

THEATRICALITY IN TACITUS'S *HISTORIES*

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But you know people get all emotional
And sometimes, man, they just don't act rational
They think they're just on TV.

Lou Reed, *Street Hassle*¹

The impossible quest for separation of the authentic and the facsimile, of perceived normal reaction and dramatic representation, is encapsulated in the above lyrics to one of Lou Reed's vignettes of New York City life. The listener is expected to assent to the proposition that a common response to a particularly shocking event is some form of attention-seeking activity that imitates what is shown on television. The excessive emotions on soap operas or the highlighting of the sensational in news clips comes immediately to mind. The speaker implies ("you know") that his hearer will agree with his analysis and adjudge such behavior as quite inappropriate in everyday life—hence the repetition of "just" to emphasize the major points of the argument. A non-emotive, less flamboyant reaction would appear to be a more socially responsible method of dealing with the problem that has arisen.

Yet as the listener who has become an eavesdropper on this bizarre conversation knows, the matter is by no means that simple. In the song, a guest at a party with his girlfriend finds that she has overdosed, and now the host is seeking to persuade him to not make a scene that might draw the attention of the police. Indeed, his advice is to move the body onto the street and leave it to be found as the apparent victim of an accident,

1 Lou Reed, "Street Hassle," from the album *Street Hassle*, © Arista Records (ARISTA SPART 1045) 1978.

substituting another equally sordid (“just another hit-and-run”) narrative for that of drug death. The advice about “rational” behavior is now revealed to be a disguise for cold self-interest, and instead of showing grief, the guest is expected to take the corpse with him and dispose of it as best he can, actions that might be judged even less “natural” or appropriate than the criticized emotional outburst.

I choose to highlight the problems raised in the interpreting of these lyrics because they pose significant questions not merely about suitable behavior in particular circumstances (which may themselves be an unreliable fictional construct, since descriptions of the underbelly of New York could also be seen as providing vicarious thrills or as helping to confirm conservative prejudices in particular audiences), but also because of the contestation involved in adjudging speech and action. There is no simple relationship between actor and audience, but one that changes according to the focaliser (listener, composer, and the drama’s characters) and acceptance or rejection of this focus. The description of the event is thus much more than a judgment on the appropriateness of public behavior and the spectators’ reaction to it, such as when the Australian Prime Minister Bob Hawke broke down in tears on national television over his daughter’s drug addiction in 1984, thus inviting comparison with a similar tearful scene at the press conference announcing the resignation of the Australian cricket captain, Kim Hughes, several weeks earlier.² Rather, the commentary itself requires comment.

In this paper, I will explore the difficulties of adjudging appropriate behavior in the setting of the early Roman empire, noting the types of public display that might be expected from people in different stations of life, but also taking into consideration who has the dominant role in the evaluation of behavior as appropriate on each occasion. In the historical context of Tacitus’s *Histories*, major figures such as the emperors and their generals constantly seek to display the correct public forms. In turn, various groups in Roman society will offer their own evaluation of their success in these efforts. And Tacitus, the narrator, may also, by editorial comment or implied judgment, give his own observations on the staging and public

2 Despite violating the macho image of Australian politicians, Hawke earned considerable sympathy for his domestic tragedy; but even twenty years later, Hughes is publicly regarded as one of the great “sooks” (*OED*: Austral. & NZ slang, “a stupid or timid person; a coward; a ‘softy’”) of international sport for failing to maintain a proper Stoic demeanor as he effectively ended his cricketing career.

reaction to it. It is then the duty of his reader not only to note the positive and negative criticisms recorded but also to avoid accepting these judgments on faith.³ My examples reflect the complexity of this pattern, beginning with the apparently simple description of Domitian's first appearance in the senate, which depends on the evaluation of body language, then turning to the depiction of imperial marshals (Caecina and Valens) on the march. The account of the behavior of the emperors in A.D. 69 begins with descriptions of the manner in which each makes their way to Rome together with the evaluation of their public displays on the journey, moves on to the reactions to their individual appeals to the army, and concludes with the deaths in Rome of Galba and Vitellius, whose downfalls might seem all the more pathetic because of their attempts to maintain some dignity in a scenario whose staging is no longer within their control.

This approach is closely related to the studies of theatricality and imperial actors developed in Carlin Barton's *The Sorrows of the Ancient Romans* (1993) and Shadi Bartsch's *Actors in the Audience* (1994), which, in turn, draws on studies of theatre and film.⁴ But for Tacitus, I wish to emphasize not so much what might be recognized by the Romans as theatre-like, as that which is transformed into the theatrical, and to stress, more than the gaze of the original participants, the role of the historian as theatre critic. Nero saw himself and was seen by his subjects as an actor. It is not so easy to assess his immediate successors by the same standards, even allowing for the shadow of Nero looming over all in the Long Year that followed his death.

In recent years, much attention has been devoted to the considerable

3 My treatment of this topic originated in a presentation given at the Pacific Rim Latin Literature Seminar at Rome, July 2000. Since then, Holly Haynes 2003 has treated similar themes, concentrating on the development of an imperial ideology at Rome, its undermining by the civil wars of 69, and its recreation under the Flavians. While Haynes seeks to develop a comprehensive psychoanalytical and philosophical description of Tacitus's work, my aim here is rather to emphasize the sociological and political aspects of his narrative.

4 Bartsch 1994.10–12 and notes 22–24 give a useful overview of modern theory on theatricality and the gaze. Her study keeps within the bounds of dramatic performance and avoids the “amphitheatrical” (60–61). Shumate 1997.364–403 includes theatre, games, and circuses in a study of the spectacular, building on the work of Borzsák 1973 and Keitel 1992. More recent writers, such as Zissos 2003, extend interest in spectacle even to boxing matches, although these do not appear to have been a normal part of Roman *munera* (Suet. *Gaius* 18.1 has Caligula innovating in inserting squads of Campanian and African boxers amid gladiatorial shows).

element of public display in aristocratic Roman life of the late republic and early empire. At notable houses, the morning routine began with the parade of *salutatores*, some of whom would actually receive entry and greet the patron on his stage at the tablinum; later, there was the spectacle of the retinue of clients marking the great man's progress to the Forum and his return after business in the law courts or senate.⁵ The size of the escort and its conduct were a visible display of power and a caution to rivals: such a warning might be viewed either as aggressive in intent or designed to reduce the chances of actual conflict when power and influence were uncertain.⁶ There is an element of theatricality in these rituals that, in modern times, might invite the accusation of behaving as if aware that a television camera was filming the events. So Cicero directs the gaze of his audience to the inappropriate demeanor of his opponents, for instance, the stiff-necked posture of Piso or the effeminate gait of Gabinius.⁷ Under the principate, there are necessarily adaptations of traditional rituals and behavior. Developments in speaking style are likely to be linked to the change away from republican oratory, and ill-considered public display could result in political disaster.⁸ Still to no small degree, the influential in the ancient world continued to be conscious of acting out a role—Augustus's last words ("How have I played my part?") are a striking example.⁹

5 Cf. Wiseman 1982.28–30, based on [Q. Cic.] *Comm. Pet.* 34–37; Hales 2003, especially chap. 1 ("The Ideal Home") and chap. 2 ("The House and the Construction of Memory").

6 Sen. *Epist.* 123.7; cf. L. Cornificius on his elephant (Dio 49.7.6) and MacMullen 1986. For unfortunate misunderstandings when social relations were not advertised, see the examples of Larcus Macedo (Pliny *Epist.* 3.14.6–8) and Cato (Seneca *de Ira* 2.32) with Fagan 1999.31.

7 Corbeill 2002 rightly emphasizes the socially conservative ideology behind such descriptions, while Bell 1997 stresses the importance for Roman politicians of impressing the populace by displays of their power and prestige. Flaig 2003 examines the semantics of Roman ritual, especially in the republican period. Lateiner 1995 offers a detailed taxonomy of non-verbal behavior following psychological research as applied to Homeric poetry. Roman political activities, too, could be profitably studied in terms of "proxemics" (Lateiner 1995.105–36).

8 For changes in speaking styles, see Seneca the Elder's *Controversiae* and Tacitus's *Dialogus*. Piso's passage through Italy and, especially, his overly public disembarkation in broad daylight at the tomb of the Caesars and procession with full retinue to his home by way of the Capitol was one of the *irritamenta invidiae* ("incitements to public resentment") which led to his downfall (Tac. *Ann.* 3.9.2–3).

9 Suet. *Aug.* 99.1: "et admissos amicos percontatus ecquid iis videretur mimum vitae comode transegisse." It is often forgotten that Augustus's words need to be put in their cultural setting: he is quoting the ending to a comedy (*Poetae Comici Graeci* 8.925).

The ancient historians highlight such displays, in part because of their basic premise that history should offer exemplary cases to warn of conduct to be avoided or to highlight what should be emulated, fulfilling the role Horace's father is said to have played in pointing out the successful and the failures of Venusia to his son, but in a rather more elevated genre.¹⁰ There are also the literary benefits of *enargeia*, the vivid presentation of scenes, with corresponding delectation for the reader and the possibility of creating repeated generic scenes that will not only display the conduct of important characters, but their interaction with their immediate audience.¹¹ In Tacitus's *Histories*, this is a particularly useful device because of the frequent portrayal of the dysfunction of traditional behavior in a period of extreme conflict,¹² where emperors might be slain in the middle of the Roman Forum and generals be lynched by their own troops—while bystanders applauded the performance and lent their encouragement to the actors.

I will begin with an apparently straightforward example: the young Domitian's first entry into the senate, early in January A.D. 70. "He gave a brief, restrained speech in view of his father's and brother's absence and his own youthfulness, while displaying an appropriate demeanor—since his character was still unknown, his frequent blushes were taken as a sign of modesty."¹³ Tacitus's depiction of Domitian's apparent *civilitas* on his first

10 Horace *Serm.* 1.4.105–26; Livy *Praef.* 10: "hoc illud est praecipue in cognitione rerum salubre et frugiferum, omnis te exempli documenta in industri posita monumento intueri; inde tibi tuaeque rei publicae quod imitere capias, inde foedum inceptu foedum exitu quod vites" ("Here is the particular gain and advantage from learning about historical events: you can see displays of every type of conduct set out in a splendid record and from this you can select examples for you and your society to imitate and also ones repulsive from start to end for you to avoid"), with Moles 1993. Throughout this paper, all translations are my own.

11 For an interesting treatment of "exemplarity" in Tacitus's *Annals*, see Henderson 1989. Woodman 1993 emphasizes the theatrical conduct of the participants in the Pisonian conspiracy. Walker 1993.360–61 shows how, in Thucydides and the Greek novelists, the depiction of emotional reactions in the spectators to events is designed to create similar feelings in the reader. Yet the *mise en abyme*, the self-conscious setting of an audience in the narrative, also calls attention to the artificiality of this representation (363)—a pattern that I hope to show is as much repeated in Tacitus as it is in Lou Reed's New York stories.

12 *Hist.* 1.2.1: "opus adgredior opimum casibus, atrox proeliis, discors seditionibus, ipsa etiam pace saevom" ("I'm undertaking a work which is rich in turns of event, vicious in its warfare, confused by rebellion, and savage even in the very time of peace"). The rest of this chapter acts as a virtual overture to the work, indicating numerous high- (or rather, low-) lights for the reader's delectation.

13 "Quo die senatum ingressus est Domitianus, de absentia patris fratrisque ac iuventa sua pauca et modica disseruit, decorus habitu; et ignotis adhuc moribus crebra oris confusio

public outing is, of course, ironic, since his glowering appearance together with a flamboyant display of triumphal robes in the senate forms the image that will come to typify his reign.¹⁴ What appears to be a statement about the morality of its subject (since, in Stoic ethical thought, propriety, *kosmiôtês*, and modesty, *aidêmosynê*, are species of virtues derived from the primary virtue of self-restraint, *sôphrosynê*—Stobaeus 2.7.5b2 Wachsmuth) is, in fact, a foreshadowing of a quite different characterization to be revealed by the historian in later books. What is appropriate in a youth becomes a sign of moral decadence in the mature emperor.¹⁵ It is left an open question as to whether the senators should have seen through this façade (known to the historian and his readers, but not to the onlookers), or whether it is a sign of Domitian's turpitude that he can so readily assume the appearance required by senatorial etiquette.¹⁶

Expected conduct is also the theme of another topos that is repeated frequently in the *Histories*: the depiction of the progress of an army commander or even the commander-in-chief, the *princeps*, through his territories.¹⁷ It is to be expected that a general will be appropriately dressed in the *paludamentum* that signifies his rank and power and that he will be

pro modestia accipiebatur" (*Hist.* 4.40). Note the ambiguity of *decorus habitus*: the phrase would appear to describe Domitian's body language, but could be taken literally as "respectably attired," prefiguring his habit of appearing in the senate in the full regalia of a *triumphator*.

- 14 *Agr.* 45.2: "praecipua sub Domitiano miseriarum pars erat videre et aspici, cum suspiria nostra subscriberentur, cum denotandis tot hominum palloribus sufficeret saevus ille voltus et rubor, quo se contra pudorem muniebat" ("The unique feature of our sufferings under Domitian was looking on and being watched, since our groans were noted down and that savage face and the blush which he used to protect himself against any sense of shame was all that was needed to put a black mark against the pallor of so many men"—which also offers a jibe at Domitian's role as *censor perpetuus*); *Plin. Pan.* 48.4: "superbia in fronte, ira in oculis, femineus pallor in corpore, in ore impudentia multo rubore suffusa" ("arrogance in his expression, anger in his gaze, an effeminate paleness in the complexion of his body, but on his face, a lack of self-control highlighted by his constant blushing"); *Dio* 67.4.3.
- 15 Cf. *Sen. Epist.* 11.3–4, especially his comments on the flow of blood to the face of violent men such as Sulla the tyrant, "as though they had shed all their sense of decency" (*quasi omnem verecundiam effunderint*).
- 16 Haynes 2003.75–79 discusses the relationship between the *kosmiôtês* of the emperor and the *kosmos* of the empire, with a different interpretation of the depiction of Domitian. Whether actors can imitate modesty by blushing (denied in *Sen. Epist.* 11.7, but suggested as possible by *Quint. Inst.* 6.2.36) is also a question here.
- 17 The theme dates back at least as far as Xerxes' progress through Asia and Thrace in Herodotus Book 7. In the *Histories*, Tacitus particularly contrasts the progress of the two Vitellian generals, Caecina and Valens: Morgan 1994b.

attended by a retinue of soldiers as befits his status. Consider the attempt by Aulus Caecina to play his part before the inhabitants of northern Italy (*Hist.* 2.20.1):¹⁸

at Caecina, velut relictæ post Alpes sævitia ac licentia, modesto agmine per Italiam incessit. ornatum ipsius municipia et coloniae in superbiam trahebant, quod versicolori sagulo, bracas, barbarum tegumen, indutus togatos adloqueretur. uxorem quoque eius Saloninam, quamquam in nullius iniuriam insignis equo ostroque veheretur, tamquam læsi gravabantur, insita mortalibus natura recentem aliorum felicitatem acribus oculis introspicere modumque fortunæ a nullis magis exigere, quam quos in æquo videntur.

As if savagery and lawlessness had been left behind on the other side of the Alps, Caecina made his way through Italy with his column on their best behavior. But the country towns and colonies regarded his dress as a sign of arrogance: he was speaking to the wearers of the toga in a multi-colored cloak and breeches, clad like a barbarian. They also showed their resentment at his wife Salonina for prominently riding on a purple-blanketed horse,¹⁹ claiming that they had been insulted (*tamquam læsi*); although this hurt nobody, it is innate in human nature to cast a jaundiced eye (*acribus oculis introspicere*) over the recent good fortune of others and to demand restraint in success most of all from those they have seen as their peers.

At first glance, it might appear that Caecina, despite his attempts at civility, has been unable to cast aside his military uncouthness. In reality, this is a criticism of the boorishness of small-town mentalities: unable

18 See Ash 364–65 in this volume on Corbulo, another general who was well capable of playing a part.

19 So Heubner 1963 on 2.20: *insignis equo ostroque*, treating the phrase as a hendiadys after comparing Verg. *Aen.* 4.134f.: “ostroque insignis et auro stat sonipes.” The alternative translation, that she was “riding on a horse, dressed in purple,” is more obvious in its display of power.

to endure the success of one who has escaped the restrictions of municipal life, the locals regard their own conduct as the model (they are true Roman citizens, clad in the Roman ceremonial blanket) and Caecina as now foreign in all respects.²⁰ Onto his wife, they direct a gaze that reveals their own mediocrity, and they do not like what they see. All this, it might be said, presages badly for an uncivil war.

By contrast, Fabius Valens, Caecina's rival in service to Vitellius, is portrayed as traveling "with a huge, flabby column of concubines and eunuchs, moving too slowly to be going to war" ("Fabius interim Valens multo ac molli concubinarum spadonumque agmine segnius quam ad bellum incedens," *Hist.* 3.40.1). But Valens is not a true Roman: he is someone who seeks to shock, an explicitly camp commander, as shown by his obituary (*Hist.* 3.62.2; cf. Pomeroy 1991.204–05). Of equestrian background from the metropolis of Anagnia, his dubious morals were matched by genuine intelligence: even his willingness to perform mime under Nero showed talent (he acted skillfully, if hardly appropriately). Yet unlike Caecina, who sought to advance his career by switching his allegiance to Vespasian, Valens was remarkably loyal to the emperor he had created—and died for it. Also in contrast with Caecina, who hides his disloyal intentions by playing the role of general, Valens appears to disguise his newfound fidelity to Vitellius through a public display of the excesses of civilian life. Or does he? He had both encouraged Verginius to seek imperial power and denounced him when he had turned it down ("et fovit Verginium et infamavit," 3.62.2). He had also arranged the assassination of his commander in Germany, Fonteius Capito, when the latter was making his bid for power, after urging him on or because he had been unable to urge him on ("corruptum seu quia corrumpere nequiverat," 3.62.2). Yet Valens's success under Nero and loyalty to Vitellius suggest an affinity for unrestrained public display and the vulnerability of a trickster in circumstances where he is but one of a company of actors.²¹

20 Ash 1999a.40 and n. 14 rightly notes that Tacitus is correcting Plutarch *Otho* 6.6, which accuses Caecina of such arrogance that he would communicate with Roman officials only by signs. This does not mean that Caecina cannot use Latin—he is showing the same aristocratic ethos to those beneath him as Pallas does in *Ann.* 13.23.2 (on which see Millar 1977.76). As Ash shows, the threat lies in the heterogeneity of Caecina's men, not in his personal mixing of dress codes.

21 The display of Valens's head to the Vitellian forces (3.62.1) and their subsequent despair (3.63.1) suggests a famous parallel: the extinguishing of Carthaginian hopes when Has-

The progress of their generals, however, pales before the emperors' parades, misstaged or mistimed efforts to display autocratic power. Galba's arrival in Rome occurs before the *Histories* begin, so it receives only brief mention as part of the description of the army's morale at the start of A.D. 69. A slow and bloody journey to Rome, befitting both Galba's age and the considerable opposition to his elevation, was capped by the death of numerous unarmed soldiers (Tacitus talks of "many thousands slaughtered"²²) on his approach to the city, an omen inauspicious even for the butchers themselves (*Hist.* 1.6.2). Otho, on his way to meet the armies of Germany, sets out on his journey with full speed and without any physical comforts, marching in front of the standards wearing a steel breastplate—unwashed, unkempt, and quite unlike his reputation (2.11.3).²³ Contrast this with the progress of Vitellius (2.59.2), who floats in leisurely fashion down the Arar, while his army proceeds on foot, but unfortunately lacks the cash to put

drubal's head is flung into their pickets, which ends Livy Book 27 (27.51.12: "Hannibal . . . agnoscere se fortunam Carthaginis fertus dixisse," "It is said that Hannibal declared that he recognised [in his brother's features] the fate of Carthage"). Tacitus has substituted a Roman for the Carthaginian, a not inappropriate parallel given that it was believed that Valens was bringing reinforcements from Germany to the beleaguered Vitellian troops, and plays on expectations of traditional Carthaginian *perfidia* in his paradoxical portrayal of Valens's character. As Rhiannon Ash points out to me, there is a similar incident in Frontinus *Strategemata* 2.9.5, where Vadandus's head is hurled into Tigranocerta, suggesting an established historical topos based on the Hasdrubal incident (related in Frontinus *Strat.* 2.9.2). See Ash 369–70 in this volume.

For Valens as a prefiguration of Vitellius, see 1.66.2: "accensis egestate longa cupidinibus immoderatus et inopi iuventa senex prodigus" ("showing no restraint in his desires which had been kindled by years of poverty; now after being poor in his youth, he had become an extravagant old man." The comic parallels are obvious). The description of a *mollis Valens* ("the weak Mr. Strong") suggests a not uncommon Tacitean wordplay on nomenclature (see Woodman and Martin 1996.491–93). But, contrary to expectation, Valens is not "strong only in his vices," but shows strength of character in his loyalty.

22 Cf. Dio 64.3.2: 7,000 killed; the figures appear exaggerated (although Suet. *Galba* 12.2 has "non modo inmisso equite disiecit, sed decimavit etiam," "He not only cleared them out of his way by sending in the cavalry, but even had them decimated").

23 Cf. Juv. 2.99, describing a mirror as *pathici gestamen Othonis* ("the chosen weapon of the faggot Otho"—a parody of Vergil *Aen.* 3.286 [Braund 1996]). Contrast Tacitus's nuanced depiction (introduced at 1.22.1: "non erat Othonis mollis et corpori similis animus," "Otho's mind was in no way weak and flabby by contrast with his body") with Suetonius's "expeditionem . . . inpigre atque etiam praepropere incohavit" (*Oth.* 8.3: "He began his expedition vigorously and even with excessive haste") suggesting a rashness that will be Otho's undoing at Bedriacum.

on a truly regal show.²⁴ This habitual insufficiency of funds (*vetus egestas*: Tacitus does not go into the sordid details of Vitellius using the threat of legal action to control the horde of dunning creditors who blocked his path to Germany [Suet. *Vesp.* 7]) is only surmounted through the kindness of the governor of Lugdunum, a generous heart with matching bank account (“*largus animo et par opibus*”). Iunius Blaesus provides the emperor with servants and a liberal escort. But this imperial debt, which the emperor acknowledges with flattery that befits a slave, is the origin of an unreasonable hatred for Blaesus that concludes with the emperor gloating after his benefactor’s death (3.39.1).²⁵

It is difficult not to detect a pattern of decline from Galba’s (overly) strict discipline, to Otho’s attempt to mimic the image of a military leader, to Vitellius’s servile imitation of an *imperator*. The disorder of 69 is organized by the historian to no small degree by concentrating on the emperors’ competence to play their roles successfully as foci of the aspirations of the state. A key theme is that of *servitus*: not simply as the opposite of *libertas* but as a marker of social relations. Otho is prepared to do everything a slave might do in order to gain mastery (*omnia serviliter pro dominatione*, 1.36.3), but playing the part of the *servus callidus* encourages the disorder in the state. He may act out the role of emperor, but the response of the public is based not on support or hostility, but on the whim of those over whom he is master, and who, as is regular behavior in a slave household, each have their own interests in heart, not the general good (“*nec metu aut*

24 Suet. *Vit.* 10.2 compresses Vitellius’s journey into one long carnival: “*namque itinere inchoato per medias civitates ritu triumphantium vectus est perque flumina delicatissimis navigiis et variarum coronarum genere redimitis, inter profusissimos obsoniorum apparatus, nulla familiae aut militis disciplina, rapinas ac petulantiam omnium in iocum vertens*” (“After he started out, he passed through the midst of the towns like a general holding a triumph and floated down the rivers on the most luxurious transport bedecked with multi-hued garlands, attended by the most extravagant provisions for banqueting, without any control over his slaves or soldiers, but treating all their thefts and outrages as a source of amusement”). Here humor, often the weapon of the disenfranchised against authority (cf. Freud 1976.107–08), becomes the means by which the emperor disguises his own inability to control his social inferiors.

25 For the problems of indebtedness for the emperors, see Roller 2001.193–210, esp. 198 (Tiberius’s indebtedness to G. Silius: *Ann.* 4.18). Blaesus, as a senator, can be seen as a potential rival to Vitellius and so incur hatred, whereas the freedman A. Larcus Lydus, who provided Nero with a million sesterces on his return to Rome from Greece in A.D. 68 (Dio 63.21.2), was so far beneath the recipient in status that he was apparently able to gain free equestrian rank for himself and the possibility of entering the senate for his son, the Macedo whose death is related in Pliny *Epist.* 3.14.

amore, sed ex libidine servitii, ut in familiis, privata cuique stimulatio et vile iam decus publicum," *Hist.* 1.90.3).²⁶ When Vitellius appears, Tacitus suggests that the emperor is not simply performing like a slave—in real life, he *is* a slave, hiding his innate hatred behind the buffoonery that befits a housebred servant.²⁷ In comparison with the Saturnalian emperor Claudius, a fool of a master deceived by cunning underlings, Vitellius has himself sunk into servility.²⁸

After the successful outcome of the battle of Bedriacum, Vitellius's journey is marked by increasing sloth and more lavish banquets, his gradual acquisition of all the denizens of Nero's court (2.71.1), and the creature comforts of sojourns at the most pleasant towns and villas.²⁹ On his approach to Rome, he is to be found surrounded by no less than 60,000 troops, even more camp followers, his advisors and generals, the senate and equestrian orders (who have traveled from Rome in high anxiety to greet their new ruler), and, to cap it all, a crowd of buffoons, actors, and charioteers whom he considered his personal friends, who had arrived to pay their grasping respects (*flagitiosa per obsequia*, 2.87.2). Only the intervention of his advisors prevents him from entering the city in triumph over the Roman state, riding a stallion, in a general's cloak, and driving populace and senate before him (2.89.1).³⁰ Yet the final parade is still impressive: "a

26 Haynes 2003.7 offers a different interpretation based on reading *simulatio*, which weakens the very live metaphor of conduct within the slave household. For *ex libidine* as "based on whim," see *OLD libido* 2c, which suggests that *servitii* is a subjective genitive, not objective (pace Heubner's commentary).

27 Blaesus treats Vitellius as a free man should (*comitaretur liberaliter*), which marks him out as *ingratus*, "an ingrate," in the eyes of the emperor, who, however, hides his resentment as a slave would ("quamvis odium Vitellius vernilibus blanditiis velaret," 2.59.2). The topos, "slave to one's pleasures," is a commonplace which can be used in syllogistic argument, as when the representative of the Tencteri suggests to the inhabitants of colonia Agrippensis (Cologne) that they discard their Roman comforts (*abruptis voluptatibus*) that serve to enslave them and return to their ancestral customs and practices (*instituta cultumque patrium*) that guarantee freedom (4.64.3).

28 For the portrayal of Claudius in terms of Roman comedy, see Dickison 1977.634–47. If Claudius is the *senex stultus* ("foolish old master"), Vitellius is often closer to playing the role of *servus*—but a cringing slave, rather than displaying the cunning of the *servus callidus*.

29 Antonius Primus suffers from the same arrogance and greed after his success at Cremona, but has more determination to ensure the feathering of his nest than Vitellius had shown (3.49). His actions might easily have led to another spiral of disorder but for Mucianus's intervention (3.52).

30 Suet. *Vit.* 11.1 actually has Vitellius enter Rome as conqueror: "urbem denique ad clasicum introiit paludatus ferroque succinctus, inter signa et vexilla, sagulatis comitibus ac

brilliant sight (*decora facies*) and an army which deserved someone other than Vitellius as their princeps" (2.89.2). Four months later,³¹ these same troops are demoralised and in disarray (2.99.1):

longe alia proficiscentis ex urbe Germanici exercitus species: non vigor corporibus, non ardor animis; lentum et rarum agmen, fluxa arma, segnes equi; impatiens solis pulveris tempestatum, quantumque hebes ad sustinendum laborem miles, tanto ad discordias promptior.

Far different was the appearance of the German army when it was leaving the city: there was no strength in their bodies nor vim in their spirits; it was a slow, ragged column, with arms in disrepair and the horses straggling; the soldiers could not stand the sun, dust, and storms, and just as they were incapable of undertaking any effort, they were all the more ready to turn to squabbling.

It appears as if the soldiers have fallen prey to the enticements of urban life and grown torpid like their emperor. In reality, a physical explanation is as readily available as a moral one: the problems of bivouacking so many men at Rome (particularly in the traditionally disease-ridden Trastevere³²) in the unhealthy autumn had led to major outbreaks of disease (2.93.1).

In a year of civil war, emperors' and imperial candidates' addresses to their troops (not before battle but to justify their claims to power) also gain the status of set pieces. Galba's entry into the Praetorian Camp on 10 January, in filthy weather (*foedum imbris diem*), with thunder and lightning, shows either his contempt for the fortuitous³³ or perhaps a fatalistic view

detectis commilitonum armis" ("He entered the city to the sound of the war-trumpet, in general's cloak, and with sword buckled on, amid standards and flags, his retinue dressed in military cloaks and the weapons of his fellow soldiers unsheathed").

31 For the dating of Vitellius's arrival in Rome (probably June), see Chilver 1979 on 2.87.1; Wellesley 1972.195 dates the departure of the troops from Rome to mid September.

32 Chilver 1979 on 2.93.1, Scobie 1986, esp. 421–22.

33 *contemptorem talium ut fortuitorum* may appear to recall Mezentius, the *contemptor divum* (Verg. *Aen.* 7.648: "despiser of the gods"), but there is also a considerable element of the republican sternness of Cato the Elder, described by Livy in a memorable portrait as a man "rigidae innocentiae, contemptor gratiae, divitiarum," (39.40.11: "of unbending incorruptibility, a despiler of favors and money") whom not even old age could crush.

that what will be cannot be avoided.³⁴ Whatever the reason, it really does rain on this parade. The emperor's speech is one of imperial and imperious brevity: an announcement of Piso's selection as his successor following both the precedent of Augustus and the archaic military custom of each soldier choosing another; then a declaration that the German mutiny affected only two legions and would be soon brought under control. There are no blandishments or incentives offered. It also goes down, as will Galba himself, like a lead balloon: "He was undone by his old-style discipline and excessive sternness, which we will no longer tolerate" (1.18.3).

By contrast, Otho reaches out to greet the common soldiers and blows them kisses, "doing anything a slave would do to become master" (*omnia serviliter pro dominatione*, 1.36.3).³⁵ This gains him the throne, but not immediate control, as shown by the near massacre of the Roman senate in the Palace sometime later when a rumor had spread of a coup.³⁶ The next day, Otho again enters the camp: he could have demanded punishment for the mutiny's ringleaders, but "a principate which has been sought by crime cannot be maintained by a sudden change to moderation and ancient strictness" (1.83.1). A mixture of upbraiding and flattery,³⁷ coupled with a show of sternness against all of two scapegoats, ensures temporary control (1.85.1).

The pattern is repeated. After a rumor has spread that Verginius Rufus had assassinated Vitellius, the legionaries break into the imperial dinner party, and Verginius is only saved from a lynching with considerable difficulty (2.68.4).³⁸ Vitellius even goes so far as to join in the praise (*conlaudavit*) of the soldiers' sense of loyalty (*pietas*) in the camp the next day, increasing the anger of his auxiliaries at the regular troops' arrogance and immunity from military discipline (2.69.1). Even worse is the emperor's willingness to grant numerous furloughs: "Not so in the times of our ancestors, when the Roman state was based on courage, not on cash"

34 See also Pagán 202–03 in this volume.

35 By contrast, it is not infrequent for Roman commanders to have to pose as slaves in order to save their skins from those they command (so Valens, 2.29.1: *servili veste*; Vocula, 4.36: *servili habitu*).

36 For an overview of the themes here, see Damon 2003.261 ("seditio").

37 See Damon 2003 on 1.83.1 for the "rich emptiness of [Otho's] style."

38 In contrast to Vitellius, Verginius is held in high regard—but also hated for having turned down the offer of imperial power not once, but twice (after the defeat of Vindex in 68 [cf. Pliny *Epist.* 6.10.4] and after the suicide of Otho [Tac. *Hist.* 2.51, Plut. *Otho* 18.4–7]).

(“contra veterem disciplinam et instituta maiorum, apud quos virtute quam pecunia res Romana melius stetit,” 2.69.2). The Ennian reminiscence is of considerable irony, since the original comes from the tale of the execution of Manlius Torquatus junior on the orders of his father for breaking ranks and fighting in single combat.³⁹

The contemporary discipline of Vitellius is hardly so strict. His last entry to his troops’ encampment at Mevania is even more ineffectual: summoned by his own troops (*flagitante exercitu*, 3.55.3), he addresses the men while flocks of ill-omened birds fly overhead⁴⁰ and after the sacrificial bull has escaped and had to be stuck (*confossus*, 3.56.1) rather than slaughtered, providing a foreshadowing of the emperor’s own death in a rain of blows (*ingestis vulneribus*, 3.85).⁴¹ “But the greatest portent of all was Vitellius himself (“praecipuum ipse Vitellius ostentum erat”), ignorant of military matters, showing no foresight in his planning, asking others about the order of march, reconnaissance, and how much chance there was of hastening or delaying the fighting” (3.56.2). What has been suspected from the first is now revealed in practice: the emperor is no *imperator*.⁴² Nothing

39 *Ann.* 156 Skutsch: “moribus antiquis res stat Romana virisque” (“The Roman state is based on time-honored behaviour as well as its heroes”). Perhaps the Ennian reminiscence is transmitted through Livy 8.7.16 (“disciplinam militarem, qua stetit ad hanc diem Romana res, soluisti”), but the reminder of Torquatus is clear. Such contrasts with earlier times appear to cluster around Vitellius, as for instance in the *ekphrasis* of his visit to the battlefield at Bedriacum, a ghastly spectacle whose hideousness was increased by the garlanding of the site by the citizens of Cremona. “There were those who were touched by the fickleness of fortune and tears of pity” (“erant quos varia sors rerum lacrimaeque et misericordia subiret,” 2.70.3); “at non Vitellius flexit oculos,” but the great leader does not bat an eyelash at the sight of so many unburied corpses. This is an Aeneas for the successful, unable to recognize the *lacrimae rerum*, who makes his way to Rome in luxury without any concern for the past or for the sacrifices that have made his ascent to power possible. As Morgan 1992 shows (correcting aspects of Woodman 1979), the effect is to portray Vitellius as a tourist, set against a background carefully constructed in Aristotelian fashion to bring out the horror of war without creating disgust at the specific details. The *amphitheatrical* could also be explored in detail here: the panorama of the battlefield provided for Vitellius is bookended by gladiatorial shows in his honor provided by Caecina at Cremona (2.70.1) and Valens at Bononia (2.71.1).

40 Dio 64.16.1 has the vultures actually flock to the sacrifice and almost drive the emperor from the altar as he addresses his troops.

41 On foreshadowing and other temporal devices, see Pagán 197–99 in this volume.

42 Contrast the actions of Vespasian in his Judaeac campaign: “He would march at the front of the column, choose the site for his camp, and combat the enemy day and night through strategy or personal participation, eating what was available and hardly recognizable as different from a common soldier in his dress and appearance” (“anteire agmen, locum cas-

is achieved, and Vitellius, tiring of playing toy soldiers (*taedio castrorum*), finally abandons his troops and returns to Rome to meet his end.

By contrast, Vespasian and his supporters use their chances well. When Vespasian's guard salutes him not as general but as emperor, he seizes the opportunity and replies as a commander should (*militariter*). This gives Mucianus, the governor of Syria, the excuse to administer an oath of allegiance to his own soldiers and, entering the theatre at Antioch, to address the civilian populace and announce the accession of a new emperor in a speech *in Greek*—but then Mucianus is always the showoff (“*omniumque quae diceret atque ageret arte quadam ostentator*,” 2.80.2).⁴³ Still Mucianus is also able to control the troops after his arrival in Rome in A.D. 70: after he has had the German and British troops assemble unarmed and separate from the fully equipped Flavian forces, he causes such anticipation of a massacre that the previously mutinous troops appeal for mercy, and even the Flavians call on him to show pity. By agreeing to this joint appeal and declaring all those before him to be soldiers of the one emperor, he creates an unshaken unity and desire to serve in the combined army (4.47).

In a world turned upside down, where women such as Verulana Gratilla will join in the conflict not from familial duty but simply to be personally involved (3.69.3), where Triaria, the wife of L. Vitellius, can strap on a sword and participate in the recapture and punishment of Tarracina (3.77.2), it is hardly unexpected that the distinction between *belli* and *domi*, of *us* and *them* should constantly be in danger of being lost. The

tris capere, noctu diuque consilio ac, si res posceret, manu hostibus obniti, cibo fortuito, veste habituque vix a gregario milite discrepans,” 2.5.1).

- 43 Although the use of the theatre in Greek cities as a public forum was normal, Tacitus emphasizes Mucianus's display of Greek eloquence (“*satis decorus etiam Graeca facundia*”) before fawning civilians (“*concurrentes et in adulationem effusos*,” 2.80.2). When Vespasian visited Alexandria, he was acclaimed by the citizenry in the circus (*PFouad* 8; Montevocchi 1981), yet Tacitus ignores this to concentrate on the miracles that attended the emperor's visit to the Temple of Serapis (4.81). Henrichs 1968 tentatively suggests (59 n. 24; cf. Humphrey 1986.510) that the wonders associated with Serapis were a propaganda exercise before the circus visit. This rationalist reading, emphasizing the importance of support from the Alexandrian community for the success of the Flavian cause, is possible, but underestimates Tacitus's ability to exclude material (e.g., because of contempt for the *ochloi*, the Alexandrian mob). The account of miracles inspired by Serapis (4.81) suggests that Vespasian was mixing freely with the Alexandrian populace and so likely to have visited the hippodrome *before* visiting the Temple of Serapis (4.82). By contrast, in 1.72, Tacitus reports popular demonstrations against Tigellinus at the circus and theatre as indicative of the general unpopularity both of the former Praetorian Prefect and of his protector, Titus Vinius.

initial depiction of this breakdown of order, which also is the cause of the ills to come, occurs with the death of Galba (1.40):⁴⁴

agebatur huc illuc Galba vario turbae fluctuantis impulsu, completis undique basilicis ac templis, lugubri prospectu. neque populi aut plebis ulla vox, sed attoniti voltus et conversae ad omnia aures; non tumultus, non quies, quale magni metus et magnae irae silentium est. Othoni tamen armari plebem nuntiabatur: ire praecipites et occupare pericula iubet. igitur milites Romani, quasi Vologaesum aut Pacorum avito Arsacidarum solio depulsuri ac non imperatorem suum inermem et senem trucidare pergerent, disiecta plebe, proculcato senatu, truces armis, rapidi equis forum inrumpunt. nec illos Capitolii adspectus et imminentium templorum religio et priores et futuri principes terruere, quo minus facerent scelus, cuius ultor est quisquis successit.

Galba was being swept from one side to the other by the changing movements of the crowd as it ebbed and flowed, while all the temples and halls around were filled with the populace, presenting a miserable outlook. There was no sound from the crowd and populace, but stunned looks and ears turning at every noise, neither panic nor confidence, but the silence of great fear or great anger. Otho was notified that the populace was being armed: he ordered his men to head off pell-mell and forestall the danger. So Roman soldiers, as if they were on their way to eject a Vologaesius or Pacorus from the ancestral throne of the Arsacids and not to slaughter their emperor, old and unarmed, scattering the crowd, trampling the senate, galloping on their mounts, burst into the Forum. The prospect of the Capitol, or the sanctity of the temples looming above, and past and future emperors did not frighten them

44 On this scene of Galba's death, see also Pagán 205–06 and Keitel 232–36 in this volume.

from committing a crime, whose avenger is the successor of the deceased.

The most remarkable feature of this passage is not the loss of distinction between Roman and foreign shown by the actions of Otho's supporters, an almost banal observation, but the alienation of the Roman populace from their emperor, Galba, and his party.⁴⁵ Amid their confusion as to where to go next, the imperial party in the Forum sees not the compassionate faces of bystanders⁴⁶ but hushed spectators at the most ghastly *munus* imaginable, where an emperor and his advisors have been placed in the arena to be slaughtered.⁴⁷ The Othonians, as active participants in their own drama (they believe that they must forestall the possibility of the urban mob being armed against them), make their entrance without taking any notice of the surroundings at all.

The scene is to be repeated. First, as low comedy on Vitellius's arrival in Rome when the soldiers rush around the city. "They particularly made for the Forum in their desire to visit the spot where Galba had lain—and they were no less a savage sight, bristling with animal hides and huge weapons" ("nec minus saevum spectaculum erant ipsi, tergis ferarum et ingentibus telis horrentes," 2.88.3).⁴⁸ Secondly, as tragi-comedy at the

45 This obviously recalls 1.32.1, where an assorted mob of free plebs and slaves demands the execution of Otho and his co-conspirators, "like another course at the races or in the theater" ("ut si in circo aut theatro ludicrum aliquod postularent"), but the emphasis here is not so much on a "collective cognitive dysfunction" (Shumate 1997.381) as the terrifying recognition of the sham of public support by Galba and his retinue.

46 Even Vitellius initially evokes such pity by his office (3.58.2).

47 Morgan 1994a argues for the spectacle as a *circus*, since the race will be for Otho's horsemen to burst in and get to the emperor first (so Suet. *Galb.* 19.2). While the viewpoint of the *prospectus* is almost certainly that of the populace gazing down on the Forum (so, too, they are the active force behind the *impulsus* moving Galba around; cf. *OLD* s.v. *prospectus* 2b, esp. Cic. *Dom.* 116: "in Palatio pulcherrimo prospectu porticum . . . concupierat," "He wanted a portico on the Palatine that offered an outstanding outlook" and Damon 2003 on 1.40.1, noting that *prospectus* is most commonly applied, as if by a realtor, to "pleasant views"), the slaughter of one of the participants is hardly the normal aim of a race. A *munus* in the amphitheatre can involve all forms of slaughter from gladiatorial displays to fatal charades (which Galba's death more closely resembles).

The significance of the arena as the site of (intended) ordered violence has drawn considerable attention in recent years: Barton 1993, 2002; Gunderson 1996, 2003b; Zissos 2003. Gunderson 2003b rightly emphasizes the role of the Amphitheatrum Flavianum ("the Colosseum") in establishing the new Flavian order by creating a fixed site for gladiatorial display controlled by the ruling family.

48 See Ash 1999a.45–46 on the comic aspects, perhaps echoing the behavior of the Allian Gauls in Livy 5.41.

final capture of the city by the Flavian troops. Vitellius's supporters may demand that he revoke his abdication since "the only thing that matters is in the end whether one gives up the ghost amid abuse and derision or in a show of courage" ("id solum referre, novissimum spiritum per ludibrium et contumelias effundant an per virtutem," 3.66) and demand the death of Sabinus as a special treat ("ius caedis et praemia navatae operae petebant," 3.74), but the final battle is but another show for the benefit of the masses (3.83):

aderat pugnantibus spectator populus utque in ludicro certamine, hos, rursus illos clamore et plausu fovebat. quotiens pars altera inclinasset, abditos in tabernis aut si quam in domum perfugerant, erui iugularique expostulantes parte maiore praedae potiebantur . . . velut festis diebus id quoque gaudium accederet, exsultabant fruebantur nulla partium cura, malis publicis laeti.

The populace was there to be spectators for the fighters, and just as in gladiatorial games, supported one side then the other with shouts and applause. Whenever one side had lost the struggle, the onlookers demanded that those who had hidden in shops or had taken refuge in any house be dragged out and slaughtered and so gained the majority of the loot . . . As if this was to be a bonus pleasure for the holiday, they rioted and enjoyed themselves without concern for either side but delighting in the sufferings of the state.

While the last praetorians in the camp perish to a man, seeking a noble death (3.84.3), Vitellius is hauled from his miserable refuge in the Palace and is the last disgraceful spectacle (*foedum spectaculum*) of the day—his clothes ripped, his arms bound behind his back, an unpitied object of contempt.⁴⁹ As Tacitus notes, remove the identification with the victim that a shared appear-

49 As Levene 1997.132 stresses, following the Aristotelian definitions of fear and pity (*Poetics* 13–14), "with pity, one responds to [a character's] plight sympathetically—but from the standpoint of an observer." Tacitus's readers, however, become a meta-audience: not simply responding to events in ways that the crowd on the spot do not, but also judging the reactions of that crowd (147).

ance fosters and you remove all sympathy: *deformitas exitus misericordiam abstulerat* (3.84.4).⁵⁰ But Vitellius cannot be dispatched so easily: his reply to a tribune's insults, "Still I was your emperor," re-establishes the bond of compassion that makes his death, too, one of the day's tragedies.⁵¹

In conclusion, it can readily be seen how the rituals of upper-class Roman life may be used to depict and measure success and variation from the norm in this period. Historical narration needs to be structured, and repeated themes assist didactic purposes and increase the reader's pleasure in variation from the familiar. But there is also another feature, which is a strategy of upper-class society as well: by the observance of regular custom, a bond is formed inside the status group that assures assistance in times of need.⁵² Danger occurs when other groups—the general populace, the

50 Cf. 2.31.1: "utriusque exitium, quo egregiam Otho famam, Vitellius flagitiosissimam meruere" ("the death of each, through which Otho gained a glorious reputation and Vitellius one of total disgrace"). Perkins 1993 suggests that Tacitus generally seeks to emphasize the negative assessment of Otho. Yet in comparison with Vitellius, Otho can act the part of the leader: e.g., on the journey from Spain to Rome, where Otho is solicitous of his troops' welfare (1.23.1); as new *princeps* ("contra spem omnium non deliciis neque desidia torpescere," "Contrary to everyone's expectations, he did not laze around enjoying indulgences and idleness," 1.71.1—contrast Vitellius in 2.36.1); and in his attempts to lure over his rival *muliebribus blandimentis* ("with blandishments fit for a woman," 1.74.1), while Vitellius can only try to match his offers.

51 Contrast Suet. *Vit.* 17, who offers specific details of the emperor's humiliation ("reducto coma capite, ceu noxii solent, atque etiam mento mucrone gladii subrecto, ut visendam praeberet faciem neve summitteret," "His head pulled back by the hair and the point of a dagger leveled under his chin to ensure that he showed his face to the spectators and didn't look down"), the charges of arsonist and glutton levelled at him ("aliis incendiarium et patinarium vociferantibus," 17.2), and the unkindly mentions of Vitellius's flushed face from hard drinking, his distended belly, and his limp due to a chariot accident when Gaius was driving. Such emphasis on the "monstrous body," stressing the Bakhtinian carnivalesque (cf. Braund and Jones 1998), is notably absent in this part of Tacitus's account in contrast to the animalization of Vitellius in 3.36.1 ("ut ignava animalia, quibus si cibum suggeras, iacent torpentque," "like domesticated animals who lie around in a state of lethargy so long as they are brought food"). In Dio (65.20–21), there is a miscellany of physical details followed by the emperor's final words—resulting in the soldiers losing their temper (*orgisthentes*) and killing him on the Gemonian Stairs. It should also be noted that the death of Vitellius differs markedly from that of Galba: instead of the mock amphitheatrical show that attended the latter's end, Vitellius is annihilated, a destruction of the vile body that has no entertainment value at all (cf. the death of Marius Gratidianus in Lucan *B.C.* 2.190–93).

52 There are numerous examples of this: Dio 53.27.5, where the emperor Augustus helps to rebuild the house of Messala, burnt down in 25 B.C.; Asturicus (Juv. 3.212–22), who does so well out of charity that he is suspected of arson. In Apuleius *Met.* 1.6–19, Aristomenes tells how he took pity on his old friend Socrates, reduced to destitution (and so not a

common soldiers—control the fates of the more worthy. Even a Vitellius should attract an educated reader's pity, but in the topsy-turvy world of A.D. 69, such compassion may not have been felt in practice. Yet as mentioned, even the possibility of empathy should be viewed as a class strategy: the theatrics of Tacitus offer as little sympathy for other orders of society as the senators in Juvenal's *Third Satire* show to those not of their group who have fallen on hard times.⁵³

In addition, the theatre may also function as an alienating device. So the term *theatrum mundi* appears to have originated in John of Salisbury to separate out a special class of spectator. Those who have achieved virtue “look down upon the stage of the world and, scorning the drama of fortune, are not lured by any enticements into feigned illusions and lunacies” (“hi sunt qui de alto virtutum culmine theatrum mundi despiciunt ludumque fortunae contemptentes nullis illecebris impelluntur ad vanitates et insanias falsas”).⁵⁴ As the amphitheatre helps to create a structured society by defining Rome as those not in the arena, Tacitus's *Histories* create a senatorial Rome by a similar bloody strategy wherein disorder appears to be let loose inside the state, but is ultimately controlled by the historian himself. For instance, it is part of his strategy to change the viewpoint to that of the general populace at the death of Galba or during the Flavian forces' entry into Rome. One might be tempted to see this as a criticism of imperial power as the system collapses and there is a strange, carnivalesque anarchy such as might occur at the Saturnalia.⁵⁵ But at Rome, festivals are an extension of power relations: the master permits licence at the Saturnalia and the games rely on the beneficence of the *munerator*.⁵⁶ By defining the populace of Rome

natural beggar). For similar cases of sympathy for the wealthy, see Hamel 1990.196–70, e.g., *bKeth.* 67b, where rabbi Hillel provides an impoverished nobleman with all the attributes befitting his former station.

53 Juv. *Sat.* 3.209–22; cf. Braund 1996 on 3.216: “The poor man's books . . . signal his culture, but the rich man's library is an index of his wealth.”

54 John of Salisbury *Policraticus* (1159) Book Three, Chapter Nine; Christian 1987.67, 239.

55 Cf. Bakhtin 1968.4–7 on folk carnival humor as a popular response to the political forms and ceremonial of the upper classes. As Berrong 1986 shows, the two types often happily coexisted in Rabelais's world. At Rome, Augustus was not only a patron of the high arts (Suet. *Aug.* 89), but also keen on popular entertainment (Suet. *Aug.* 45.2: watching local boxers in street bouts; 74: street entertainers and storytellers; 83: games and pastimes).

56 As Veyne 1976 shows, the relationship between the patron of the games and the spectators was not, in fact, as one-sided as this. But Tacitus's depiction of the games suggests that seeking the support of the humblest is a sign of weakness in an emperor: cries for the

as spectators, Tacitus confirms their impotence and restores power relations between government and governed.⁵⁷ Yet we must recognize this as a strategy, as part of a system of historical discourse within which Tacitus is working. The voice of the historian is not revealing a Platonic truth, but acting to re-establish the values of his own senatorial class.⁵⁸

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death of Tigellinus in the Forum and at the Palace are magnified at the games and races, where such demonstrations have been traditionally permitted, until Otho gives in (1.72; Haynes 2003.71–72 seems to misunderstand events here). Vitellius's popularist behavior at the games and races is treated as inappropriate humility (2.91.2) grasping for the approval of the dregs of society ("omnem infimae plebis rumorem . . . adfectavit," 2.91.2). When discussing *Ann.* 16.4–5, Bartsch 1994.29–30 had already observed the historian's ability to manipulate the theatrical model to criticize both ruler and ruled.

Such a "negative Saturnalia" had already been constructed by Seneca, as shown by Nauta 1987, who observes that alongside the Utopian, even revolutionary image of the festivities at the Saturnalia, there is a much more traditional view of a period of misrule, of an absence of civilization that can only be permitted for the briefest of periods (88). Seneca's humor was "neither 'popular' nor egalitarian, since it was the laughter of a new power élite triumphing over an old one" (94).

57 Contrast Lucan's strategy as described by Leigh 1997.5: "If complicity with the coming of Caesarism is associated with the dispassionate gaze of the spectator, the mentality which Lucan represents as most appropriate to the Republican is that of constant emotional intervention against history." Rather than providing an historical account "as seen by bystanders and performed by soldiers" (Leigh 1997.304), Tacitus denies the value of the audience's judgment within his narrative.

58 It is often forgotten that the happiness of the historian's own day is defined in terms of the protocol followed at a meeting of the senate: "ubi sentire quae velis et quae sentias dicere licet" (1.1.4: "Where you can have your own opinion and say what that is"—in contrast to silently following the lead of bad emperors).

This paper is dedicated to the memory of Judith Ginsburg, a friend from her arrival at Cornell University in 1977 and always a perceptive reader of Tacitus and his interpreters. The author would like to thank the special issue editors, Martha Malamud and Rhiannon Ash, and the anonymous reader for numerous improvements and suggestions that have helped to shape this paper.