difficult, within the scope of this paper, to offer thorough discussion of those communications which must have been conducted by letter but for which Tacitus records no epistolary exchange, and I concentrate principally on letters which are explicitly marked as such; the question of Tacitus's criteria for selecting material to be treated with epistolary colour deserves further investigation.

1.25.3: Drusus reads out Tiberius's letter to the army in Germany.
1.29.1: Drusus promises to write to Tiberius if the army will be compliant.
1.36.3: Germanicus offers a settlement (*epistulae nomine principis*).
1.48.1–3: Germanicus's letter to Caecina prompts the slaughter of the mutineers.
1.53.3–5: Sempronius Gracchus ("ghostwriter" of Julia's earlier epistolary attack on Tiberius), writes to his wife before his death.
1.73.3: Tiberius to the senate on the sale of a statue of Augustus.
2.26.2: Tiberius's frequent letters summoning Germanicus home.
2.42.3: At Tiberius's instigation, Livia invites Archelaus to Rome.
2.59.2: Tiberius rebukes Germanicus for being in Egypt.
2.63.1–2: Tiberius's deceptively friendly exchange with Maroboduus.
2.65.4–5: Rhescuporis to Tiberius.
2.70.2: Germanicus to Piso renouncing his friendship and possibly (*addunt plerique*) ordering him to leave the province.
2.78.1: Piso to Tiberius on Germanicus's *luxuria.*
2.79.2: Sentius to Piso warning him off.
2.88.1: The Chatti leader's offer to assassinate Arminius is read out in the senate.

Letters define Tiberius's enactment of power right from the start, since the reign begins with assiduous epistolary courtship of the army in which the opening letter is written (prematurely) in the persona of *princeps* (1.7.5). Tacitus quickly directs the reader's interpretation by telling us that Tiberius's fear of Germanicus's popularity and authority among the legions prompted the early correspondence with the army (1.7.6).[14] The mutiny among the troops in Germany dominates most of the letters of Book 1 (those of Drusus and Germanicus, as well as of Tiberius), but these letters also lay foundations for the story of Germanicus which drives the letters of Book 2. The army letters, however, could not properly be described as

14 As Rhiannon Ash points out to me, letters are a particularly effective medium for Tiberius in competing against Germanicus because they overcome the problem of his lack of *comitas* (Germanicus's characteristic quality), at least in relation to one readership, namely the soldiers, for whom Tiberius declares a special affection (1.25). Tiberius is simply a better communicator in absence, a man for whom letters are the ideal medium rather than a poor substitute for presence.

cruentae;[15] they show a relatively unproblematic exercise of power by the supreme commander in the city over absent subjects and agents (which will be inverted in later books, as the absentee emperor begins to exercise his power in voluntary "exile" outside the city).

Book 2 contains two groups of letters. The smaller group contains dissimulating exchanges with foreign kings (Archelaus, Maroboduus, and Rhescuporis), one of which is explicitly contrasted with a more truthful speech in the senate (2.63.3).[16] The major sequence, however, dramatizes the hostile relationship between the emperor and his adopted son, Germanicus. 2.26.2–3 gives extended treatment of several letters (*crebris epistulis*) requiring Germanicus's return home after the campaign against Arminius. At 2.59.2, Tiberius rebukes Germanicus for visiting Alexandria without permission.[17] Most of the remaining letters of Book 2 trace the final stages of the quarrel between Piso and Germanicus, and Piso's attempt to re-establish his position after Germanicus's death (2.70.2, 2.78.1, 2.79.1–2), while further epistolary underpinnings of the Germanicus narrative will emerge at 3.16, where Tacitus reports the unidentified *libellus* in Piso's hands which friends thought had contained epistolary instructions from Tiberius about Germanicus.[18] This brings us full circle to the murky tale of written instructions sent to Agrippa Postumus's guards at 1.6.1–3: family enmities inform both the politics and the letters of the regime in its early stages.

Book 3

3.16.1–4: Piso's *libellus*; *codicilli* addressed to Tiberius on clemency for Piso's son.
3.32.1: Tiberius to the senate about Tacfarinas.
3.35.1: Tiberius suggests candidates for the governorship of Africa.

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15 The only letter which—through overzealous interpretation by its addressees—results in deaths is 1.48.3, from Germanicus to Caecina. On the mutiny in Germany and Caecina's actions, see Woodman 319–24 in this volume.

16 2.42.3, 63.1, 65.4–5. Contrast 2.88.1 (showing Tiberius's ostentatious rectitude when the Chatti leader offers to assassinate Arminius). On this incident, see also Ash 361–62 in this volume.

17 Tacitus does not explicitly state that this rebuke was (as it must have been) in letter form.

18 Cf. 2.43.4: "Certain people believed that secret instructions had been given to him by Tiberius."

3.47.1: Tiberius's belated letter to the senate on the Gallic rebellion.
3.47.4: Tiberius refuses an *ovatio*.
3.52.3–54.6: Tiberius on luxury.
3.56.1–4: Tiberius recommends Drusus for tribunician power.
3.59.2: Tiberius to the senate on honours for Drusus; Drusus to the senate.

At 3.31, Tiberius withdraws to Campania in what seems a "rehearsal" for his later life.[19] Perhaps in consequence, the book's letters are more varied and include a coolly accurate report of the campaign against the Gauls,[20] and instructions to appoint a commander against Tacfarinas in Africa (3.32.1, 3.35.1). The latter exchange gives a relatively simple example of the challenge of correctly interpreting Tiberius's letters. The emperor offers the senate an only superficially free choice between two candidates for proconsular command in Africa; fortunately for the senate and for the unsuitable candidate, the crucial clue is obvious (3.35.1–2):

> proximo senatus die Tiberius per litteras, castigatis oblique patribus quod cuncta curarum ad principem reicerent, M. Lepidum et Iunium Blaesum nominavit ex quis pro consule Africae legeretur. tum audita amborum verba, intentius excusante se Lepido . . . intellegereturque etiam quod silebat, avunculum esse Seiani Blaesum atque eo praevalidum.
>
> On the day of the next senate, Tiberius in a letter, after sidelong castigation of the fathers for referring every matter of concern to the *princeps*, named M. Lepidus and Junius Blaesus as those from whom the proconsul of Africa should be chosen. Then the words of both of them were heard, with Lepidus the more intent upon excusing himself . . . there was understood also something which he kept quiet: Blaesus was Sejanus's uncle and, for that reason, highly effective in terms of power.

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19 "Giving gradual consideration to a long and continuous absence," 3.31.2.

20 "He neither detracted from nor added to the truth," 3.47.1. See Woodman and Martin ad loc. for Tiberius as the "historian" of this war. Tiberius is, we should notice, in some sense also writing epistolary history.

Tacitus focuses on the letter's readers and the anxiety with which they respond to this letter. Nevertheless, the book is largely free of threatening letters and begins to showcase Tiberius's own grimly contemptuous viewpoint. In this book, for example, we find both Tiberius's famous apostrophe to the senate ("Ah! Men primed for slavery," 3.65.3) and also one of the best examples of his epistolary attempts to curb excesses of slavish flattery, a rebuke to the senate for an overblown proposal to inscribe in gold letters the decrees of the day on which Drusus received tribunician power (3.59.2). This letter, like others in which Tiberius turns on a fawning senate, is framed in the unambiguous terms (*nominatim arguens*) which the narrator so often leads his readers to believe uncharacteristic of the emperor, and suggests that we need to reread the persona of some of the letters (see below).[21] Letters in the latter part of the book, in particular, present Tiberius's recurrent attacks on excess and indulgence (including the inscribed gold letters proposed *contra patrium morem* at 3.59.2 and the *ovatio* of 3.47.4), and at 3.52.3–54.6, a lengthy epistolary jeremiad on luxury illustrates the emperor's austere outlook in most Sallustian terms.[22] Collectively, though, the letters convey the persona of a jaundiced observer of his own world at the very time when his absence from the city prevents him from actually *seeing* those whom he attacks—something he even expresses as an advantage in 3.53.1:

> ceteris forsitan in rebus . . . magis expediat me coram interrogari et dicere quid e re publica censeam: in hac relatione

21 Tacitus's Tiberius typically makes his points *oblique* (e.g., 3.35.1) or with *dissimulatio* (e.g., 2.26); the narrating historian reads over the shoulders of the internal readers, as it were, while tracing their interpretative struggles and forcing us to separate ourselves consciously from the confused or duped internal audiences. For avoidance of names in other circumstances, see, e.g., 4.70.4 (*nullo nominatim compellato*). Tiberius's tendency both to write cryptically, so that his audience must struggle to interpret and execute his wishes, and to use letters to attack and slander runs contrary not only to the practice of Pliny and even (to a lesser extent) of Cicero but also to some of what we have of epistolary theory. Iulius Victor, for example, forbids quarrels and complaints in letters ("iurgari numquam oportet, sed epistole minime," *Ars Rhetorica* 27). Ps.-Libanius's more realistic list of epistolary modes *does* include blame, insult, slander, mockery, and coded communication, but he also recommends clarity of expression (*de Forma Epistolari* 4). *Offensive* letters were not unusual—some of Antony's replies to Augustus's moralizing reprimands were trenchantly rude (Suet. *Aug*. 69.2). However, Tiberius's obscure, aggressive letters consistently defy expectations, and we may reasonably suppose that they would have startled a readership schooled by Cicero and Pliny (whose Book 10 puts a very different emperor on show).

22 On Tiberius's discreet behaviour when in Rome, see Levick 1976.276 n. 100.

> subtrahi oculos meos melius fuit, ne, denotantibus vobis ora ac metum singulorum qui pudendi luxus arguerentur, ipse etiam viderem eos ac velut deprenderem.
>
> In perhaps all other matters . . . it would be more expedient if I were to be present to be questioned and to say what I recommend in the interests of the state; but on this motion, it is better that my eyes be withdrawn, lest, as you mark the dread on the faces of those individuals who deserve criticism for their shameful luxuriousness, I myself should see them too and (as it were) apprehend them.

Several letters of this book rework the motif of absence—natural in letters, but especially apt for this emperor who had already spent so much of his life away from the city and was preparing for permanent withdrawal. So at 3.59.2, Drusus's letter to the senate accepting tribunician power is disastrously received because his sojourn in Campania recalls his father's aloofness: inappropriate absence makes the letter's *modestia* appear arrogance. Conversely, Tiberius's letter explaining his delayed departure for the Gallic front tries to disarm senatorial readers' disapproval of his *proximity* to Rome (3.47.2):

> simul causas cur non ipse, non Drusus profecti ad id bellum forent, adiunxit, magnitudinem imperii extollens, neque decorum principibus, si una alterave civitas turbet**omissa urbe, unde in omnia regimen. nunc quia non metu ducatur iturum ut praesentia spectaret componeretque.
>
> At the same time, he added reasons why neither he nor Drusus had set off for the war, emphasising the size of the empire; nor was it proper for *principes*, if only one or two communities were disruptive, to abandon the city whence came direction for the whole; but now, since dread was not a factor to influence him, he would go to examine the immediate situation and settle things down.

Dolabella's proposed *ovatio* for Tiberius's return from Campania combines to near-comic effect the emperor's actual proximity to the city

and the fiction of his personal responsibility for the campaign; inviting Tiberius to enter the city as a returning victor simply accords too much significance to his absence. Tiberius's reply is suitably scathing and self-aware, contrasting remembered triumphs dangerously won in youth with the sham acclaim for an old man returning from a country break (*peregrinationis suburbanae*) (3.47.4): "igitur secutae Caesaris litterae quibus se non tam vacuum gloria praedicabat ut post ferocissimas gentes perdomitas, tot receptos in iuventa aut spretos triumphos, iam senior peregrinationis suburbanae inane praemium peteret," "So there followed a letter from Caesar in which he proclaimed that, after taming the most defiant nations and accepting or rejecting so many triumphs in his youth, he was not now, as an elderly man, so devoid of glory that he requested an empty award for a suburban peregrination."

In Book 3, then, Tiberius's power is exercised in critical and contemptuous letters from outside Rome, many addressed to a senate worthy of his contempt.

Book 4

4.29.3:	Tiberius has long remembered Serenus's letter.
4.39.2–41.3:	Exchange between Sejanus and Tiberius.
4.69.3:	Four would-be consuls denounce Germanicus's friend Sabinus.
4.70.1:	Tiberius attacks Sabinus.
4.70.4:	Tiberius's letter of thanks for Sabinus's punishment also threatens Agrippina and Nero.

Book 4 revolves around Sejanus, not only as author or addressee in the central letters of the book (4.39–41), but even as arbiter of epistolary communication, once he resolves at 4.41.1–3 to sequester the emperor outside Rome—partly in order to control his correspondence.[23]

Book 4, though, also offers a further context for the increasing density of Tiberian letters. Tacitus's interest in letters is congruent with his programmatic digression at 4.32–33; here he contrasts the more glorious

23 Suetonius (*Tib*. 51.2) and Dio (57.12.6) attribute Tiberius's departure to his poor relationship with Livia; Tacitus alone portrays Sejanus's hold over the emperor in the light of the consequences of that departure for Tiberius's *correspondence* in particular.

material available to historians in an earlier age ("ingentia bella, expugnationes urbium, fusos captosque reges," "mighty wars, stormings of cities, routed and captured kings") with his own subject matter, the "savage orders, constant accusations, deceitful friendships [and] . . . ruin of innocents,"[24] all of which are dramatized in the letters of the later Tiberian books.

Tacitus also locates part of the utility of his work in the opportunity it offers to understand the mind of the ruling autocrat. He makes no explicit reference to letters here, but this genre (one supposedly peculiarly revealing of personality)[25] is ideally suited to his project. Moreover, his depiction of contemporary readers' efforts to "decode" them also has important interpretative consequences. The emphasis on the emperor's letters highlights the senators' slavish degeneration, pushing them further down a Sallustian scale of acceptable practice: they are not now men of action, nor even the writers who might respectably commemorate the men of action, but merely nervous readers and exegetes of one man's texts.[26] Tiberius's absence from the city is matched by the absence or disconnection of the senate from power and meaning, and the letters from Tiberius will increasingly map this separation.

Book 5

5.2.1–2: Tiberius explains his absence from his mother's funeral, restricts her honours, and attacks her friends.[27]

5.3.1–2: Tiberius attacks Agrippina and Nero.

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24 "Nos saeva iussa, continuas accusationes, fallaces amicitias, perniciem innocentium et easdem exitii causas coniungimus," 4.33.3.

25 Demetrius *On Style* 227: "In every other form of speech, it is possible to see the writer's character, but in none so clearly as in the letter" (trans. Innes).

26 On the relative status of making or writing history, see Sallust *Cat*. 3.1–2.

27 Another letter type which shows Tiberius operating in a mode quite alien to that of, e.g., Pliny's collection is the obituary letter. Pliny characteristically adopts a quasi-historical mode for *exitus* letters, but Tacitean history entirely recasts the link between death and epistles. Death in Pliny's world brings eulogy; Tacitus's imperial epistolographer responds with (at best) restrictions upon posthumous honours or (at worst) invective against surviving associates of the deceased. Tiberius's letters after Livia's death (5.2–4) do both these things. Where no such attacks ensue, Tacitus remarks upon it (e.g., 5.7.2). For posthumous epistolary attack, cf. also Piso's self-serving denunciation of Germanicus (2.78.1). In laudatory letters, on the other hand, praise tends to be muted, particularly in letters about his own family (e.g., 3.56.3 on Drusus, 6.15.1: *levi cum honore iuvenum*).

It seems likely that Book 5 was full of important letters: Tacitus may well, for example, have built the lost sections around the letter from Tiberius which finally destroyed Sejanus—a letter which could also conceivably have harked back to the exchange between Sejanus and Tiberius in Book 4.[28] Even the short surviving section contains two letters. Both close the Tiberius-Augusta narrative which opened with Livia's letter in Book 1 summoning Tiberius home to take up his rule;[29] the second, in particular, explicitly marks a new phase in the *dominatio* of Tiberius after Livia's death (5.3.1):[30]

> ceterum ex eo praerupta iam et urgens dominatio: nam incolumi Augusta erat adhuc perfugium, quia Tiberio inveteratum erga matrem obsequium neque Seianus audebat auctoritati parentis antire: tunc velut frenis exoluti proruperunt missaeque in Agrippinam ac Neronem litterae quas pridem adlatas et cohibitas ab Augusta credidit vulgus: haud enim multum post mortem eius recitatae sunt.
>
> Thenceforward it was sheer oppressive despotism. With Augusta safe and sound, there had still been a refuge, because Tiberius's compliance towards his mother was deep-rooted, and Sejanus would not dare to overrun her parental authority; but now, as if released from harness, they charged ahead, and a letter was sent against Agrippina and Nero which the public believed had been delivered previously and withheld by Augusta (it was not long after her death that it was read out).

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28 Tiberian letter: Dio 58.9–10, Juvenal 10.69–72: "quisnam / delator quibus indicibus, quo teste probavit? / 'nil horum; verbosa et grandis epistula venit / a Capreis' 'bene habet, nil plus interrogo.'"

29 That letters begin or end an episode seems natural: the few Neronian letters in Tacitus's narrative mark beginnings (or near-beginnings) and ends of two stories (14.6 and 14.10: invitation to Agrippina and a letter to the senate about her death; 14.22 and 14.59: a letter to Rubellius Plautus warning him to stay out of public life and a letter to the senate about the deaths of Sulla and Plautus).

30 See Syme 1958.1.405 on the chronology of the attacks.

Book 6

6.2.3–4: Tiberius chastises Togonius (for his response to an earlier Tiberian letter).
6.3.1–2: Tiberius attacks Junius Gallio, along with Sextus Paconianus.
6.5.1–6.2: Tiberius defends Cotta.
6.7.2: Cestius informs against Servaeus and Thermus (both berated in Tiberius's letter).
6.9.2: Tiberius's exchange with Vistilius (3 letters).
6.9.3: Tiberius's rescript taking over three *maiestas* cases.
6.12.1–3: Tiberius on the senate's acceptance of new Sibylline books.
6.15.1–3: Tiberius writes to the senate about his granddaughters' husbands and requests a guard inside the curia.
(6.25.2: Tiberius marks Agrippina's suicide with invective against her.)
6.27.3: Tiberius on senatorial reluctance to accept high military commands.
6.29.2: Tiberius to the senate after Labeo's suicide.
6.30.3: Gaetulicus is rumoured to have defended his friendship with Sejanus in a letter to Tiberius.
6.39.2: Tacitus remarks on the ease and speed of epistolary communication between Tiberius and the senate.

Book 6, the apogee of the epistolary narrative, contains some of the most vivid examples of Tiberius's letter types, including his administrative letters. Overall, even the hostile Tacitus's picture of Tiberius is one of a conscientious administrator, and administrative rescripts have been relatively clear and moderately expressed, but they become more alarming when rebuking undue arrogation of authority and expertise or breaches of Augustan regulations. At 1.73.3, for example, a letter to the consuls simply halts a foolish prosecution of someone who included a garden statue of Augustus in the sale of his house, but at 2.59.2, Tacitus distinguishes between Tiberius's mild criticism (*lenibus verbis*) of Germanicus's "Scipionic" dress and behaviour in Egypt and the much harsher reprimand (*acerrime increpuit*) for presuming to enter Egypt without permission, in defiance of Augustan provisions.

In this book, Gallio's implied criticism of Augustus's theatre seat-

ing schemes ("repperisse prorsus quod divus Augustus non providerit"), in aid of a bid for patronage among retired praetorians who had been excluded from them, makes him a victim of 6.3.2. The threatening overtones of 6.12.1–3 follow this pattern, since Tiberius is explicitly reiterating Augustus's regulations for the Sibylline books.[31] Here Tiberius reprimands Caninius Gallus, who successfully recommended new Sibylline prophecies to the senate, mildly criticising also (*modice increpans*) the tribune Quinctilianus, who, in youthful ignorance of proper procedure, brought them to Caninius's attention in the first place. The letter seems simply to correct improper procedure in no very sinister fashion, although the verb (*increpans*) has frightening connotations, even when modified as here (*modice*), as it commonly describes Tiberius's epistolary attacks in the *Annals*.[32] Nevertheless, Tiberius's attitude to his imperial inheritance and his epistolary handling of administrative matters appear in a very different light from his paranoid and vengeful management of friendship.

However, sinister letters predominate now: seven of the letters explicitly marked as letters threaten to some degree, and the letter sequences (including those letters *not* marked as such) constitute in themselves a narrative of deaths and dangers, as letter after letter arrives casting suspicion or demanding punishment.

The opening salvo is bloodless as Tiberius merely teases the senate for supporting Togonius's proposal for a senatorial guard (6.2.3–4), leaving Togonius unharmed. However, the more frightening excoriation of Junius Gallio for seeking inappropriate patronage among praetorians (6.3.2) is treated at length, and its attack pitched as if delivered in person ("violenter increpuit, velut coram rogitans," 6.3.1). At 6.7.2, Tiberius rails against two erstwhile friends of Sejanus despite their probity during the friendship; Tiberius appoints the informer C. Cestius as their prosecutor, and instructs him to reveal to the senate the letter of information he had sent to Tiberius (6.7.2). This epistolary fallout from past friendship with Sejanus is briefly interrupted by Terentius's courageous speech at 6.8.1–6, in which he defends his pursuit of Sejanus's goodwill to such good effect that his accusers are punished instead. The next chapter, however, returns to form, and records an epistolary exchange which ends in the suicide of Tiberius's correspondent,

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31 For competition with Augustus, see also 6.13.1, which explicitly measures Tiberius's success in bringing corn to the city against that of Augustus.

32 E.g., 2.59.2, 6.3.1, 6.7.2, 6.12.2; see also (for *increpo* used of an attack on Tiberius) 3.44.2.

Vistilius (6.9.2), and at 6.9.4, Scaurus is obliquely threatened in a letter adjourning further *maiestas* cases ("datis quibusdam in Scaurum tristibus notis," "though giving some ominous signals against Scaurus").

Two letters are distinctive because the narrator intrudes into the narrative to contradict Tiberius. At 6.25.2, Tiberius unjustly slanders Agrippina after her death—presumably in a letter to the senate (like the posthumous attack on Drusus Caesar in the previous chapter), though this is another instance in which Tacitus does not specify the medium of attack. 6.27.3 reports Tiberius's written complaint to the senate about the difficulty of finding willing candidates for provincial commands; Tacitus points out that Tiberius had overlooked the position of Lucius Arruntius, who was still barred from the governorship in Spain after ten years.

6.38–39 brings further deaths and accusations, and here the paradox of Tiberius's epistolary activity is made clear: Tiberius is, in fact, so near Rome during these events that not only can he practically see the bloodstained *domus* and the hands of the executioners, but rescripts can reach the consuls within a day (6.39.2): "haec Tiberius non mari, ut olim, divisus neque per longinquos nuntios accipiebat, sed urbem iuxta, eodem ut die vel noctis interiectu litteris consulum rescriberet, quasi aspiciens undantem per domos sanguinem aut manus carnificum," "These matters Tiberius learned, not cut off by the sea (as formerly) nor through long-distance messengers, but close to the city, so that on the very same day or after only a night's intermission, he could write back to the consuls' letters, while almost observing the gushing blood in the houses or the handiwork of the executioners."

Although physically absent, the emperor can still "see" the effects of his letters; the motif of absence, around which expressions of longing or of affectionate friendship might cluster in other letter writers, is grotesquely reworked in a sanguinary and fearful narrative. The book, which opened with the strikingly vivid attack on Gallio (*velut* coram *rogitans*), makes its last reference to letters emphasise Tiberius's epistolary proximity. Tiberius's letters, it seems, are now peculiarly effective in achieving one of the main aims of all letters: to bring the isolated, absent writer into the presence of his addressees.[33]

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33 In this respect, as in others, Book 6 shows a development from earlier books (contrast, e.g., 3.53.1 on Tiberius's relief that he can *not* see the targets of a letter or 3.59.4, when the imperial letter writer is characterised as "an elderly commander . . . oppressed by the sight of his citizens").

In this book, too, another digression (which picks up some of the anxiety of the key passage at 4.32–33 discussed above) acknowledges that Tacitus's choice of subject matter, and his sustained and perhaps repetitive treatment of that material, is unusual (6.7.5): "neque sum ignarus a plerisque scriptoribus omissa multorum pericula et poenas, dum copia fatiscunt aut quae ipsis nimia et maesta fuerant ne pari taedio lecturos adficerent verentur: nobis pleraque digna cognitu obvenere, quamquam ab aliis incelebrata," "Nor am I unaware that the perils and punishments of many men have been neglected by numerous writers, who tire of their plentifulness or are afraid that what was excessive and sorrowful to themselves might affect their readers with equal aversion; but I have come across matters worthy of recognition, though uncelebrated by others."

Tacitus here defines his project as somewhat atypical in the historiographical tradition, not only because it may fail to bring pleasure to the reader (an important part of historiography's mission) but also because of the very material—if "normal" history records famous events and unusual individuals, the *Annals* commemorate individuals who might otherwise go unremembered, buried in a mass grave, as it were, of tyranny's historiography. The details of Tacitean history are the perils and penalties suffered by civilian individuals (4.33.3); such anecdotal, detail-driven material is the natural stuff of epistolary narrative, as several of Pliny's letters demonstrate. Nevertheless, the types of letters in the historian's text are so significantly unlike their Plinian or Ciceronian counterparts as to convey the buckling of social structures normally braced by a bustling epistolary economy.

GENERIC INVERSION IN TIBERIUS'S LETTERS

In the collections of Cicero and Pliny, letters build *amicitia*, as correspondents foster each other's careers or literary work, send news, declare affection, or discuss personal or political associates. Even Pliny's letters to Trajan advertise good relations and proper communication between emperor and governor. The darker side of epistolary interaction is reserved for other genres: as Michael Trapp says (2003.41): "Tragedy, history, and the novel are full of instances of epistolary deceit and harm." Tacitus's narrative works to this agenda: letters in the first six books of the *Annals* tend not to maintain friendships but to report their severance: thus Germanicus to Piso at 2.70.2, or Tiberius on the end of his friendship with Labeo at 6.29.2: "sed Caesar missis ad senatum litteris disseruit morem fuisse maioribus, quotiens dirimerent amicitias, interdicere domo eumque finem gratiae ponere: id se

repetivisse in Labeone," "But Caesar, in a letter sent to the senate, said that whenever their ancestors broke off friendships, it had been their custom to debar a person from the house and, in that way, to put an end to their cordiality; that had been his own resort in Labeo's case."

The epistolary severance of friendship and its mortal consequences are further charted in the three letters of 6.9: barred from the emperor's society, Vistilius interrupts his own suicide to write for mercy, but resumes after an unrelenting reply (*immiti rescripto*).[34] Many of the most frightening letters of Book 6 target Sejanus's erstwhile friends; as I have suggested, the missing sections of Book 5 might have included the letter which heralded and required Sejanus's fall and, perhaps, another in response to his death. Letters themselves become harbingers of inevitable death, and the courage of a Gaetulicus or a Terentius in acknowledging a relationship with Sejanus is all the more startling against such a backdrop.

Relatively few private encounters with Tiberius feature in the text, and he seems to interact with close associates almost exclusively in begrudging, hate-filled letters; the rare exceptions can be shocking.[35] Moreover, distorted, misplaced, or dangerous friendship is a central theme of the Tiberian narrative; even such letters as defend friendship do so only for those with whom friendship is reprehensible. Cotta Messalinus, for example, a thoroughly unpleasant character whose record of cruel *sententiae* has laid him open to attack at the earliest opportunity, boasts offensively of the emperor's protection (6.5.1; cf. 5.3.2). His confidence is borne out by Tiberius's letter in his defence. The senate turned hearsay against their enemy, but the emperor's letter paradoxically urges a just interpretation of private speech (6.5.2): "nec multo post litterae adferuntur quibus in modum defensionis, repetito inter se atque Cottam amicitiae principio crebrisque eius officiis commemoratis, ne verba prave detorta neu convivalium fabularum simplicitas in crimen duceretur postulavit," "And not long afterward, a letter was delivered in which, in the manner of a defence, he rehearsed the beginning of his friendship with Cotta and recollected the latter's frequent services, demanding that perversely twisted words and the frankness of dinner party

34 For death delayed for letter writing, cf. Sempronius Gracchus, who "ghosted" a letter ostensibly from Julia, but who pauses before the death that letter brought him to write another, this time to his wife (1.53.5). In both cases, the writing process itself is intruded into the death scene.

35 E.g., his visit to the bedside of his friend Cocceius Nerva (6.26.1) or his assault upon Agrippina (4.52.3). For Tiberius favouring communication by intermediary over a personal meeting, cf., e.g., 2.28.2.

stories should not be scaled to the level of a crime." Only one chapter later, Tacitus demonstrates the futility or even dishonesty of the emperor's letter: ill-advised speech in any context was already routinely inviting ruin ("Whatever the subject of their talk, whether in the Forum or at a dinner party, men were censured," 6.7.3).[36]

The emperor's unprecedentedly close friendship with Sejanus, and his subsequent vengefulness, dominate his letters from Book 4 onwards.[37] The response to Sejanus's request to marry into the imperial family is both an imperial rescript and the closest he comes to a letter of personal friendship. Quoted directly and in extenso, it parades frankness,[38] even dwelling on the *invidia* surrounding the friendship ("In their resentment of you, they censure me too," 4.40.5). Sejanus, in alarm, is forced to deal directly with this issue ("In response, Sejanus no longer talked about marriage, but with a deeper dread, protested against the silent suspicions, the public rumors, the encroaching resentment," 4.41.1). *Invidia* may endanger his control of the emperor, and he decides, *sublatis inanibus*, to eschew self-advertisement by leaving the city and taking his emperor with him—but to increase his real power by controlling Tiberius's correspondence (4.41.2). To control the correspondence of this emperor, in particular, really could be to control his reign and its history. The Sejanus letters are thus associated in Tacitus's text with secrecy and control more than they are with the traditions of friendship.

So the letters of Tacitus's Tiberius abandon or invert many of what we regard as the normal functions of letters, and we need a different framework within which to interpret them. Tacitus has endowed Tiberius with a highly distinctive voice in a strange epistolary world in which imperial power is wielded in absence and by letter. I suggest that the key lies in the sardonic, aggressive, unhappy persona of the imperial epistolographer, who is not only "read" (by contemporaries and by us), but is himself a "reader" of those around him. His "readings" of his own world inform his letters, in which invective and satire are the dominant modes.

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36 To a modern reader, at least, that context makes Tiberius's famous epistolary cry of despair at 6.6 entirely understandable: where speech has become the most dangerous act of all, even the emperor has been reduced to helplessly searching for words.

37 For Tiberius's awareness that the relationship with Sejanus exceeds any of Augustus's friendships with advisers, see 4.40.6.

38 "Simplicius acturum (4.40.3) . . . atque ego haec pro amicitia non occultavi . . . quid intra animum volutaverim . . . omittam ad praesens referre; id tantum aperiam" (4.40.7).

READING TIBERIUS

Ellen O'Gorman shows (2000.78–105) the degree to which the figure of Tacitus's Tiberius both invites and baffles attempts to "read" him, while also himself operating as reader (and misreader) within the text. "Reading Tiberius" is quite literally what we, and the senate in the text, are invited to do, and part of the fascination of the narrative is in watching Tiberius's subjects trying to determine the meaning of the emperor's letters; misinterpretation, after all, may be fatal. The responses of separate groups of internal readers may differ. For example, Tiberius's letter at 5.3.1–2 attacking Agrippina and Nero is denounced as a fake by a populace unable to believe that the emperor could intend destruction of his own flesh and blood (a display of naiveté the reader, fortified by the narrator's hostile commentary throughout the narrative, is well able to evaluate): "simul populus effigies Agrippinae ac Neronis gerens circumsistit curiam faustisque in Caesarem ominibus falsas litteras et principe invito exitium domui eius intendi clamitat," "Simultaneously, the people, bearing likenesses of Agrippina and Nero, stood around the curia and, with propitious prophecies for Caesar, kept shouting that the letter was forged and that the *princeps* did not wish extermination to be aimed at his family" (5.4.2).

The senators, however, trust the letter's authenticity but fear its obscurity.[39] In this quandary, they turn to Junius Rusticus, whom they judge an expert reader of Tiberius's mind because of his privileged position as compiler of the *acta senatus*. He functions as interpreter in two senses: as a historian (or at least "recorder") and as a reader trusted by both sides who can "see into" (*introspicere*) Tiberius's mind. This quasi-epic "wise adviser," understanding that Tiberius's current intentions are indeed murderous but anticipating the old man's remorse, issues a warning about the mutability of history and hatred: "fuit in senatu Iunius Rusticus, componendis patrum actis delectus a Caesare eoque meditationes eius introspicere creditus . . . disserebatque brevibus momentis summa verti: posse quandoque Germanici fatum paenitentiae esse seni," "Now there was in the senate Junius Rusticus, chosen by Caesar to compile the fathers' deeds and thus credited with insight into his deliberations . . . He argued that the highest matters turned

39 "Tiberius, despite the ferocity of his invective, had left everything else ambiguous," 5.3.3.

on only the slightest movement: possibly in future the old man would regret Germanicus's fate" (5.4.1).

This expert "reader" of Tiberius offers the nuanced interpretation needed to avert the cruelty which would inevitably ensue upon the more fearful and literal reading which the senate might otherwise have made; for that day, at least, the threat to Agrippina and Germanicus's surviving family is lifted (5.4.2).

A narrative built with letters allows the historian to exploit them as a performative genre and to dramatize, in a highly specialised and unusual way, the responses of the internal audience to Tiberius's highly unconventional missives. Oral performance of letters, especially of a collection of letters, is relatively rarely mentioned in other literary contexts: they had no place in recitation rooms or on the stage, although, naturally, letters were (in real life) read out for many official purposes in the senate and elsewhere. However, in *Annals* 1–6, they often work like the speeches which are the more familiar inventions of historiography, and, indeed, Tacitus even veils the epistolarity of much of Tiberius's interaction with the senate: everything he "says" to the senate in Book 6, for example, must have been said by letter, but not every utterance is marked as a letter.[40] The effect is to allow us to read/hear Tiberius as he "speaks" to his addressees, but at the same time to watch, in his absence, the responses of the senatorial "readers" and their struggles to interpret these confusing, ambiguous dispatches. Their struggles and ours as external readers run in parallel, although the narrator's interventions commonly force us to separate ourselves consciously from the confused or duped internal audiences. "Misreading," however, is all too easy for internal and external readers alike: as Terentius warns: "Research into the emperor's hidden thoughts and secret designs is forbidden, hazardous, and not necessarily informative" (6.8.4).

Take, for example, contemporary readings of the letter in defence of Cotta Messalinus (6.5.1–6.2), a letter which excited attention (both Tacitus and Suetonius tell us) because it was thought to reveal the torments of Tiberius's soul (6.6; cf. Suet. *Tib*. 67.1):

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40 For communications which must have been epistolary but are not explicitly marked as such, see, e.g., 3.48.1, 6.9.4, 6.10.2, 6.13.1, 6.16.3, 6.19.1, 2, 6.23.1, 6.24.1, 6.25.1. Conversely, at 3.57.1, the senate treats an explicitly marked letter as an *oratio* (*praeceperant animis orationem patres*). Tacitus tends to strip letters of even basic epistolary formulae (on which see Trapp 2003.34–38); in speeches, however, rhetorical features, even simple ones like the vocative address to the *patres*, tend to be retained.

> insigne visum est earum Caesaris litterarum initium; nam his verbis exorsus est: "quid scribam vobis, patres conscripti, aut quo modo scribam aut quid omnino non scribam hoc tempore, di me deaeque peius perdant quam perire me cotidie sentio, si scio." adeo facinora atque flagitia sua ipsi quoque in supplicium verterant. neque frustra praestantissimus sapientiae firmare solitus est, si recludantur tyrannorum mentes, posse aspici laniatus et ictus, quando ut corpora verberibus, ita saevitia, libidine, malis consultis animus dilaceretur. quippe Tiberium non fortuna, non solitudines protegebant quin tormenta pectoris suasque ipse poenas fateretur.
>
> The start of that letter of Caesar's was regarded as distinctive, for he opened with these words: "If I know what to write to you, conscript fathers, or how to write, or what not to write at all at this time, may the gods and goddesses destroy me worse than the daily death I feel." So was it the case that his deeds and depravities had turned into reprisals for himself as well: not without reason did the most outstanding man of wisdom customarily affirm that, if the minds of tyrants could be opened up, mutilations and blows would be visible, since, just as bodies were mauled by lashings, so was the spirit by savagery, lust, and evil decisions. In Tiberius's case, neither his fortune nor his solitude protected him from admitting the tortures of his soul and his own punishments.

The opening of the letter, however, does not seem adequately to convey such putative torments (these could seem, indeed, entirely the product of the senate's nervous and Tacitus's Platonic imaginations). As an expression of impatience or despair, it is congruent with Cicero's more despondent letters (in which, for example, he struggles to find an appropriate mode in which to write the very letters themselves); it certainly does not automatically reveal a tyrant's agonies. Moreover, as Barbara Levick neatly demonstrates, the echoes of comic phrases and colloquial language in "di me deaeque peius perdant," combined with Tiberius's liking, plentifully attested elsewhere, for sardonic, allusive humour even in official communications should make us doubt with Levick whether the letter's opening "ought to

be taken as tragically as it usually is" (1978.97). A hostile observer's judgment dominates in both Tacitus and Suetonius, but we need to look again at this tyrant's persona.

The grim humour of some of Tiberius's correspondence, in which he likes to "mix mockery with seriousness" (6.2.4), consists partly in his recognition that any of his words, written or spoken, are liable to over- or misinterpretation by craven senators whose anxious misreadings are symptoms and proof of their slavishness. Even in Book 6, in which many letters fulfil the grisly promise of 3.44.2–3, Tiberius's first letter merely teases (without threatening) Togonius about an over-literal and over-enthusiastic reading of an earlier letter about a senatorial escort for the emperor.[41] Togonius is the butt of the joke (*per deridiculum auditur*, 6.2.2), Tiberius is right about the absurdity of the situation, and his letter plays itself out in a spoof of the proposed escort and the problems of selecting suitable participants. Tacitus has already conditioned his readers to share in the mockery by telling us (6.1.1) that Tiberius likes to tease his audience with the *possibility* of a return at any moment—so we know both that Tiberius will never need such a bodyguard and that any letters about a possible return should be taken with a pinch of salt (cf. 6.15.3). Togonius should have known what we know—he had enough information, after all, and he just needed to be a better reader of his emperor's warped epistolary humour.

So Tiberius is, in some respects, in control of his readership and able to "play" it as he wishes; as epistolographer, he is also, however, figured—by the very nature of his correspondence—as a nervous (even paranoid) reader of the *libelli*, *codicilli,* and *epistulae* of others, to which a large proportion of his own letters respond (e.g., 3.44.2, 6.39.2). Much of his correspondence is disturbing, indeed, precisely because of the degree to which it operates in reaction to that of others. This is entirely in keeping both with the emperor's role as author of rescripts and with the angry impotence he expresses in 6.6.1.

All this has important consequences for *our* reading of Tiberius. When Henry Furneaux wrote: "In one sense . . . all the works of Tacitus are satire," he was talking about Tacitus's "armoury of sharp-edged maxims," but satire is even more deeply embedded within the text: Tiberius's letters

41 "He had evidently believed the missive demanding one of the consuls as his bodyguard," 6.2.3.

(potentially, as Horace demonstrated, a naturally satirical medium) cast the Tacitean satire's target as an epistolary satirist in his own right, who mocks and scolds his craven contemporary readers. Vengeful attack motivated by the mixture of savage contempt and emotional impotence we see in Tiberius is typically satirical. In Tacitus's "monster-hating histories" (Freudenberg 2001.215), the monstrous protagonist is a master of irony and invective in his own right, far outstripping the Augustan epistolary satirist in the rage and contempt which fills his letters. As a letter writer, Tiberius is not this text's Pliny, and certainly not its Trajan, but he makes a convincing Juvenal.

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