

SHADOWS AND ASSASSINATIONS: FORMS OF TIME IN TACITUS AND APPIAN

VICTORIA E. PAGÁN

APRIL 3, 1968

Well, I don't know what will happen now; we've got some difficult days ahead. But it doesn't matter with me now, because I've been to the mountaintop. And I don't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over, and I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the promised land. And so I'm happy, tonight; I'm not worried about anything; I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.¹

This remarkable peroration of the last speech of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., delivered in Memphis, Tennessee, achieves added emotional and memorable effect because it eerily foreshadows his assassination. In this speech, delivered less than twenty-four hours before his death, King faces with courage and resolve a future sure to be fraught with dissension, unrest, and

1 Martin Luther King, Jr., "I've Been to the Mountaintop," in Carson and Shepard 2001.222–23. I have omitted the notations of the audience response. For a discussion of the text and title of this speech, see Sussman 2005.51 n. 1.

even that which King least desired, violence. Of course, no one knew that he would be dead within a day. His “Mountaintop” speech was addressed to an immediate cause, the sanitation workers’ strike in Memphis. Yet from our vantage point, the peroration casts a strong shadow across our perception of King’s assassination. Having heard this speech on the night of April 3, 1968, one might have been filled with a sense of hope, or at least courage. Reflecting on these words on the evening of April 4, 1968, one must have perceived a sense of foreboding and doom.

Assassination is a complicated phenomenon for many reasons. The unforeseen, violent murder of a public figure has a powerful hold on civic memory, imagination, and history. As an acute trauma, assassination is a sudden, singular event that falls outside the range of ordinary human experience. As a collective trauma, it is shared with others and has enduring effects. It evokes responses of fear and vulnerability that often devolve into volatile situations. Moreover, assassination effaces stable boundaries between chaos and order, public and private, sacred and profane. It disrupts social continuity either by uniting citizens in the face of pain and suffering or by fragmenting society. The acute collective trauma caused by assassination requires repair; the social disruption demands closure. According to Arthur Neal: “Restoring a sense of order and coherence becomes a necessary societal response to conditions of trauma” (1998.22). Assassination, a challenge to authority, forces a society, in its loss of confidence, to re-examine its moral conscience.

Sorting out the morality of an assassination so as to disentangle alternative moral interpretations is the historian’s job. In this article, I seek to understand how Tacitus and Appian accomplish this task. Since assassination is sudden and usually unanticipated, it marks a sharp, immediate change. The contemporaries who experience the event remain in the dark up until the moment of assassination; afterwards, they are stunned, confused, and helpless. So, for example, when Robert F. Kennedy delivered his remarks on the death of Martin Luther King, he immediately called for compassion and love in the face of bitterness and hatred. In spite of this clear injunction, nevertheless he admitted: “We will have difficult times; we’ve had difficult times in the past; we will have difficult times in the future. It is not the end of violence; it is not the end of lawlessness; it’s not the end of disorder.”²

2 Robert F. Kennedy, “On the Death of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.,” in Guthman and Allen 1993.357. The speech was delivered in Indianapolis, Indiana, on the evening of April 4, 1968.

Those who write about assassination long after the event are in a position to explain the kind of instability that Kennedy spoke of. The violence is mitigated by the assurances that the retrospective historian can give: the assassination was a unique, acute event and life continued, even if radically changed. My concern is the effect such retrospection has on the moral underpinnings of the historical narrative. In the temporal gap between the event and the representation of the event lies the potential for moral interpretations by the historian. Thus the passing of time plays a critical role in the formulation of a morality of assassination.

Starting with a theoretical discussion of time in narrative, I proceed to apply the concept of foreshadowing and its permutations to two specific accounts of assassination in ancient Rome: the death of Galba in Tacitus *Histories* 1.36–43 and the murder of Julius Caesar in Appian *Civil Wars* 2.111–17.³ By casting temporal shadows forward and back, the historian can drain events of their immediacy so that they seem either inevitable or obvious. Through an explicit acknowledgement of the outcome of events, as yet unknown to the protagonists within the narrative, both historian and audience can pass judgment on the ignorant Galba and Caesar. From this omniscient, retrospective vantage point, Tacitus and Appian exploit the ideological impact of each assassination. This sense of being wise after the fact is a regular feature of every historical narrative; however, assassination brings omniscience into sharp relief because the gulf between the protagonists' ignorance of the future and the historians' knowledge of the past is so profound. The perception of a feckless Galba or a capable Julius Caesar caught by surprise is thus created and perpetuated by the historian's careful manipulation of the past, the present, and the future. Finally, in spite of the obvious differences between the situations of King and the two Roman statesmen, I frame my argument with King's assassination because the "I've Been to the Mountaintop" speech so neatly illustrates the principle of backshadowing, while the remarks by Robert Kennedy express the immediate and desperate need for resolution and sense in the face of disruption and conflict.

The assassinations of Caesar and Galba are separated by 113 years,

3 For Damon 2003, *Hist.* 1.36–43 is a discrete narrative unit describing the coup d'état. In a structural analysis of Appian *B.C.* 2, Bucher 1997.56–57 shows that the conspiracy against Caesar (2.111–17) can be considered a distinct narrative unit within Book 2 that covers a relatively brief period of time (less than one month) in comparison to other units in the book.

and the differences between the representations of the two men in personality and in political standing are undeniable. Caesar was a vibrant, ambitious leader, a ruthless general, and a capable dictator; Galba was old, feckless, ineffectual, and incapable.⁴ The former was the victim of a senatorial conspiracy, the latter the victim of a military coup d'état. However, they were both consuls, both leaders of armies. Caesar was the founder of the successful Julio-Claudian dynasty, Galba, as founder of an aborted dynasty, was the first emperor who was related in no degree to the house of the Caesars (cf. *Hist.* 1.16.1, Suet. *Galba* 2.1). Both assassinations initiated periods of uncertainty, when the course of events and their results were not yet clear; both ushered in a period of civil war.

While Tacitus and Appian both treat assassination, they are, of course, radically different authors in many other ways. The Roman Tacitus was intimately acquainted with Roman politics, writing in Latin for a senatorial audience; his work proceeded in the ancient tradition of annalistic history (see Ginsburg 1981). Appian, on the other hand, was an Alexandrian Greek, less familiar with the intricacies of Roman government.⁵ He organized material geographically and ethnically, according to the nations conquered, and not according to the rigid annalistic formula employed since the inception of Roman historiography. Although his writing betrays an admiration for the Romans, nevertheless he cannot escape his position as an outsider. He thereby provides the perspective of history from the standpoint of a sophisticated, assimilated provincial.

Despite these differences, Appian and Tacitus share important characteristics. Both are temporally removed from their subject matter; neither were principal protagonists. Both locate the assassinations within a larger framework rather than constructing a self-contained narrative in the form of a monograph. Perhaps most importantly, both write long after the reign of Augustus had permanently changed the shape of Roman historiography. According to Dio: "Formerly, as we know, all matters were reported to the senate and to the people . . . but after this time, most things that happened

4 Such is the impression that Tacitus wishes to impart, as Rhiannon Ash points out to me. According to Suet. *Galb.* 6.3, in his youth Galba was able to direct military maneuvers, shield in hand, while running for twenty miles close beside the emperor's chariot. On Galba's political career, see Syme 1982. On Tacitus's reticence about certain aspects of Galba's past in order to shape his character, see Cole 1992.237–38.

5 E.g., Bucher 2000.438, esp. n. 70. See also the conclusion of Bucher 1995.410: Appian tended to oversimplify when he failed to understand the complex causes of events.

began to be kept secret and concealed” (53.19.2, 3), and Tacitus himself begins the *Histories* by drawing a line between those who wrote before Actium and those who wrote after: “After the conflict at Actium, and when it became essential for peace that all power should be centered in one man, these great intellects passed away” (*Hist.* 1.1). Both Appian and Tacitus composed their works after the principate was firmly established and the Julio-Claudian dynasty had died off. Therefore, any differences between them are not due to any traceable differences between republican and imperial history, or between contemporary and retrospective history. A comparison of these two assassination narratives clarifies what distinguished Tacitus and Appian from earlier historians.

TELLING TIME

In *Narrative and Freedom: The Shadows of Time*, Gary Morson begins by examining the familiar trope of foreshadowing, a device that imposes order on causality. Most importantly, “foreshadowing seems utterly to preclude the possibility of options” (Morson 1994.49). This trope, more than others, robs narrative of its sense of freedom. Characters have no choice, or if they do, it is merely illusory. In an analysis of nineteenth-century novels, Morson discerns a solution to this dilemma: authors use what he calls “sideshadowing,” in which “two or more alternative presents, the actual and the possible, are made simultaneously visible” (1994.118).

Sideshadowing opens up possibilities in narrative; what emerges is not one single linear narrative but a network of possible outcomes and conclusions.⁶ Sideshadowing allows us to see *what might have been*; this is the essential ingredient of the novels of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy. Thus sideshadowing allows for a degree of freedom from the constraints of time. Such open possibilities are precisely what history cannot tolerate; the genre demands that historians resist the temptation to narrate what might have been and instead reduce the narrative to a single strand of what indeed happened. Alternative narrative outcomes are disengaged.

Morson tells only one part of the story, though, and his work is best understood as an analogue to the simultaneously published work of Michael Bernstein, whose *Foregone Conclusions: Against Apocalyptic History* takes the final step in developing a theory of freedom and time by applying the

6 O’Gorman’s article in this volume articulates this phenomenon as “virtual history.”

concept of temporal shadowing to historical texts. Bernstein explores the concept of what he calls “backshadowing” (1994.16; emphasis in original): “Backshadowing is a kind of retroactive foreshadowing in which the shared knowledge of the outcome of a series of events by narrator and listener is used to judge the participants in those events *as though they too should have known what was to come.*”

Foreshadowing provides knowledge of future events to the reader but denies it to the characters; it is a trope of fiction. Sideshadowing opens up possibilities of future events to the reader; this is also a fictive move. Backshadowing, however, assumes prior knowledge of the outcome of events and couples this knowledge with a moral judgment of the characters and their ignorance. Backshadowing is the essential characteristic of history, in which both author and reader know full well the singular outcome of events and, confident in this knowledge, either despise or pity the characters who stumble in the darkness of their ignorance toward foregone conclusions. By manipulating the narrative, by casting temporal shadows forward and back, the narrator can drain events of their immediacy so that they seem either inevitable, as in the case of foreshadowing, or obvious, as with backshadowing.

Characters in historical narratives are by no means free to make choices. The characters Tacitus and Appian depict have already made their choices. Yet to what extent do these writers create historical narratives in which the *reader* is free to imagine various outcomes?

My answer to this question is influenced by David Harvey’s discussion of the materialism of space and time in his study of postmodernity (1990.211–25). The progression of time from the past, things already experienced, to the present, to the future not yet experienced, seems natural and coincides with Aristotle’s beginning, middle, and end; however, an author does not always fashion the experience of time in a linear form, from past to present to future. In some descriptions of political revolutions, for example, the future takes precedence over all other time. Actions performed in the past are condemned for hindering the future, while actions performed in the present have value only if they contribute to the formation of the new order.

In the praise of a traditional society, on the other hand, the past takes precedence over all other time. Nothing in the present compares to the value of the past, when things were better, stronger, and more effective. The best future is one that replicates the past. Here we profit from Judith Ginsburg’s penetrating analysis of the complex and even tangled relationship

between the past and the present in Tacitus's *Annals*. "While the past is often invoked in the *Annals* as a standard against which to measure the present, it is not an absolute standard; nor is the view that the past was better than the present the only perspective we are given" (Ginsburg 1993.87). Such is the hallmark of Ginsburg's contribution to Tacitean studies: her ability to distill a complicated idea without sacrificing the particulars.

Harvey describes progress as the opposite of decadence; instead of getting worse, things only get better. Progress privileges the future, decadence validates the past; both explain change teleologically. Cyclical time, on the other hand, accentuates not change but continuity, and it is a regular feature of religious, mythical, and magical narratives (Harvey 1990.201–10). Whether an author chooses to represent time as teleological or cyclical (or both) proves interesting in its implications for our understanding of the ethics of assassination.

The assassinations of Galba and Caesar are important because their immediate futures are still significant, valuable, and open to change. Ethical responsibility resides in these moments, when survivors of the unexpected murder must answer for themselves—without any assurances that their answer is correct—the deliberative *quid faciam*, what am I to do? Our task is to observe the ways Tacitus and Appian treat these moments just before and just after the murder: for both, the void left by the assassinated leader is at once filled with uncertainty. However, we must not lose sight of the fact that, for Appian and Tacitus, these events are located in an inaccessible (and for Appian, distant) past. The uncertainty belonged to the protagonists, not the historians; it was contemporary, not retrospective. Still these two assassinations allow us to glimpse the articulation of such uncertainty.⁷ The Romans of the time did not know what the assassinations of Caesar and Galba would bring, whether restoration of the republic, installation of yet another autocrat, or unprecedented *res novae*, revolution. Our concern is the degree to which Tacitus and Appian articulate this uncertainty and the effects those expressions—and suppressions—of uncertainty have on our interpretation of the past.

7 Consider, too, the murder of Caligula; in his narrative, Josephus stresses instability and uncertainty, as well as Claudius's attempts to efface that uncertainty: Josephus *Jewish Antiquities* 19.1–273; see Wiseman 1991 and Pagán 2004.93–108.

GALBA

Time is at the forefront of the turbulent year 69. Cynthia Damon notes that nine events in *Histories* 1 are dated precisely, more than in any other book of Tacitus (Damon 2003.126 ad 12.1). Repeated references to omens and prodigies foreshadow events, allowing the reader an omniscient vantage point from which to judge the hapless Galba, unaware of his own future. Perhaps the greatest impression that *Histories* 1 leaves on the reader is the pervasive sense of uncertainty that surrounded the events of the year; however, Tacitus mitigates the fear caused by political instability by portraying Galba in terms of an epic past so as to lend the narrative at least a generic stability. The uncertainty of the content contrasts with its sure-footed form and gives the account of the assassination of Galba the palpable tension that distinguishes it as one of Tacitus's finest moments.

Like any good annalistic history, the first sentence of the *Histories* states the names of the eponymous consuls who took office on January 1, 69: "initium mihi operis Seruius Galba iterum Titus Vinus consules erunt."⁸ Church and Brodribb translate: "I begin my work with the time when Servius Galba was consul for the second time with Titus Vinus for his colleague" (Hadas 1942.419). Thomas Cole (1992.231) and Cynthia Damon (2003.78 ad loc.) both note that Tacitus echoes the beginning of Sallust's *Histories*; however, Tacitus's use of the future tense *erunt* is novel. To preserve the original Latin, I suggest translating: "When my work begins, Servius Galba for the second time and Titus Vinus *will be (erunt)* consuls." What is the effect of the future tense? As a literary trope, *erunt* lends a sense of immediacy and vividness to the narrative; the consulship of Galba and Vinus and the dreadful year 69 will be recreated before your very eyes. Furthermore, with the very first conjugated verb, Tacitus announces that he is about to digress before beginning the work proper, as if to say, "By the time I get around to the beginning of this work, Galba and Vinus will be consuls."

It is impossible to pinpoint Tacitus's reason(s) for beginning with the future tense; however, the effects are manifold. If, according to Harvey (1990.239), temporal expressions are never neutral in their ideological import, then *erunt* bears closer examination. The future tense seems to fly in the face of the very purpose of history: to relate the past. Revolution is

8 For the text of the *Histories*, I use Damon 2003. Translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

about the future. It calls for change and for a complete break with all that went before. History, on the other hand, is about the past. It seeks to assert causality so as to create continuity with all that went before. *Erunt* produces a tension between past and future, between the traditional form of history writing that demands the past tense and the revolutionary content of the work at hand that privileges the future.

The next sentence reckons the date from the founding of the city: “nam post conditam urbem octingentos et uiginti prioris aevi annos,” “For of the former age, the 820 years since the founding of the city. . . .” This temporal duplication at the beginning of the *Histories* serves several purposes. Both methods of dating underscore the cyclical nature of time in Roman society; change is subsumed by continuity and contingency is diminished. Not even the Augustan revolution stopped the tradition that eponymous consuls give their names to the years; by reckoning the date even further back to the founding of the city (à la Livy), Tacitus accentuates the perpetuity of Roman time and emphasizes the disjuncture between the year 69 and what occurred before. Furthermore, Tacitus repeats the names of the consuls at 1.11.3, “Seruius Galba iterum Titus Vinius consules.” *Iterum* indeed: this is the second mention of Galba’s second consulship. The sense of repetition is inescapable.

Furthermore, with the over-determined reference to time in the first sentences of the *Histories*, Tacitus can emphasize the singularity of the violence of the year 69, even though civil disruption began the year before, as he is forced to admit in paragraph 52. The repetition of the opening date further consolidates the events of the year 69 into one narrative piece. A similar strategy is at work in Tacitus’s narrative of the Pisonian conspiracy, the aborted attempt on Nero’s life in 65. At *Annals* 15.48.1, Tacitus begins his account of the conspiracy by naming the consuls: “ineunt deinde consulatum Silius Nerva et Atticus Vestinus,” “Then Silius Nerva and Atticus Vestinus entered the consulship”; in the next paragraph, he begins again (15.49.1): *initium coniurationi*, “the beginning for the conspiracy.” It is no coincidence that Tacitus resorts to repeated beginnings when narrating conspiracy and assassination. The dual beginnings in both cases indicate the historian’s attempt to contain a subject matter so emotionally volatile.

The next eleven prefatory paragraphs of *Histories* 1 summarize the state of affairs at Rome and in the provinces. The narrative proper begins at 1.12.1: “paucis post kalendas Ianuarias diebus,” “a few days after the first of January.” A specific date, January 10, is finally given at 1.18.1: *quartum idus Ianuarias*, “the fourth day before the Ides of January,” when unusual

omens disturbed the day. Although Romans normally employed backward reckoning to formulate dates, at 1.26.1, Tacitus uses a rare expression, *postero iduum die*, “the day after the Ides,” that is, January 14 (Damon 2003.155 ad 26.1). The very next paragraph accentuates the anomaly, for January 15 is reckoned in the usual way (1.27.1): *octauo decimo kalendas Februarias*, “eighteen days before the Kalends of February.” Finally, Tacitus underscores the fickleness of the crowd by saying that “on the same day,” *eodem die* (1.32.1), the populace at one time demanded the destruction of Otho and at another raised a wholly different cry. The definitive temporal reference contrasts with the instability of the crowd.⁹

As Tacitus sets the stage for Otho’s reign, he must backtrack to a few days before December 1 of 68, and then to January 2. This retrograde motion of the narrative negates progress (see Bettini 1991.139). By setting the clock back to the year 68 in 1.52, Tacitus drains the immediacy from chapters 18–51. The mention of specific dates makes the assassination of Galba look like a digression. According to Cicero, digressions are regarded as a source of pleasure; the varieties of fortune and the vicissitudes of circumstance delight the reader.¹⁰ But digression intrudes upon the sequence of events and halts progress. Not until the end of the book is progress marked by the departure of Otho from the city on March 14.

Alongside the precise dates in *Histories* 1, Tacitus also recounts the omens of Galba’s impending doom. January 10 opens with signs from the heavens (1.18.1):¹¹

foedum imbris diem, tonitrua et fulgura et caelestes
minae ultra solitum turbauerant. obseruatum id antiquitus
comitiis dirumpendis non terruit Galbam quo minus in
castra pergeret, contemptorem talium ut fortuitorum seu
quae fato manent, quamvis significata non uitantur.

9 The last three dates (“sub ipsas superioris anni kalendas Decembres,” 1.52.1; *tertium nonas Ianuarias*, 1.57.1; and *pridie idus Martias*, 1.90.1) all occur after the assassination of Galba.

10 Cicero *de Oratore* 2.311: “digredi tamen ab eo quod proposueris atque agas, permouendorum animorum causa saepe utile est,” “To stir emotions, it is often useful to digress from what you have set out to do.” Cicero *de Inventione* 1.27: “digressio aliqua extra causam aut criminationis aut similitudinis aut delectationis . . . causa interponitur,” “Sometimes a digression beyond the topic is inserted for accusation, comparison, or sheer pleasure.” On digressions in Tacitus, see Woodman 1988.180–85.

11 See also Pomeroy 182–83 in this volume.

Thunder, lightning, and threatening skies disturbed beyond the ordinary the day gloomy with rain. Observation of this traditionally caused assemblies to be broken up, but it did not deter Galba from proceeding to the camp in as much as he either despised such things as being matters of chance or because those things that are fated cannot be avoided even if they are indicated.

Galba is given signs that he chooses to ignore; even Otho recognizes the storm as a bad sign for the adoption of Piso (1.38.1: *notabili tempestate . . . infaustam adoptionem*). A belief in omens ought to eliminate a sense of responsibility; if a person receives and interprets a sign, then he can resign himself from any efforts to change the outcome of events. Since he cannot escape his fate, he need not take any responsibility to avoid an ineluctable future; however, Tacitus says that Galba does not subscribe to prophecy and, in fact, he eschews it.

Tacitus admits that omens are not always heeded: "As for the hidden decrees of fate, the omens and the oracles that marked out Vespasian and his sons for imperial power, we believed (*credidimus*) them only after his success" (1.10.3). Later he describes astrologers as "distrusted by the powerful, deceitful to the hopeful, a class of men that, in our country, will always be both feared and retained" (1.22.1). Yet Otho was inclined to heed predictions, "with a desire of human nature for readily believing (*credendi*) the obscure" (1.22.3).¹² In part, I believe we are seeing in the Tacitean characters of Galba and Otho, a trope of characterization that casts the former as too quick to ignore omens and the latter as too quick to believe them. Both are victims of excess.

Again on January 15, Galba's sacrifices are ominous (1.27.1): "sacrificanti pro aede Apollinis Galbae haruspex Vmbricius tristia exta et instantes insidias ac domesticum hostem praedicat, audiente Othone (nam proximus astiterat) idque ut laetum e contrario et suis cogitationibus prosperum interpretante," "The haruspex Umbricius announces to Galba as he sacrifices before the temple of Apollo that the entrails look bad, plots are threatening, and an enemy lurks within his household; Otho heard (for he was standing nearby) and interpreted this as auspicious out of contrariness and favorable to his plans."

12 Haynes 2003 raises awareness of the ways that belief substitutes for reality in the *Histories*.

This time an intermediary interprets the sacrifice. Galba need not be responsible for understanding the omen; he need only respect the expertise of a professional. The *haruspex* sees the future that Galba foolishly ignores. Instead, Otho, for whom the signs were presumably not intended, hears and interprets the sacrifice as favorable to his designs and acts upon the omens. While Otho makes his way from the palace of Tiberius to the temple of Saturn where a scant twenty-three soldiers salute him as emperor, Galba is *ignarus interim*, still unaware (1.29.1). Given every sign by the weather and by the sacrifices, he stubbornly proceeds in ignorance of his own impending fate. Although his death is predetermined, Galba could have generated more sympathy and even respect if he had at least tried to avoid his fate. When an oracle predicts a given inevitable outcome, it does not necessarily specify the path leading to it; such is the principle on which the second half of the *Aeneid* is predicated. Although Juno accepts Aeneas's fate, nevertheless she continues to harass him.¹³ Unlike the epic goddess who at least seeks some control over destiny, Galba elicits scorn because of his unwillingness to elude fate. He walks straight into the death trap.

The final omen of *Histories* 1 is given long after the murder of Galba. Fabius Valens begins his march south from Germany with a fortuitous sign: an eagle set out before the army. Gwyn Morgan points out that Tacitus recalls Vergil and Ennius in his description of this omen. The soldiers anticipate their departure "instructi intentique signum profectionis exposcunt," "Arranged and attentive, they demanded the signal to march forth" (1.62.2). The phrase recalls Vergil's start of the boat race in *Aeneid* 5.137: *intenti exspectant signum*, "Attentive, they awaited the signal." Vergil had in mind, so Morgan argues, a passage in Ennius in which the people of Rome waited in eagerness to see whether Romulus or Remus would receive the decisive sign. "By referring back subtly to Vergil and Ennius," Morgan concludes, "it reminds the reader of the curse of fratricidal strife laid on the Romans and the suffering which must flow from that" (Morgan 1993c.328).

The Vergilian echo also adds another dimension to *Histories* 1.

13 *Aen.* 7.313–16: "non dabitur regnis, esto, prohibere Latinis, / atque immota manet fatis Lavinia coniunx; / at trahere atque moras tantis licet addere rebus, / at licet amborum populos excindere regum," "Let it be so, if it is not given to keep him from Latin kingdoms and Lavinia remains his wife unmoved by the fates. But it is permitted to drag things out and to add delays to such things, and it is permitted to demolish the people of both kingdoms." See Morson 1994.64.

The funeral games of *Aeneid* 5 establish a programmatic ethic of competition that governs the rest of the epic. When it is clear that Gyas will lose the boat race, he hurls his overly cautious helmsman Menoetes from the ship, “oblitus decorisque sui sociumque salutis,” “unmindful of his own dignity and the safety of his comrades” (5.174). When it is clear that Nisus will lose the footrace, he trips Salius so that at least his beloved Euryalus can dart ahead (5.327–38). Both Gyas and Nisus fail to demonstrate good sportsmanship. The boxing match is carefully refereed so as to ensure a fair fight: the contestants agree to fight bare fisted, since their gauntlets are so unequally crafted (5.420). Yet despite this attempt to make the contest equal, Aeneas must intervene to keep Dares from beating Entellus to death (5.461–67). With each successive competition, the Trojans gradually chip away at the definition of a “fair fight.” The Trojans emerge as sportsmen who punish their teammates when things go poorly, who are prepared to stoop to treachery to advance a teammate, and who fight to the death unless restrained by a third party. These are the ethics that accompany the Trojans to the battlefields of Latium.¹⁴ Thus in his allusion to *Aeneid* 5, Tacitus not only reminds the reader of the ever-present curse of civil war, but also the compromised ethics of such a contest.

On January 15, a mere twenty-three soldiers acclaim Otho their emperor and march upon the Forum. Galba’s advisors hold a council (1.32.2–34); having gained a following, Otho delivers a speech (1.37–38.2). Tacitus then sets the scene for Galba’s assassination (1.40.1):¹⁵

agebatur huc illuc Galba vario turbae fluctuantis impulsu,
completis undique basilicis ac templis, lugubri prospectu.
neque populi aut plebis ulla uox, sed attoniti uultus et
conversae ad omnia aures; non tumultus, non quies, quale
magni metus et magnae irae silentium est.

Galba was buffeted here and there by the shifting momentum of the wavering crowd; on all sides, halls and temples were filled, the view being a dismal one. Neither

14 For a discussion of funeral games as an imitation of combat, see Redfield 1994.204–10. Feldherr 2002 explores the themes of repetition and sacrifice in the boxing match.

15 On this scene of Galba’s death, see also Pomeroy 186–87 and Keitel 232–36 in this volume.

the people nor the crowd made a sound, but their faces were thunderstruck and their ears turned to catch every sound; there was neither turmoil nor repose, but the sort of silence of great fear and great anger.

The passive voice *agebatur* robs Galba of personal agency. The adverbs *huc illuc* emphasize the randomness of the action. The wave analogy (*fluctuantis*) likens the crowd to the sea.¹⁶ However, the meaning of the phrase *lugubri prospectu* is difficult to capture. Morgan believes it is a comment made in Tacitus's own voice; Tacitus points not to the indifference of the crowd but to its anticipation of the start of events (Morgan 1994a.237, 238). Hence narrative equilibrium is poised in the balance, and the crowd waits to see which way the tide will turn. Most uncharacteristically, the crowd listens rather than raises a shout. Neither turmoil nor repose: again, translators disagree on the rest of the sentence. What does the *quale* clause modify? G. E. F. Chilver restricts the *quale* clause and makes it a gloss on *quies* alone: "There was no silence of the kind associated with fear or deep anger" (1979.99). Richard Husband offers: "There was no commotion, there was not ordinary quiet, there was that silence which is characteristic of great fear and great passion" (1915.321). Church and Brodribb interpolate an adversative conjunction: "It was a scene neither of agitation nor of repose, but there reigned the silence of profound alarm and profound indignation" (Hadas 1942.442). Cynthia Damon cites a parallel from Xenophon's *Agésilas* that strengthens the argument that the *quale* clause "clarifies the paradox of *non tumultus, non quies*."¹⁷

I would not say that Tacitus clarifies; rather he gives the *impression* of clarifying his meaning. Tacitus proffers the two states of mind, *non tumultus, non quies*, using artfully balanced language, and then discards them both. Turmoil and repose are not clarified but dismissed because it is impossible to say which prevailed. In such an interpretive situation, according to Roland Barthes, "one no longer needs to choose, but only to endorse" (1972.153), hence the silence (*silentium*) that dissolves the dilemma and renders the uncertainty speechless—and thereby powerless.

Tacitus exercises rhetorical mastery over the uncertainties of assas-

16 As Damon 2003.182 (ad 40.1) points out, the analogy appears only here in Tacitus.

17 Damon 2003.182. Xen. *Agiselaus* 2.12: φωνὴ δὲ τις ἦν τοιαύτη οἶαν. On Xenophon, see also Morgan 1994a.238–39.

sination throughout the account and valorizes the instability of a world of civil war by means of epic diction. This principle is best demonstrated in the description of the corpse of Galba (1.41.3):

de percussore non satis constat: quidam Terentium euocatum, alii Laecanium, crebrior fama tradidit Camurium quintae decimae legionis militem impresso gladio iugulum eius hausisse. ceteri crura brachiaque (nam pectus tegebatur) foede laniauere; pleraque uulnera feritate et saeuitia trunco iam corpori adiecta.

About the murderer not enough is agreed upon: some say Terentius, a man selected out by his commander, others Laecanius, but the most prevalent rumor holds that Camurius, a soldier of the fifteenth legion gouged his throat by inserting his sword. The others foully hacked at the arms and legs (for his chest was protected); in their savagery and cruelty, several wounds were added to the body, now merely a trunk.

As in any good assassination, the details are controversial.¹⁸ Uncertainty hounds the historian who can only report alternatives so as to privilege the last with detail, and so with added credibility.¹⁹ First, the rumors are reported in indirect discourse, introduced by the statement, “not enough is agreed upon.” Terentius and Laecanius are dismissed; Camurius is identified by legion. In the indicative, and highly graphic, *laniauere*, Tacitus’s facts find solid ground. In the phrase “militem impresso gladio iugulum eius hausisse,” B. Walker finds diction reminiscent of lines from Seneca’s *Hercules Furens*, *Thyestes*, and *Oedipus*. The gory details of the assassination are written in terms that ironically cast the otherwise feckless Galba as what she calls a “tragic hero.”²⁰

18 Cf. *Ann.* 3.16: Tacitus cannot ascertain the details of the death of Piso; it is unclear whether he committed suicide or was assassinated. On the epistemological crisis of assassination, see Pagán 2004.112.

19 On the technique, see Wiseman 1993.141, 146: “The invention of circumstantial detail was a way to reach the truth.”

20 Walker 1976.115. On Plutarch’s crafting of Galba and Otho as tragic tyrants, see Keitel 1995.

Beyond diction, we might see in this dramatic color a hint of Tacitus's own philosophy of history. By casting the death of Galba as a tragedy, Tacitus can discharge the therapeutic duty of the historian. The gruesome scene put before the reader's eye serves as a catharsis that exorcises the residual fear that assassination creates. Indeed, assassination brings an inescapable sense of tragedy; in his remarks on the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., Robert Kennedy, seeking catharsis, invoked a chorus from the *Agamemnon*.²¹

In her study of armies and leaders in the *Histories*, Rhiannon Ash (1999a.80–83) comments on the significance of the last sentence of this passage (1.41.3), “*pleraque uulnera feritate et saevitia trunco iam corpori adiecta*,” “In their savagery and cruelty, several wounds were added to the body, now merely a trunk.” Through descriptive vocabulary, Tacitus associates Galba's death with other decapitated figures in Latin literature. In Lucan's *Bellum Civile* 1.685–86, a frenzied woman foresees the mutilated trunk of Pompey upon the distant shores of Egypt: “*hunc ego, flumine deformis truncus harena / qui iacet, agnosco*,” “Him I recognize, that disfigured trunk lying upon the river sands.” In turn, Lucan alludes to the mutilated trunk of Priam at *Aeneid* 2.557–58: “*iacet ingens litore truncus, / auulsumque umeris caput et sine nomine corpus*,” “He lies a mighty trunk upon the shore, the head torn from the shoulders, a nameless corpse.”

Many scholars have treated the intertextual relationship between Lucan and Vergil and the pervasive imagery of Pompey's mutilated corpse in Latin literature.²² Ash interrogates the intertextuality that links Galba with Pompey and Priam at the moment of their deaths to conclude that Tacitus's use of the Vergilian “filter” at this point “momentarily simplifies the moralism of the episode” (1999a.81). Furthermore, she argues that the intertextual references to Pompey and Priam force the reader to judge Galba at the moment of his death (1.41)—a moment more important than the sum of his life.

I agree and add to the discussion two further references in the

21 Guthman and Allen 1993.357: “My favorite poet was Aeschylus. He wrote: ‘In our sleep, pain which cannot forget falls drop by drop upon the heart, until, in our own despair, against our will, comes wisdom through the awful grace of God.’” For the tragic elements in “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop,” see Sussman 2005.

22 See Narducci 1973, Ahl 1976.184–85, Moles 1983, Feeney 1986, Bowie 1990, Hinds 1998.8–10, 100, Morgan 2000.52–55, Malamud 2003. On Priam in the *Aeneid*, see Sklenar 1990; on the *Punica*, see McGuire 1995.

Aeneid to decapitated trunks.²³ In Book 9, as Nisus and Euryalus ambush the Rutulians, Nisus slays, first, the three attendants, then the armor bearer and charioteer, finally, the lord Remus himself at 9.332–33: *truncumque reliquit / sanguine singultantem*, “He left the trunk gasping in its blood.” Alliteration and onomatopoeia distinguish the passage and heighten the gruesome effect. Vergil employs a similar image of a headless corpse in his description of Phegeus, a Trojan victim who flung himself in the path of Turnus’s chariot at 12.382: *caput truncumque reliquit harenae*, “He left the head and trunk upon the sand.” The unstoppable wheels of the chariot roll forward; the dismembered body is the result of a senseless attempt to oppose an inevitable doom. Similarly, the improvident Galba stands before the relentless forces of Otho, only to be left, head and trunk, “upon the sand.”

I argue that the epic ambience of *Histories* 1.41.3 enervates the impact of the assassination. First, the reference to the death of Pompey via Priam resolves the uncertainty that the assassination caused, because the reader is made to think of another famous Roman figure who suffered a similar fate. Rendered predictable, history is made to repeat itself. Secondly, the allusion to the death of Pompey and the possible allusion to the death of Phegeus confer on the entire situation a sense of hopelessness and futility. Galba’s death is a foregone conclusion, and foregone conclusions, by definition, do not allow for alternative explanations or interpretations.

The obituary of Galba seals the episode. Arthur Pomeroy calls Tacitus “the last great writer of death notices in the ancient world” (1991.224), and *Histories* 1.49 confirms such an assessment. Tacitus describes the burial of the body, head and trunk reunited, and then remarks on Galba’s longevity: he had survived the reigns of five emperors. In family, wealth, and even in character, Galba was fortunate. The details of his life are given: his time in Germany, Africa, and eastern Spain. Then the obituary closes with a *sententia* to which the historian would return: “omnium consensu capax imperii, nisi imperasset,” “By common consent, he would have been capable of empire, if only he had never been emperor” (1.49.4).²⁴ Patrick Sinclair argues that Tacitus uses *sententiae* to demonstrate his own mastery

23 On the symbolism of decapitation in the Roman literary tradition, see Ash 1997.196–200; on the ideological implications of decapitation in Roman politics and discourse, see Richlin 1999.

24 Tacitus returns to the theme of *capax imperii* at *Ann.* 1.13.2; see Syme 1970a.30–49, Pagán 2005. On *sententiae* in the *Histories*, see Damon 2003.15–16, 302–04.

over both his historical material and his readers; *sententiae* allow Tacitus to assert his rhetorical dominance and authority (1995.151, 180, 190–91). According to Paul Plass, the economy of structure that characterizes such a maxim helps “reinforce consciousness of the moral *disorder* often dealt with by the maxim . . . the reader is distanced from immediate historical reality for the purpose of larger moral and political judgment by the formal wit of Tacitus’ aphoristic style” (1988.96). Thus with a *sententia* that neatly rounds off the obituary, which neatly rounds off the life and (messy) death of Galba, all loose ends are tied. Narrative balance and equilibrium are restored to an otherwise distressing social and political upheaval.

In short, Tacitus recounts the death of Galba using a variety of rhetorical techniques that stabilize the story and give it artistic unity, coherence, and purpose. Over-determined markers of time keep the reader on track and show that the narrative can account for every moment leading to the murder. Omens that speak clearly to the reader point the blame for the assassination in the direction of an emperor who chose to ignore the signs. Dense ablative phrases and the absence of clear connectives force the reader to make sense of the juxtapositions of *tumultus* and *quies*. Tragic color elevates the episode to a grander and more awe inspiring status and allows the historian to administer a healing catharsis, while epic allusions stabilize the form, if not the content, of the narrative. Finally, the obituary serves as a last word, the last word of which, in turn, attempts to make sense of a senseless moment in time.

CAESAR

We come now to perhaps the most renowned event in Roman history, and certainly the most commemorated assassination of a Roman statesman in Western thought. By the time Appian (c. 95–165 C.E.) came to narrate the events surrounding the Ides of March 44 B.C.E., many writers had already covered the material in histories and biographies alike. The moral assessments of the assassination were by no means unanimous; according to Tacitus, some regarded the murder of Caesar as the worst crime, others as the best (*Ann.* 1.8.6). For Appian, there was no question but that the murder was a terrible crime, although he reserved his judgment of the deed until the obituary of Brutus (*B.C.* 4.134).

If Tacitus overemphasizes time in his narrative of the turbulent year 69, then Appian, in stark contrast, makes time stand still in his narrative of the Ides of March. Repeated delays in the progress of the con-

spiracy suspend the passing of time and give the impression that Caesar might actually escape his fate, even though the reader is assured from the outset that he did not.

The action of the conspirators is repeatedly impeded. At 2.112, we are told that Brutus and Cassius, praetors at the time, quarreled over who should hold the more prestigious post of urban praetor. Caesar mediated the dispute in favor of Brutus. Appian then comments on the preference Caesar habitually showed Brutus; it was thought (ἐνομιζέτο, 2.112) that Brutus was his son.²⁵ Then we are given a list of reasons why Brutus, so beloved by Caesar, would still choose to conspire against him. This list, which interrupts the action of the narrative, is, in turn, interrupted by evidence of the people's expectations of Brutus (*B.C.* 2.112):

ἀλλ' εἴτε ἀχάριστος ὢν ὁ Βροῦτος, εἴτε τὰ τῆς μητρὸς ἀμαρτήματα ἀγνοῶν ἢ ἀπιστῶν ἢ αἰδούμενος, εἴτε φιλελεύθερος ὢν ἄγαν καὶ τὴν πατρίδα προτιμῶν, εἴθ' ὅτι ἔκγονος ὢν Βρούτου τοῦ πάλαι τοὺς βασιλέας ἐξελάσαντος ἐρεθιζόμενος καὶ ὀνειδιζόμενος μάλιστα ἐς τοῦτο ὑπὸ τοῦ δήμου (πολλὰ γὰρ τοῖς ἀνδριάσι τοῦ πάλαι Βρούτου καὶ τῷ δικαστηρίῳ τοῦδε τοῦ Βρούτου τοιάδε ἐπεγράφετο λάθρᾳ· Βροῦτε δωροδοκεῖς; Βροῦτε νεκρὸς εἶ; ἢ ὠφελές γε νῦν περιεῖναι ἢ ἀνάξιά σου τὰ ἔκγονα ἢ οὐδ' ἔκγονος εἶ σὺ τοῦδε, ταῦτα καὶ τοιουτότροπα ἄλλα πολλὰ τὸν νεανίαν ἐξέκαυσεν ἐπὶ τὸ ἔργον ὡς ἑαυτοῦ προγονικόν.

But whether Brutus was thankless, or unaware of the faults of his mother, or doubtful, or ashamed, whether he loved freedom too much and esteemed the fatherland, or because he was sprung from the Brutus of old who expelled the kings, he was provoked and upbraided to this deed by the people (for many things were inscribed secretly on the statues of the Brutus of old and on the tribunal of this Brutus, such as, "Brutus, are you bribed?")

25 Caesar's paternity of Brutus was merely rumor; Caesar's celebrated affair with Servilia (in the mid 60s B.C.E.) took place long after the birth of Brutus (in 85). On the year of Brutus's birth, see Woodman 1983.173.

“Brutus, are you dead?” or “Even now you would help by being alive,” or “This offspring is not worthy of you,” or “You are not the offspring of this one”). These and many things of this kind incited the young man to a deed like that of his ancestor.

This extended discussion of Brutus’s relationship to Caesar and of his possible motives, both personal and public, is indicative of Appian’s abiding interest in character over politics.²⁶ If the task of the historian is to assign causality, it would seem that here Appian declines, in a sentence that offers no fewer than six alternative explanations, capped by the indefinite “these and many things of this kind.” Embedded in the final explanation is the evidence from the graffiti on the tribunal of Brutus and the statues of his ancestor, intended, no doubt, to strengthen the claim that of all the reasons by which Brutus was induced to act, it was his connection to his ancestor that moved him the most. Such privileging of the past as a standard against which to measure the present adds to the patriotic and even monarchal tone of Appian’s writing. An inherent tension persists, however, between the invocation of Lucius Junius Brutus as the quintessential legendary hero of bygone days and the fact that this same man was in his own right a revolutionary.

The next paragraph restores the sequence of events and returns the reader to the year 44, for we are told that “while the talk about the kingship was at its height, and just before there was to be a meeting of the senate, Cassius met Brutus” (2.113). At this point, Appian shifts the mode of presentation to *oratio recta*, from the narrator’s voice to the characters’ voices. Instead of descriptive revelation, Appian uses dramatic revelation and, perhaps, in this part of the story, he draws on a dramatic representation of the conspiracy.²⁷

The conversation exchanged between Brutus and Cassius, given in direct discourse, manifests and externalizes the conspirators’ inner secrets.

26 See Gowing 1990.165 on our impression of Cassius; also 1992.180. According to Swain 1996.250, Appian “also gives play to Roman virtues.”

27 For the hypothesis that the Roman historical tradition was created and perpetuated in dramatic performances, see Wiseman 1994.1–22, 1995.138–40, and 1998. It is not without its critics: Flower 1995.173–75 registers reservations with Wiseman 1994.1–22; Fantham 2000 cautions against Wiseman 1998. Cf. Woodman 1993 on the theatricality of Tacitus’s account of the Pisonian conspiracy.

We are given a glimpse of the private thoughts of both Cassius and Brutus, uniformly illuminated. Their conversation is situated temporally and spatially; it took place just before a meeting of the senate. Appian even includes a few gestures for vividness (2.113):

ἐμβαλὼν τὴν χεῖρα τῷ Βρούτῳ, τί ποιήσομεν, ἔφη, παρὰ τὸ βουλευτήριον, ἃν οἱ κόλακες τοῦ Καίσαρος γνώμην περὶ βασιλείας προθῶσι; καὶ ὁ Βρούτος οὐκ ἔφη παρέσεσθαι τῷ βουλευτηρίῳ. ἐπανερομένου δὲ τοῦ Κασσίου· τί δ' ἂν ἡμᾶς καλῶσιν ὡς στρατηγούς, τί ποιήσομεν, ὦ ἀγαθὲ Βρούτε; ἀμυνῶ τῇ πατρίδι, ἔφη, μέχρι θανάτου. καὶ ὁ Κασσιος αὐτὸν ἀσπασάμενος, τίνα δ', ἔφη, οὐ προσλήψῃ τῶν ἀρίστων οὕτω φρονῶν;

Thrusting his hand to Brutus, he said: "What shall we do at the senate house if the flatterers of Caesar propose a motion about monarchy?" And Brutus said he would not be present at the senate house. But Cassius asked again: "What shall we do if they summon us in our capacity as magistrates, good Brutus?" He said: "I will defend the fatherland to the point of death." And Cassius, saluting him, said: "Being so inclined, whom of the nobles will you not take to yourself as a partner?"

This conversation is not reported in any of the other sources. If it is not derived from some dramatic performance, it may well be the work of Appian himself.²⁸ Appian embellishes the meeting with details; Cassius took Brutus by the hand and embraced him. The shift of voice, from the narrator to the characters, forces the reader to shift his perception of authority in the text. Rather than simply repeat the content of the conversation, Appian lets the characters speak for themselves. The conspiracy is laid out for the reader: "Thus did they disclose to each other what they had been privately thinking about for a long time" (2.113). Brutus and Cassius conversed in unveiled language. Nothing was left to inference. The shift to dramatic mimesis is a highly effective means of revelation.

Immediately following this scene, Appian lists some of the other

28 Goldman 1988 argues that Appian was not a slave to his sources.

conspirators by name (2.113). He had already named the chief conspirators, Brutus, Cassius, and Decimus Brutus, at the beginning of the account (2.111). Therefore, the continuation of the list of conspirators effectively retards the progress of the narrative. He admits as much when he names Decimus Brutus a second time, “whom I have already mentioned” (2.113). He names Caecilius, Bucolianus, Rubrius Ruga, Quintus Ligarius, Marcus Spurius, Servilius Galba, Sextius Naso, Pontius Aquila, Gaius Casca, Trebonius, Tillius Cimber, and Minucius Basilus. Of all our sources for the assassination, Appian is the only one to identify more than four conspirators by name.²⁹ In contrast to his predecessors, his deliberate choice to list twelve names stalls the action of the conspiracy.³⁰

The day before the assassination, Caesar dined with Lepidus and Decimus Brutus (2.115). After the meal, they debated the best kind of death. Various opinions were given, but Caesar alone expressed preference for a sudden death, inadvertently foretelling his own demise. That night, his wife Calpurnia dreamed she saw him streaming with blood, and she begged him not to leave the house the next morning. When he offered sacrifice, there were many unfavorable signs. What is the effect of such concentrated omens? What does Appian gain by such overdrawn foreshadowing?

Through an explicit acknowledgement of the outcome of events, as yet unknown to the characters at the time, both narrator and reader can pass judgment on the characters. From this omniscient vantage point, the impact of the event is tamed. Thus Lepidus’s portentous symposium, Calpurnia’s prophetic dream, and Caesar’s unfavorable sacrifices deflate the surprise of the assassination while simultaneously ceding the moral high ground to the reader. We know better than the great Caesar himself what was about to happen.

As if to counter this inevitability, Appian proceeds with one of the most suspenseful moments in the entire narrative. The senators gathered at the Curia behind the theater of Pompey and awaited Caesar’s arrival. Rumors

29 Nicolaus of Damascus *Life of Augustus* 19 says more than eighty men conspired against Caesar, but names only Decimus, Cassius, Brutus; Suet. *Jul.* 80.4 says more than sixty men participated, but names only Decimus, Cassius, and Brutus; Livy *Per.* 116 names Brutus, Cassius, Decimus, and Trebonius as ringleaders; Vell. 2.56.3 calls Brutus and Cassius the leaders and mentions Decimus and Trebonius; Dio 44.14.3 declines to name them all for fear of becoming troublesome (ἵνα μὴ καὶ δι’ ὄχλου γένωμαι).

30 Bucher 2000.419 n. 27 lists similar passages of “pedantic completeness” in the *Roman History*.

spread of the bad omens and the possible dismissal of the senate, and the conspirators were worried. Just then, a certain person took Casca by the hand and said: "You kept the secret from me, although I am your friend, but Brutus has reported it to me" (2.115). There is no clue who this mysterious, informed person is, and immediately Casca is terrified that the conspiracy is at risk. If this stranger knows, then others must know too. Perhaps even Caesar himself knew about the plot and would punish the conspirators. It would seem that, at this moment, the conspiracy was about to collapse. Then the stranger continued to explain his cryptic remark: "Where shall you get the money to stand for the aedileship?" A sense of relief washed over Casca, and the reader is assured, yet again, of the inevitability of the outcome of events.

Suspense is further maintained when Appian reports that three people knew of the conspiracy and tried to warn Caesar (2.116). The first, an unnamed friend, ran to Caesar's house to inform him but found only Calpurnia. Ignorant of the details, the informant waited in vain for Caesar to return from the senate. The second informant was a friend named Artemidorus, who arrived at the senate too late. Finally, someone gave Caesar a telltale tablet, but Caesar did not read it in time; it was found in his hand after his death.³¹

The final moment of suspense occurred when Caesar finally reached the senate house and Popilius Laena engaged him in conversation at the entrance (2.116). The conspirators, unable to hear the conversation, feared that Popilius would betray them. But he did not, and, according to custom, Caesar proceeded to offer sacrifices at the entrance of the senate house. Again the auspices were bad. Repeated sacrifices yielded the same results. At last, Caesar entered in spite of the omens. At this point, the events follow in swift succession (2.117): Trebonius distracts Antony, while Cimber approaches Caesar. Casca strikes the first blow. As Caesar attempts to recover, another stabs him. Cassius attacks his face, Brutus his thigh, Bucolianus the back. Crying out, Caesar finally composes himself for death and falls at the foot of Pompey's statue. He had received twenty-three wounds.³²

31 This is the one detail that is recorded in every source except the epitome of Livy: Nic. Dam. 19, Vell. 2.57, Suet. *Jul.* 81.4, Plut. *Caes.* 65, Florus 2.13.94, Dio 44.18.

32 App. *B.C.* 2.117, Suet. *Jul.* 82, Liv. *Per.* 116, Florus 2.13.95, Zonaras 10.11.D, Eutropius 6.25, V. Max. 4.5.6, Plut. *Caes.* 66. (Dio 44.19.5 gives πολλοῖς τραύμασι; Nicolaus of Damascus 24 alone records thirty-five.) With so many sources specifying the number twenty-three, it is possible that this detail may have been transferred from the influential historiographical tradition of the paradigmatic assassination of Julius Caesar to the acclamation of Otho by twenty-three soldiers (*Hist.* 1.27.2).

In this reading of *Civil Wars* 2.111–17, we see several techniques by which Appian sustains the narrative of the conspiracy to assassinate Julius Caesar. Most importantly, the narrative displays a tension between progress and delay. The outcome of the conspiracy, stated at the beginning, is a foregone conclusion toward which the narrative strives, but artfully placed detours maintain suspense. Mention of the slogans on the statue of Brutus is incidental; inserted parenthetically, it interrupts the flow of the narrative, but it also serves to explain why Brutus undertook the murder. The names of the conspirators are repeated, and repetition negates progress. The constant threats of betrayal also retard the progress of the conspiracy and its inevitable conclusion. As Caesar's life hangs in the balance, time, so it seems, stands still.

In the immediate wake of the assassination, Rome plummeted into panic.³³ Some senators were wounded and others killed in the tumult; citizens and strangers fell victim to the inadvertent violence. Spectators fled the theater of Pompey; the markets were looted; citizens fortified their private homes (2.118). Antony as consul and Lepidus as master of the horse were technically the next in command; however, they were at a loss as to how to react. Appian records: "While pondering over the matter, they were strongly moved to avenge the death of Caesar, but they feared lest the senate should espouse the side of the murderers, and so they concluded to await events" (2.118).

The morality of assassination remains complicated. Although in the case of tyrannicide, the motive is praiseworthy, still, murder cannot be condoned. For example, there is no question as to the honorable motives of the assassins of the mad Caligula. Nevertheless, they were sentenced to death, not because they were wrong, but because assassins—even when right—are never to be trusted.³⁴ Therefore, even when honorable, assassination is paradoxically reprehensible. Hence the assassination of Julius Caesar was difficult to circumscribe; consensus remained at a distance. Tacitus writes more than a hundred years later: "When Caesar the dictator was killed, the crime seemed to some the worst, to others the best" (*Ann.* 1.8.6).

33 Cf. the description of Ovid, *Met.* 1.202–03: "attonitum tanto subitae terrore ruinae / humanum genus est totusque perhorruit orbis," "The human race was dazed with so great a fear of sudden ruin, and the whole world shuddered in horror."

34 Josephus *Jewish Antiquities* 19.268: "Their verdict was that the deed had been a splendid one; but they accused its perpetrator of disloyalty and thought it right to inflict punishment upon him as a deterrent for the future." Cf. Dio 60.3.4.

Furthermore, the irresistible tendency to reduce a considerable number of conspirators to just two men denies the potential of the senate for revolution and elides the fact that, although consistently paired, Brutus and Cassius had different, individual, motives.³⁵ Therefore, the tradition that valorized the assassins of Caesar was always subject to scrutiny.

Both assassinations, of Caesar and Galba, ushered in a period of civil war; both resulted in the foundation of an imperial dynasty, one formative, the other fleeting. These were the facts to which Tacitus and Appian were privy, the facts that eluded Antony and Otho. Appian and Tacitus turn these moments of political diffidence into edifying narratives filled with purpose and reason.

APRIL 4, 1968

In the wake of the murder of Martin Luther King, Jr., the nation experienced widespread disorder and violence (Neal 1998.148). Cities across the south were wracked by rioting: Nashville, Memphis, Greensboro, Raleigh, Winston-Salem, Durham, Charlotte, Jackson. In the north, Boston, Hartford, Chicago, and New York suffered arson and riots. Violence rushed to fill the vacuum left by King's death. From the vantage point of the twenty-first century, it is hard to resist seeing the "I've Been to the Mountaintop" speech as King's prophecy of his own death. And it is easy to say now that the aftermath of the assassination was not as bad as it seemed it would be then. Neighborhoods have been rebuilt, communities have healed, major cities still stand.

When someone or something is suddenly, unexpectedly, and, in the case of assassination, publicly and violently taken away, the impulse is to make sense of the acute collective trauma and to draw a moral conclusion that gives value to an otherwise senseless act of violence. In the moments just before and just after the assassinations of Galba and Caesar, it is possible to see the suppression, repression, and, finally, the expression of the traumatic event, however artistic or rhetorical that expression may be. Such representations provide an outlet for the emotions of fear and anxiety that the traumatic event causes. The distance provided by the passing of time gives survivors the strength to say: "Perhaps there was a reason." While

35 See Rawson 1986 on the dominant tradition, its varying nuances, and the differences in the judgments of Brutus versus Cassius. See also MacMullen 1966.1–45.

tradition consecrated the assassinations of Caesar and Galba, and historiography provided a forum for discourse about tyranny, civil war, and violence, for the Romans alive in March 44 and January 69, there were no assurances. The artistry of Tacitus and Appian captures—and mitigates—the hesitancy and fear of a people rocked by violent assassination, and makes manifest, however momentarily, the fragility of the human condition.³⁶

University of Florida

36 I am most fortunate to have had a share of Judy Ginsburg's steadfast kindness, intellectual inspiration, and pleasant company both at home and abroad: this humble tribute repays but a fraction of my debt to her.