

THE SMELL OF VICTORY:
VITELLIUS AT BEDRIACUM (TAC. *HIST.* 2.70)

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The chapter that Tacitus devotes to Vitellius' visit to the site of Bedriacum has been subjected of late to a number of searching examinations. Most of this research, however, has not focused on the facts which Tacitus presents (or fails to present) and what we are to make of them, still less on the divergences between his version of events and those given by Suetonius and Dio.¹ Instead, there has been a partial discussion of the sources for his images and phraseology; a study concerned with the artistry he exhibits in arranging and developing his material, a study which is schematic to a degree inasmuch as it chops the passage into slabs that make a nonsense of the train of thought; and confusing the situation still more, an interpretation according to which Tacitus merely recycled this material when, in the *Annals*, he came to write of Germanicus' march to the site of the *clades Variana*.² As I hope to demonstrate, these approaches miss or misrepresent the literary skill with which Tacitus constructed his account and the historical purpose it was designed to serve.

To clear the ground, we need to begin with a detailed analysis of what exactly Tacitus says about Vitellius' visit to Bedriacum. He uses, then, a single sentence to set the scene: "inde Vitellius Cremonam flexit et spectato munere Caecinae insistere Bedriacensibus campis ac vestigia recentis victoriae lustrare oculis concupivit." As has often been remarked,³ it is no accident that Tacitus sandwiches the visit to the battlefield between two gladiatorial shows, that given by Caecina at Cremona and that of Fabius Valens in Bononia (2.71.1; cf. 67.2). No doubt the events took place in this sequence, but Tacitus need not have mentioned these shows (Suetonius does not); or, like Dio, he could have commented, explicitly and

1. Suet. *Vit.* 10.3 (quoted below); Dio 65.1.3. For the *Histories* and the *Annals* I use the Teubner editions by H. Heubner (Stuttgart, 1978 and 1983), and all references in text or notes which are not further identified are to the *Histories*.

2. Respectively, R. Funari, "Tacito e il linguaggio 'espressionistico': Un saggio di commento a *Hist.* 2, 70," *Athenaeum* 67 (1989): 584–94; U. Rademacher, *Die Bildkunst des Tacitus* (Hildesheim and New York, 1975), especially pp. 136–39; A. J. Woodman, "Self-Imitation and the Substance of History," in D. West and A. J. Woodman, *Creative Imitation and Latin Literature* (Cambridge, 1979): 143–55. These works are cited hereafter by author's name and page number only, as are two standard titles: A. Gerber and A. Greef, *Lexicon Taciteum* (Leipzig, 1903); H. Heubner, *P. Cornelius Tacitus, Die Historien*, vol. 2: *Zweites Buch* (Heidelberg, 1968).

3. Cf. Heubner, p. 219; Rademacher, pp. 92–93.

clumsily, on Vitellius' not being satisfied by the number of men who had died in the battle. He does neither, because the way the gladiatorial combats bracket the visit is enough to provide a gory context for the emperor's excursion. Besides, readers would be distracted by open moralizing from imitating Vitellius and feasting their eyes—with horror, of course, not gusto—on the battlefield itself, a requirement imposed on them by the constant emphasis on seeing and sights. In the first sentence alone we have *spectato munere* and *lustrare oculis*. The second sentence, the immediate introduction to the description of the ground, Tacitus prefaces with a nominative phrase in apposition, *foedum atque atrox spectaculum*. Nor, despite Rademacher, is this stress on the visual limited to the first half of the chapter.⁴ In the body of the account there appear the verbs *monstrabant*, *recognoscere*, and *intueri mirari*. At the conclusion it is said that Vitellius could not or, more accurately, would not turn his eyes away (*non . . . flexit oculos*).⁵ And the first sentence in the next section of the narrative uses the words *gladiatorum spectaculum editur* to describe Valens' games. The reader has no choice but to visualize the carnage.⁶

The reader, however, is not the only target of these comments. Perhaps because scholars have been so preoccupied with comparing Tacitus' description here both with the accounts he gives of other battles and with similar scenes in other authors, they appear to have missed an enormous difference in substance. As Tacitus sets up his narrative, Vitellius is acting unworthily in conceiving this wish to visit the battlefield (the capriciousness of that wish brought out by the verb and the tense employed: *concupivit*), let alone in wanting to tramp the ground and gaze upon the fallen.⁷ It is one thing to visit a battlefield in order to secure hard information with which to spur one's emperor to action, as the centurion Iulius Agrestis will later do (3.54.2–3). It is quite another to wish to see something as an end in itself, merely because it is there, with no intention of learning from the experience or of performing any worthwhile act on the spot.⁸ This, to anticipate, is what gives so sharp an edge to Tacitus' final sentences: among the soldiery, he says, “erant quos varia sors rerum

4. Rademacher, pp. 138–39, maintains that the second half of the chapter is taken up with reactions to the sights specified in the first half.

5. As was remarked by E. Courbaud, *Les procédés d'art de Tacite dans les Histoires* (Paris, 1918), p. 127, the second *flexit* looks back to the first and closes the chapter as the first opens it.

6. Cf. Courbaud, *Procédés*, p. 162; Rademacher, pp. 111–16; Funari, p. 594.

7. To dismiss *concupivit* as prosaic (Woodman, p. 148) is as ill advised as to see it as a parody of Alexander's *pathos* (below, n. 8); on each of its appearances in the *Histoires* the verb is pejorative in sense (Gerber and Greef, p. 200). That *insistere Bedriacensibus campis* refers to Vitellius' walking the ground literally is borne out by 3.2.4, and confirmed by Dio's insisting that he walked all of it (65.1.3). The view that *lustrare oculis* hints at Otho's behavior with the head of Piso (1.44.1: “nullum caput tam insatiabilibus oculis perlustrasse dicitur”), favored by Heubner (p. 219) and literature there cited, is open to several objections. First, the phrase *lustrare oculis* is common enough (Heubner, p. 242); second, Otho's behavior differed significantly from Vitellius' in that he allowed the burial of his adversaries (1.47.2, 49.1); and third, Tacitus may rather be reminding the reader of Vitellius' own wish, on another occasion, *pascere oculos* (3.39.1).

8. See, for example, 2.88.3, 3.20.3, 3.83.1. It seems to be believed that when Tacitus describes Germanicus' decision to visit the site of Varus' disaster, his phraseology (*cupido Caesarem invadit*) hints at voyeuristic tendencies; “curiosity seconded piety perhaps,” as it is put by F. R. D. Goodyear, *The Annals of Tacitus*, vol. 2: *Annals 1.55–81 and Annals 2* (Cambridge, 1981), p. 94. In and of itself, curiosity

lacrimaeque et misericordia subiret. at non Vitellius flexit oculos nec tot milia insepulorum civium exhorruit: laetus ultro et tam propinquae sortis ignarus instaurabat sacrum dis loci." In the same situation not every Roman commander would have reflected on the fall of empires, as did Scipio Aemilianus at Carthage,⁹ but he might fitly have copied Germanicus and his troops at the site of Varus' disaster, and have bethought himself of the *casus bellorum et sortem hominum* (Ann. 1.61.1). In Vitellius' army, however, rankers think of such things; the emperor is oblivious to all but his immediate joy. And the religious rites he conducts cannot be more than a thank-offering for his victory, since any honor he paid to the dead he limited to the Vitellian dead. Whether or not Tacitus hints at this in *insepulorum*, Dio insists that no provision was made even now for the burial of the Othonians.¹⁰ In terms of content, therefore, we cannot reasonably compare Vitellius' excursion with Germanicus' march to the site of the *clades Variana*. The latter, as we shall see presently, is depicted by Tacitus as from the first a deliberate, overt gesture of *pietas*.

Nor can this assessment of Vitellius' behavior be refuted by arguing that he would not have been expected to act any differently than he did. Our sensibilities have perhaps been dulled by the frequency with which, in more recent days, staff officers have emerged from the safety of their bunkers in order to inspect the work done by the men in the line.¹¹ Obviously, this had not been the standard procedure during the republican period, if only because the person whose reputation and life depended on the outcome of the fighting was himself the commanding general, and any inclination he might have to traverse the field afterward was capable of immediate gratification.¹² The important consideration, however, is that this situation changed little during the early Principate. Of all the emperors who preceded Vitellius, Nero alone was a hopeless case in this regard, lacking military qualities, military experience, and all desire to acquire them. Both Augustus and Tiberius had done their fair share of fighting; Caligula could be ridiculed for conducting farcical campaigns, but not for

was not prized by the ancients (H. J. Mette, "Curiositas," *Festschrift Bruno Snell* [Munich, 1956], pp. 227–35), and this cannot be palliated with the arguments of S. Borzsák, *RE* suppl. 11 (1968), cols. 404 and 486, s.v. "Cornelius" 395, that *cupido* here is meant to remind us of the *pothos* which seized Alexander, any more than it does at *Agr.* 5.3, or at 2.2.2 (of Titus), or by way of parody, of Vitellius at Bedriacum. The important consideration is what comes of the desire: Agricola achieves his military glory, Titus oracles about the future of the Flavian cause (2.4.2), Germanicus his wish to honor the dead (Ann. 1.62.1), and Vitellius nothing but self-satisfaction.

9. A. E. Astin, *Scipio Aemilianus* (Oxford, 1967), pp. 282–87.

10. Dio 65.1.3 disposes of the argument that Vitellius' visit was "intended as an act of piety rather than of sadism," advanced by G. E. F. Chilver, *A Historical Commentary on Tacitus' Histories I and II* (Oxford, 1979), p. 231. What is noteworthy, however, is the emphatic repetition of *sors* and *sortis* (whether or not the first is meant to echo Verg. *Aen.* 1.462), and there may be irony in *instaurabat*; given that Silius Italicus was, so far as we know, the only author prior to Tacitus to use the verb without any idea of repetition (3.217–18; cf. Heubner, p. 244), Tacitus may well have expected the reader to catch a play on the older meaning, stressing the certainty of Vitellius' not living long enough to repeat his rites.

11. For Europeans the perception of "the enemy in the rear" goes back to World War I: see P. Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford, 1975), pp. 82–90. In the United States it can be traced back to the conduct of several Federal generals in the Civil War.

12. Thus Caesar at Pharsalus (Suet. *Jul.* 30.4), and Hannibal the day after Cannae (Livy 22.51.5–9).

failing to put in an appearance; and even if Claudius' sixteen-day stay in Britain was an excuse to display his *virtus* and preside over elaborate ceremonies in Camulodunum, the official reason for the trip was his subordinates' need for his expertise.¹³ What is more, the demands of civil war clearly sharpened this expectation that an emperor or would-be emperor either lead his armies in person or at least possess the necessary skills for the task. Galba and Vespasian manifestly fit the bill, as Tacitus is careful to observe (1.50.4, 2.5.1). Otho was more questionable; he had been prompt to wade through the bloodshed in the forum to seize the throne, but according to Tacitus he wrecked the morale of his troops and lost the war by holding back from Bedriacum.¹⁴ But this too was better than Vitellius (cf. 1.50.3); *nullis stipendiis, nulla militari fama*, he reached the site of the battle which had won him the Principate only some forty days later (*intra quadragensimum pugnae diem*).¹⁵ No matter what the reason for the delay, his timing—like his conduct after his arrival—could be held to reduce him to the level of a tourist.¹⁶

This brings us back to the specifics of Tacitus' account, and to his second sentence: "foedum atque atrox spectaculum, intra quadragensimum pugnae diem lacera corpora, trunci artus, putres virorum equorumque formae, infecta tabo humus, protritit arboribus ac frugibus dira vastitas." As Courbaud recognized long ago, the precision of *intra quadragensimum pugnae diem* "est plus apparente que réelle."¹⁷ Whatever other ideas Tacitus may have in mind, he has no interest in the number of days it has taken Vitellius to travel from Germany, but every intention of stressing the amount of decay and putrefaction which has taken place since the battle was fought. Hence a catalog, the first of several, in which the items are arranged in descending order. Since Funari has analyzed each expression in exhaustive detail,¹⁸ we can run through the elements briefly. Thus, *lacera corpora* are corpses, bearing wounds no doubt but in one

13. For Claudius see Dio 60.21.1–2 (need for expertise) and 23.1 (length of stay; cf. Suet. *Claud.* 17.1–2). The point made in this paragraph, it seems to me, informs Mucianus' critique of previous emperors in his speech of encouragement to Vespasian (2.76.2–4), and that this is deliberate is surely proved by 2.77.3, where Mucianus comments that "aperiet et recludet contacta et tumescentia vitricium partium vulnera bellum ipsum," a remark that must be designed to make the reader think again of Vitellius' conduct at Bedriacum, since in its vividness and amplification it goes far beyond its putative models, Dem. *Phil.* 1.44, and Livy 28.44.8 (a speech by Scipio Africanus, also urging war).

14. Strictly, Otho took no personal part in the slaughter of his rivals, but he appeared immediately afterward (1.47.1); on his not putting in an appearance at Bedriacum, see especially 2.33.3 and 39.2.

15. The quotation is from Mucianus' speech (2.76.4); cf. 3.56.2. As for the timing, even Xerxes appeared on the site of Thermopylae, there to mutilate the corpse of Leonidas, shortly after the Persian victory (Hdt. 7.238).

16. For the trips made by what passed then for ordinary tourists to the battle sites, usually Greek, consecrated by history and mythology, see L. Friedländer, *Roman Life and Manners*, vol. 1 (London, 1907), p. 376; L. Casson, *Travel in the Ancient World* (London, 1974), pp. 235–36. It is perhaps worth adding that the only other people likely to visit a battlefield in the manner of Vitellius were necromancers (cf. Luc. 6.507–830), and for best results they too needed to be more prompt (ibid. 619–23).

17. Courbaud, *Procédés*, p. 99 and n. 2; cf. W. A. Spooner, *Taciti Historiarum Libri* (London, 1891), p. 251. J. Nicols, *Vespasian and the Partes Flavianae* (Wiesbaden, 1978), pp. 68–69, has observed that Vitellius must have traveled fast to reach Bedriacum when he did, but this will not justify the revival of Ernesti's conjecture *ultra* (for *intra*) by K. Wellesley, *The Long Year*² (Bristol, 1989), p. 225.

18. Funari, pp. 588–94.

piece; *trunci artus* are severed limbs, identifiably parts once attached to human bodies; and *putres virorum equorumque formae* are rotting lumps of flesh, which might once have been man or beast but are no longer recognizable by shape alone.¹⁹ After this, one might expect the list to end with gore, the one remaining human by-product of battle, but Tacitus shifts his ground (so to speak) and talks of the soil soaked by gore, not merely because he inherited the phrase from Sallust or was seeking *variatio*,²⁰ but in order to extend the catalog and mention also the terrain, bringing in the physical destruction of trees and crops and—to sum up the entire process—*dira vastitas*. To reinforce this effect of a list, the word order is such that the adjective or participle invariably precedes its noun, the number of syllables is matched where possible (*lacera corpora*; *trunci artus*, not necessarily affected by elision; *putres formae*), and the phrases become steadily more weighty, culminating in an ablative absolute to flesh out *dira vastitas*.

By switching from bodies and body parts to the ground itself, Tacitus is also able to move naturally to the road which runs through the battlefield, and to the behavior of the people of Cremona: “nec minus inhumana pars viae, quam Cremonenses lauru rosaque constraverant, exstructis altaribus caesisque victimis regium in morem; quae laeta in praesens mox perniciem ipsis fecere.” Why there had been no attempt to clean up the battlefield in the past forty days or so we are never told, but the road—over which the fighting had also ranged—had apparently been cleared of corpses and debris in the meantime, until the local people made it look once more like a charnel house, sprinkling its surface with laurel and roses, and bespattering specially constructed altars with the blood of sacrificial victims.²¹ If we leave out of account Tacitus’ ethnographical comments on Germans and Britons,²² he is not an author inclined to talk of colors, perhaps—as Courbaud suggested—because “la couleur parle peu au moraliste.”²³ On occasion he will refer to the gleam of arms, decorations, and (above all) standards under a bright sun, as for instance in his extended narrative on Vitellius’ entry into Rome.²⁴ But he resorts more commonly to the antithetical placement of black against white, day against night, as with the mishap which befell Vitellius later in the year (3.56.1): “contionanti—prodigiosum dictu—tantum foedarum volucrum supervolitavit, ut nube atra diem obtenderent.” So, given not only that *rosa* is *hapax*, but also that scenes somehow involving Vitellius appear

19. Cf. Heubner, pp. 242–43.

20. It is generally accepted that *infecta tabo humus* was inspired by Sall. *Iug.* 101.11, but Heubner, p. 243, and Woodman, p. 148, opt for Verg. *G.* 3.481. The other parallels are collected by Funari, pp. 591–93.

21. The effect is reinforced by *inhumana* and *constraverant*. The adjective Tacitus uses only once more, of the inhuman indifference with which the people of Rome watch the final struggle between Vitellians and Flavians (3.83.3; Gerber and Greef, p. 639); the verb likewise appears only once more, applied to corpses littering a beach (*Ann.* 2.25.3; Gerber and Greef, p. 212).

22. Tac. *Germ.* 4.2 (cf. also 4.61.1); *Agr.* 11.2.

23. Courbaud, *Procédés*, p. 157.

24. See 2.89; also Gerber and Greef, p. 490 (*fulgere* and its cognates), and p. 1540 (*splendere* and cognates).

more than most to arouse Tacitus' awareness of color,²⁵ we must give full force to the shades specified here. The mention of laurel, admittedly, can be interpreted in more than one way, but *prima facie* its hue ought to remind the reader either of the greenness of the countryside before it was overwhelmed by *dira vastitas*, or of the contrast between the devastation at the site and the greenness of the terrain beyond the battlefield's limits.²⁶ About the roses there is no such uncertainty: whether Tacitus saw them as red or purplish,²⁷ their color is picked up by the blood of the sacrificial victims, and the combination is patently meant to mirror the carnage which he has already described.²⁸

For all that, *nec minus inhumana pars viae* looks forward also to the locals' honoring Vitellius *regium in morem*. This phrase the commentators take to mean "like an oriental potentate," glossing it with Justin's account of the manner in which Arsinoe received Ptolemy Ceraunus and Suetonius' description of Caligula's journey to Rome upon his accession.²⁹ But as Heubner observed, the closest parallel is Curtius' report of the reception accorded to Alexander the Great at Babylon: "Bagophanes . . . totum iter floribus coronisque constraverat, argenteis altaribus utroque latere dispositis, quae non tunc modo, sed omnibus odoribus cumulaverat."³⁰ Now, whether or not Vitellius is being received like the ultimate potentate in Greco-Roman thinking, he is the focus of the narrative. This is what, most obviously, triggers the antithetical and chiasmic remark about the people of Cremona: "quae laeta in praesens mox perniciem ipsis fecere."³¹ For the city's fate represents *in parvo* the end awaiting Vitellius, a point Tacitus drives home (as we have seen) in the concluding sentence of the chapter. What unites them here, however, is a larger antithesis, not just between the living and the dead, but between living civilians and military dead. And these civilians are at fault in two ways. Just as the conduct of the Cremonese simultaneously exalts the emperor and insults the dead (who remain unburied and unhonored), so Vitellius fails to check adulation which *might* befit Alexander of Macedon, and he indulges his own civilian bloodthirstiness by trekking about the field and feasting his eyes on the slain. No matter how low Tacitus' opinion of the brutal Soldateska, he shows even more contempt for civilians who try in any way to take advantage of them, be it by making open fun of them or

25. For *rosa* see Gerber and Greef, p. 1413. Besides the passages quoted above, see 2.55.1 (the only other example of a red/green contrast), 3.38.1 (light/dark), and 3.67.2 (Vitellius with *pullo amictu, pullus* being *hapax*: Gerber and Greef, p. 1238). Note too the descriptions of Caecina at 2.20.1 and 3.31.4.

26. These possibilities are suggested by modern exploitation of the interplay between pastoral and warfare, discussed by Fussell, *Great War*, pp. 231–43, 254–69.

27. See R. J. Edgeworth, "The Purple Flower Image in the *Aeneid*," *Philologus* 127 (1983): 143–48.

28. For modern parallels see Fussell, *Great War*, pp. 243–54.

29. Justin 24.3.4–5; Suet. *Calig.* 13 (cf. Philo *Leg.* 12). Since ceremonies of this kind, albeit less elaborate, were not so unusual in a Roman context (Hirtius *B Gall.* 8.51; App. *BCiv.* 5.74/314; Suet. *Ner.* 25.2, *Galba* 18.1; Dio 63.20.4), it may be suggested that if Tacitus had had an eastern king in mind, he would have said so explicitly, as in the case of Galba (1.40.2).

30. Q. Curtius *Hist. Alex.* 5.1.20; Heubner, p. 243.

31. See B.-R. Voss, *Der pointierte Stil des Tacitus* (Münster, 1963), p. 54. The formulation is used again, of Arrius Varus, at 3.6.1.

(like Vitellius) by donning the *paludamentum* and playing out the role of warrior-emperor.³²

This antithesis between civilian and military becomes stronger still in the next section of the narrative. For we come now to material which contrasts markedly with what has preceded, and bears not just a military but a hierarchic stamp, in other words, another catalog arranged in descending order: “aderant Valens et Caecina monstrabantque pugnae locos: hinc inrupisse legionum agmen, hinc equites coortos, inde circumfusas auxiliorum manus; iam tribuni praefectique, sua quisque facta extollentes falsa vera aut maiora vero miscebant. volgus quoque militum clamore et gaudio deflectere via, spatia certaminum recognoscere, aggerem armorum, strues corporum intueri mirari.”³³ There are three or four aspects to this passage which merit attention.³⁴ First and foremost, there is the way the enumeration takes account of seniority: it begins with the generals, Valens and Caecina, passes to the junior officers, themselves separated into legionary and auxiliary commanders, and ends with the rankers. Second, all behave in the manner appropriate to their standing. Valens and Caecina discourse on the tactics of the battle, mentioning—again hierarchically—the legions, the cavalry, and the auxiliaries. The junior officers concentrate on their own accomplishments, embellishing or even fabricating deeds of daring. And the men merely recognize the stretches of ground over which they fought, and gape in wonder at piles of weapons and heaps of bodies.³⁵ Third, a certain irony runs through the narrative. While the point cannot be pressed, the word order suggests that Valens pushes himself forward at Caecina’s expense, even though he arrived only just in time for the battle.³⁶ The junior officers certainly have no interest in the larger picture, but solely in securing recognition (and so promotion) for themselves. And the driest touch, the soldiers *clamore et gaudio deflectere via*.³⁷ If modern parallels are any guide, the troops were

32. For the soldiery, see I. Kajanto, “Tacitus’ Attitude to War and the Soldier,” *Latomus* 29 (1970): 699–718. Adverse comments on civilians who try to take advantage will be found at 1.53.2, 2.88.1–2, 3.33.2, 81.1 (Musonius Rufus), and 83.1–3. On Vitellius, the *paludamentum*, and his folly, see “An Heir of Tragedy: Tacitus *Historiae* 2.59.3,” *CP* 86 (1991): 138–43. This insistence on Vitellius’ civilian aspect, of course, is linked with Tacitus’ emphasis on the troops’ loyalty to the emperor (especially 3.86.1) and on his unworthiness (especially 2.89.2).

33. I have cut off one sentence at the end of the enumeration (“et erant quos . . . subiret”), in order both to make clear the effects at which Tacitus is aiming, and to reserve for separate discussion the problem which this enumeration creates for him.

34. Several of the details registered below have been noted by L. Valmaggia, *P. Cornelio Tacito: Il libro secondo delle Storie* (Turin, 1897), p. 132; and by A. Salvatore, *Stilo e ritmo in Tacito* (Naples, 1950), pp. 174–75 = *Psicologia e stile in Tacito* (Naples, 1971), pp. 157–58; cf. also Rademacher, p. 138.

35. The use of the singular, *aggerem armorum*, worried E. Wölfflin, “Jahresbericht über Tacitus,” *Philologus* 27 (1869): 113–49, at p. 143 = *Ausgewählte Schriften* (Leipzig, 1933), p. 100, leading him to suggest that the victors erected “ein Art *tropaeum*.” But since Tacitus is composing a catalog, and has already shown a taste for isosyllabism, he may well be exploiting elision to match *aggerem armorum* against *strues corporum*, an effect not to be achieved with the plural.

36. Valens’ arrival is reported at 2.27.1, 30.1–2, and 31.2, his claim to have saved Caecina from defeat at 2.93.2; Caecina’s attempt to seize all the glory appears at 2.24.1.

37. Since *deflectere* is used only here in the *Historiae* (and once in *Ann.* 3.21: Gerber and Greef, p. 267), it is probably meant ironically to echo the two occurrences of *flectit* (above, n. 5), and at the same time to dissociate the troops from their leader (see below).

probably ordered to halt on the road, and to wait while their seniors and betters tramped the ground. Vitellius' men, however, break ranks, pour down the embankment, and noisily enjoy themselves, relieved presumably to have survived the battle. And this sets up a fourth progression, to the extent that it is not covered by their conduct, from the rational lecture by the generals, through the mixture of reason and emotion which animates the junior officers, to the simple feelings of the soldiery.

As can be seen from this analysis, Rademacher's attempt to impose a break in the sense within this segment ruins every one of the effects at which Tacitus is aiming.³⁸ This passage, indeed, makes up the central panel around which the other details are arranged, the outer limits being set by the subject of Vitellius' behavior, and the ring composition being emphasized by the echo achieved with *flexit* and *non flexit*. Nonetheless, the correspondence is by no means mechanical. Interposed between Vitellius and his army we have, on the one side, the Cremonese, insensitive civilians like the emperor; but on the other side there are those, rankers at that, who are highly sensitive to the moral which must be drawn from the spectacle: "et erant quos varia sors rerum lacrimaeque et misericordia subiret. at non Vitellius flexit oculos nec tot milia insepultorum civium exhorruit: laetus ultro et tam propinquae sortis ignarus instaurabat sacrum dis loci." With the moral we need not concern ourselves again. Here the passage is important because it illustrates the way in which Tacitus solves the problem created by arranging the material in the form of a catalog. Given that he must return somehow to Vitellius and his bloodthirsty appreciation of the scene, it looks almost as if he has painted himself into a corner. What is significant, however, is his refusal to draw a parallel between the troops' relatively innocent enjoyment and their emperor's sadistic satisfaction. Instead, he employs a double antithesis, first between the troops who enjoy themselves and those who feel compassion, and then between the latter group and Vitellius himself. No doubt there were those in the army who experienced the sorrowful feelings Tacitus specifies, rankers being notorious also for their sentimentality or—as he puts it when he is describing their mood swings—their childlike mutability of temperament.³⁹ But this arrangement also severs any direct link between the common soldiery and their civilian emperor, so allowing Tacitus to close the chapter in the same manner as he had opened it.

There seems to be no value judgment buried in the antithesis between the soldiers who enjoy themselves, relieved to be alive, and those who feel sorrow: having fought for their very existence, perhaps, they are entitled to whatever emotions they choose to entertain. There is, however, an extremely strong contrast between the men, who are professionals, and their ruler, who is not. This point is hammered home by means of an artful reversal, which associates Vitellius now—to his detriment—with the dead. The emperor, we are told, revels in the slaughter of adversaries who may

38. See above, note 4.

39. See 1.69, 2.29.3, and 45.3, 3.31.3.

have fought and died in their thousands for Otho, but who had been his fellow citizens before they were denied burial and left to rot (*tot milia in-sepultorum civium*). Yet Vitellius' one concern is to offer a thank-offering for his victory, which is a thank-offering for these deaths. This is not even impiety; it is the mark of a man *omnis humani divinique iuris expers*.⁴⁰

This being Tacitus' portrayal of Vitellius' visit to the site of Bedriacum, we cannot explore the implications to be drawn from the account until we have reviewed briefly the case offered by Woodman, to the effect that Tacitus drew on this material in the *Annals*, when he composed his description of the march made by Germanicus and his army to the scene of the Varian disaster.⁴¹ For whatever acceptance of his arguments might indicate about Tacitus' literary procedures, it has certainly been held to raise serious questions about his reliability as a historian. As Goodyear expressed it, after various caveats, "passages of transferred narrative description are presumptive evidence of free composition (sources being unavailable or ignored) and, if we take a severe view, irresponsibility."⁴²

To clear the way for his own views, Woodman begins by discounting as inadequate two alternative explanations for such similarities as are found in the two passages, the idea that battlefields may have a certain generic likeness, and the theory that the two accounts—along with similar descriptions by Vergil and Livy—go back to a common literary prototype, "for example, in a now lost passage of Ennius."⁴³ Though this second hypothesis may not be quite as absurd as Woodman seems to believe,⁴⁴ it is incapable of proof, and there is nothing to be gained by dwelling on the possibility. Where the former idea is concerned, however, Woodman's approach is manifestly too cavalier. This is demonstrated most easily by quoting the description of a scene from the Napoleonic Wars, Ségur's account of the way in which the Grand Army, retreating from Moscow, passed by Borodino on October 29–30, 1812, some fifty days after their victory on September 7:

Après la Kalougha, on marchait absorbé, quand plusieurs de nous, levant les yeux, jetèrent un cri de saisissement! Soudain chacun de nous regarda autour de soi: on vit une terre toute piétinée, nue, dévastée, tous les arbres coupés à quelques pieds du sol, et plus loin des mamelons écrêtés; le plus élevé paraissait le plus difforme. Il semblait que ce fut un volcan éteint et détruit. Tout autour, la terre était couverte de débris de casques et de cuirasses, de tambours brisés, de tronçons d'armes, de lambeaux d'uniforme, et d'étendards tachés de sang.

40. So 2.91.1 (compare Mucianus' taxing Vitellius with *inscitia* at 2.77.3). This may help to explain why there is no criticism of Vitellius on religious grounds such as Tiberius supposedly leveled against Germanicus (*Ann.* 1.62.2), although Vitellius was already a *quindecimvir sacris faciundis* and an Arval Brother (R. Hanslik, *RE* suppl. 9 [1962], col. 1709, s.v. "Vitellius" 7b).

41. *Ann.* 1.61.1–62.1; Woodman, pp. 143–49, repeated more briefly in A. J. Woodman, *Rhetoric in Classical Historiography* (London and Sydney, 1988), pp. 176–78.

42. Goodyear, *Annals of Tacitus*, 2:97.

43. Woodman, p. 147.

44. See "Two Omens in Tacitus," *RhM* (forthcoming); the findings of Funari, pp. 584–94, also suggest a need for greater caution.

Sur ce sol désolé gissaient trente milliers de cadavres à demi dévorés. Quelques squelettes restés sur l'éboulement de l'une de ces collines, dominaient tout. Il semblait que la mort eût établi là son empire: c'était cette terrible redoute, conquête et tombeau de Caulaincourt. Alors le cri: "C'est le champ de la grande bataille!" forma un long et triste murmure. L'Empereur passa vite. Personne ne s'arrêta; le froid, la faim, et l'ennemi pressaient; seulement on détournait la tête en marchant, pour jeter un triste et dernier regard sur ce vaste tombeau de tant de compagnons d'armes sacrifiés inutilement, et qu'il fallait abandonner.⁴⁵

For all the variation in detail, Ségur's account parallels Tacitus' description of Vitellius' time at Bedriacum in a number of important particulars: there is the same stress on *dira vastitas*, a similar enumeration of *aggerem armorum*, *strues corporum*, and the same regret for the useless slaughter, if not of fellow citizens then of what comes to the same thing, companions in arms, slain in their thousands and still lying unburied.⁴⁶ There is no need to assume that Ségur was familiar with Tacitus' works, though it is not impossible (as we shall see presently, Napoleon himself was acquainted—at whatever remove—with Suetonius' *Lives*). The fact remains that an unprejudiced reader will find basic, generic similarities between Tacitus' account of Bedriacum and Ségur's narrative such as are not to be discerned between either of them and the Roman historian's description of Germanicus' army amid the forests and swamps of Germany.

To come now to the specifics, Woodman's case depends on one key observation: "The most remarkable parallel between the two passages is the way in which, half-way through each, Tacitus introduces the men who had survived their respective disasters and who conveniently happened to be on hand to point out various important areas. This detail seems to me so unusual, and unparalleled elsewhere, that it places the many other correspondences in a different light."⁴⁷ This formulation, in and of itself, betrays a fundamental misunderstanding of Tacitus' account of Vitellius' visit to the site of Bedriacum. For only a hasty reading, I think, would lead one to characterize the episode as a disaster in the eyes of Valens or Caecina, to assert that these two turn up "half-way through" the narrative, or to suppose that their presence was merely convenient. In the passage from the *Annals*, on the other hand, it is legitimate to say that the survivors (*superstites*) appear "half-way through," but their appearance is neither unexpected nor unprepared. And this is as it should be, since they have a vital role to play in that scene, a consideration Woodman misses because his analysis of this narrative too is faulty.

For Germanicus' visit to the site of the *clades Variana* Tacitus uses two sentences to set the stage: "igitur cupido Caesarem invadit solvendi suprema militibus ducique, permoto ad miserationem omni qui aderat exercitu ob propinquos, amicos, denique ob casus bellorum et sortem hominum. praemisso Caecina, ut occulta saltuum scrutaretur pontesque et aggeres umido paludum et fallacibus campis imponeret, incedunt maestos locos

45. Général Comte Philippe-Paul de Ségur, *La campagne de Russie, 1812* (Paris, n.d.), p. 162.

46. One more similarity between the two accounts is discussed in the final section of my paper.

47. Woodman, p. 147.

visuque ac memoria deformes." Let us note, first, that it is unwise to claim that the initial sentence contains two separate and successive ideas, "Germanicus' desire to bury the dead soldiers" and "the reaction of the present army."⁴⁸ What Tacitus is seeking to convey is the *pietas* of the general and the *pietas* of his troops, the latter influenced by personal as well as larger considerations. This is confirmed by the way in which they are linked, in reverse order, in the two sentences which close the narrative and, more particularly, by the way in which Germanicus himself is termed *praesentibus doloris socius*: "igitur Romanus qui aderat exercitus sextum post cladis annum trium legionum ossa, nullo noscente alienas reliquias an suorum humo tegeret, omnes ut coniunctos, ut consanguineos aucta in hostem ira maesti simul et infensi condebant. primum extruendo tumulo caespitem Caesar posuit, gratissimo munere in defunctos et praesentibus doloris socius."

Now, if Tacitus had said only once that Germanicus' troops were mourning kinsmen and friends, we could explain this as his means of bringing out their *pietas*. That he returns to the subject and again emphasizes the sharpness of their grief indicates something more than ring-composition.⁴⁹ In light of the clannish character of the legions and their relative isolation from one another,⁵⁰ it suggests that at least some of these men were themselves survivors of the disaster. And this is borne out, in turn, by Tacitus' stating that the army marched through territory "ugly both to see and to remember." Whatever the route Germanicus' force is supposed to have followed, legions had not crossed this terrain for five years; those who above all found it ugly *memoria* should be the survivors who had struggled back to safety.⁵¹ So there is ample preparation for the appearance in the body of the narrative of survivors whom, in any case, a prudent general could be expected to employ as guides through lands with which, in whole or part, he personally was unfamiliar.

Let us turn now to what Woodman terms "a long central 'panel'." In fact, there are two panels, arranged in sequence. The first describes the site: "prima Vari castra lato ambitu et dimensis principiis trium legionum manus ostentabant; dein semiruto vallo, humili fossa accisae iam reliquiae consedis intellegebantur. medio campi albertia ossa, ut fugerant, ut resisterant, disiecta vel aggerata. adiacebant fragmina telorum equorumque artus, simul truncis arborum antefixa ora. lucis propinquis barbarae arae, apud quos tribunos ac primorum ordinum centuriones mactaverant." As Woodman concedes, there is much less stress here on the visual aspect than in the account of Bedriacum, and the reason is obvious. These details

48. So *ibid.*, p. 145.

49. I agree with Woodman, p. 145, that the repetition in *Romanus qui aderat exercitus* indicates ring-composition (though this is not its sole purpose). But the fact that Germanicus' army and their commander are mentioned in this order upon their second appearance is dictated as much by Tacitus' need to create the antithesis with Tiberius' reaction in 62.2 (not part of the account, as is shown by the inability of Woodman, p. 145, to fit it into his scheme), just as it is to preserve the narrative connections that the emperor reacts first to Germanicus, then to his army, and then again to Germanicus, thus paving the way for the opening of chapter 63.

50. Tacitus makes both points in *Hist.* 1.9.3 and 51.3.

51. Cf. Goodyear, *Annals of Tacitus*, 2.95, perhaps hesitant because the only other references to survivors appear to set their recovery much later (Dio 56.22.4 with *Ann.* 12.27.3).

represent the deductions which trained soldiers, Germanicus' men, could make from the evidence along their way (notice especially *intellebantur*). One might perhaps wonder how they knew that those sacrificed at or on the altars had been tribunes and senior centurions, but there is nothing unnatural about such an assumption. More important, we should note another major difference between this material and Tacitus' account of Bedriacum. The historian resorts once again to a catalog, but the arrangement of the items here is strictly chronological, from Varus' first camp through the human sacrifices made by the Germans after their victory.

The second panel is not quite the same: "et cladis eius superstites, pugnam aut vincula elapsi, referebant hic cecidisse legatos, illic raptas aquilas; primum ubi vulnus Varo adactum, ubi infelici dextera et suo ictu mortem invenerit; quo tribunali contionatus Arminius, quot patibula captivis, quae scrobes, utque signis et aquilis per superbiam inluserit." Here too Tacitus gives us a catalog, and again the order is chronological (from the initial attacks through Arminius' exultation in his victory). But this is material which nobody could have deduced from the remains or the ground. Only eyewitnesses could supply such information, and that is why Tacitus brings on the survivors at this very point.⁵² There is no justification for talk of the survivors' conveniently turning up, as if Tacitus had produced them like rabbits out of a hat. Nor is there anything in the least improbable about the facts reported in either panel, still less anything to suggest that Tacitus had to look for material either in his own earlier account of Bedriacum or in the works of the poets whose phraseology he chose to echo.⁵³

One must grant, I think, that Tacitus himself was very much aware that he had dealt with similar material in his description of Vitellius' excursion to Bedriacum. But it is far less logical to suppose that he wished to echo that account or to recycle its contents, than it is to conclude that he was trying his hardest not to imitate that episode or, failing that, to show readers who recalled it that he was capable of dealing with similar material in a very different, more sophisticated manner. Hence two catalogs instead of a single panel, chronological sequences instead of an arrangement by rank, a narrative composed from deduction and report instead of an emphasis on the purely visual, and a large number of Vergilian reminiscences instead of just one or two.⁵⁴

52. Cf. E. Koestermann, *Tacitus, Annalen*, vol. 1: *Buch 1–3* (Heidelberg, 1963), p. 213.

53. Apropos of *medio campi albertia ossa*, Woodman (p. 148) declares it "highly unlikely that Tacitus had any historical evidence for whitening bones in the middle of the plain," on what basis I cannot discern. Let us note first that, if there were skeletons to be seen at Borodino only some fifty days after that battle, there is no reason why there should not have been bones amid the plains of Germany. Second, given Tacitus' penchant for the strongest color contrasts and the fact that the plain in question is German swamp, we can argue that Tacitus thought the green so dark as to appear almost black. And this in turn suggests that he was following an eyewitness account (at whatever remove), rather than being inspired by Vergil (Woodman, pp. 148–49) or some other poet (Goodyear, *Annals of Tacitus*, 2:96, n. 3).

54. On the Vergilian echoes in the Bedriacum episode, see above, nn. 10 and 20. The numerous allusions to Vergil in *Ann.* 1.61–62, offered with more enthusiasm by Woodman (pp. 148–49) than by Goodyear (*Annals of Tacitus*, 2:94–98), need not be explained solely by the hypothesis that the historian considered this a more heroic scene.

Once this is recognized, of course, Woodman's entire case falls to the ground. For he himself admits that many of the verbal echoes in the later account are either unavoidable, or else suggestive of a deliberate attempt to get away from the terminology of the earlier narrative, just as Good-year, after his review of the material, grants that "nothing in [Ann. 1.] 61 is inexplicable without reference to [Hist.] ii.70."⁵⁵ It is time to discard a theory which has called into question Tacitus' historical reliability without adequate grounds, besides obscuring the literary artistry with which he composed his accounts, first of Vitellius' visit to Bedriacum, and then of Germanicus' pilgrimage to the site of the Varian disaster.

If we may turn now to the reasons that Tacitus places so much emphasis on the visual aspect of Vitellius' excursion to Bedriacum, one school of thought seems to regard it simply as the historian's way of bringing out the emperor's cruelty as vividly as possible. Hence the observation that, had he not traveled to Bedriacum, "some other means of attacking his inhumanity would no doubt have been found."⁵⁶ This comment is obviously pointless. It is scarcely more helpful to remark that Tacitus presents Vitellius' behavior at the site in the manner typical of a tyrant,⁵⁷ in that this does nothing to palliate the oddity, tyrannical or otherwise, of his visiting the battlefield some forty days after the event. Nor will it do to argue that, here as elsewhere, Tacitus overstates the emperor's cruelty: "he was easy-going, generous, affable, a good provincial governor, an affectionate son and father."⁵⁸ For all this Tacitus is our primary source and he concedes every item, at the proper place.⁵⁹ This, clearly, is not the proper place. And while we may conjecture that Tacitus considered stress on the visual element the most effective, most vivid way of portraying the emperor's inhumanity on this occasion, the hypothesis is hardly so compelling as to rule out other types of explanation.

To the extent that it addresses the text before us, there is more to be said for the suggestion by Borzsák that, at least in the first three books of the *Histories*, Tacitus emphasizes the visual because he is employing the *spectaculum* motif as a way of unifying his material, and regards Vitellius' reign, even the year of the four emperors, as a *foedum spectaculum*.⁶⁰ If this were correct, it would account for Tacitus' elaborating scenes like Vitellius' excursion to Bedriacum or his entry into Rome (2.89), both of them—on the face of it—episodes well calculated to reveal the emperor's character; nor could we fault the historian for criticizing Vitellius' excessive enjoyment of his tour of the battlefield (cf. Ann. 1.76.3). It is doubtful, however, whether any such overarching theory can explain, not the few passages where the visual aspect is stressed, but the many where it is

55. Woodman, p. 147; Goodyear, *Annals of Tacitus*, 2:97.

56. Chilver, *Historical Commentary*, p. 231.

57. Borzsák, "Cornelius," cols. 459–60; cf. D. Flach, *Tacitus in der Tradition der antiken Geschichtsschreibung* (Göttingen, 1973), pp. 95–96.

58. K. Wellesley, "Suggestio falsi in Tacitus," *RhM* 103 (1960): 272–88, at p. 286.

59. See 3.86.2 (character), 2.97.2 (governorship; cf. Suet. *Vit.* 5), 1.75.2, 3.59.3, 67.1, 68.2 (family).

60. I. Borzsák, "Spectaculum: ein Motiv der 'tragischen Geschichtsschreibung' bei Livius und Tacitus," *ACD* 9 (1973): 57–67, at p. 66; cf. Rademacher, pp. 114–15.

not. And since there is enormous variation in Tacitus' exploitation of this device,⁶¹ it is probably wiser to look for an immediate reason for his procedure in the chapter we are discussing, a reason discernible as soon as we recognize that Tacitus, far from overstating his case, shows a restraint entirely absent from Suetonius' version of the visit to Bedriacum.⁶²

Although vastly briefer, the biographer's account is also vastly more robust (*Vit.* 10.3): "utque campos, in quibus pugnatum est, adit, abhorrentes quosdam cadaverum tabem detestabili voce confirmare ausus est optime olere occisum hostem et melius civem. nec eo setius ad leniendam gravitatem odoris plurimum meri propalam hausit passimque divisit." This story recent scholars have either ignored or rejected.⁶³ Yet it is just as plausible as Tacitus' account. For all Suetonius' readiness to purvey gossip and slander, Vitellius' liking for brutal candor is as well attested as his taste for wine, and Tacitus himself refers to both traits on occasion.⁶⁴ Not that it is the emperor's drinking per se that excites censure here, but his drinking openly (*propalam*) as well as to excess (*plurimum meri*) and his passing the wine around (*passim*) in the presence of the dead.⁶⁵ Much more important than this, however, a battlefield that had not been cleared for some forty days—in early, middle, or late summer—would be far less notable for the sights to be seen than for the all-pervading stench of decomposition.⁶⁶

That Suetonius faces up to this fact, whereas Tacitus alludes to it elliptically (*putres virorum equorumque formae*), could be explained in terms of decorum alone. Writing biography, a lesser genre, Suetonius was under no obligation to avoid mentioning odors, offensive or otherwise. Not that this should be attributed to a depraved taste: like Vitellius' comment, many of the references are down-to-earth remarks by his subjects. So we find not only further reports on decomposing corpses (*Calig.* 27.4; *Ner.* 48.2) or details about Nero's body odor (*Ner.* 51), but a string of quotations, the best known probably Vespasian's joke about money's having no smell, whatever its source (*Ves.* 23.3).⁶⁷ In Roman historiography, by

61. Borzsák "Spectaculum," p. 65, for example, offers an attractive interpretation of *circumspectabat* at 2.74.1, but it hardly follows that we can invest the verb with as much significance on its every appearance, e.g., 1.55.2, 2.92.2, 3.73.1; similarly with *circumspicere* (Gerber and Greef, p. 170).

62. So, rightly, Courbaud, *Procédés*, p. 80; R. C. Lounsbury, *The Arts of Suetonius* (Bonn, Frankfurt a/M, and New York, 1987), p. 102; cf. R. Syme, *Tacitus*, vol. 1 (Oxford, 1958), pp. 189–90.

63. It is ignored by Wellesley, *Long Year*², p. 100; and by P. A. L. Greenhalgh, *The Year of the Four Emperors* (London and New York, 1975), pp. 110–11; an attempt to explain it away is made by R. Engel, "Das Charakterbild des Kaisers A. Vitellius bei Tacitus und sein historischer Kern," *Athenaeum* 55 (1977): 345–68, at p. 360 n. 54.

64. For Vitellius' candor, see Suet. *Vit.* 8.2 (the emperor makes light of misfortune), 10.3 (the mean-spirited comment on Otho's grave, a story at which Tacitus hints: 2.49.4), and 14.2 (the wish *pascere oculos*, reported differently by Tacitus at 3.39.1). To this could be added Vitellius' dying words (3.85), notable for their baldness, and a belittling comment on the Golden House (Dio 65.4.1). On his drinking Tacitus is again restrained, using only the word *temulentus* ("tipsy": see Pliny *HN* 14.90) and of the emperor himself only twice (1.62.2, 3.56.2; but note 2.68.1, 91.1). Suetonius (*Vit.* 13 and 17), Plutarch (*Galba* 22.7), and Dio (65.2–3) do not usually separate his drinking from his gluttony.

65. For reservations about drinking in the presence of the dead, see Cic. *Leg.* 2.60; Apul. *Met.* 2.24; cf. Pliny *HN* 14.88.

66. Fussell, *Great War*, p. 49; cf. Shakespeare, *Henry V*, 4.3.91–108.

67. See *Iul.* 67.1 (quotation); *Aug.* 4.2, 86.1 (quotation); *Calig.* 23.3, 37.1; *Ner.* 31.2; *Ves.* 8.3 (quotation).

contrast, talk of odors was clearly supposed to be kept to a minimum. Thus Sallust raises the topic only three times, once to bring out the sordidness of the Tullianum (*Cat.* 55.4), once to document the complete breakdown of Postumius Albinus' command in Africa (*Iug.* 44.4), and once to report on the spices of Gordyene (*H.* 4.72M). Livy is even more reticent, yielding only seven references: one relates to a prodigy (3.10.7), one explains a stratagem used against the Romans (38.7.13), two deal with pestilential conditions (3.6.3, 25.26.11), two more with horses panicked by the scent of elephants (21.55.7, 30.18.7; cf. Frontin. *Strat.* 2.4.12–14), and one comments on natural emanations at Phaselis (37.23.2). As with Livy, so with Tacitus. In his historical works there are two references to natural emanations, one direct (5.6.2) and one oblique (3.33.2), four to spices (*Germ.* 27.1; *Ann.* 2.60.4, 3.2.2, 16.6.2), and one to bodily decomposition, this in a passage dealing with Thracian insurgents who, termed *barbari*, are described as being penned in on a site where *pollui cuncta sanie odore contactu*.⁶⁸

Not that this ends the matter. The stench of physical decomposition had for centuries been thought an inappropriate theme for epic poetry, and yet Lucan and Statius chose to dwell on it.⁶⁹ To explain why Tacitus showed more reticence than these Silver poets, it is worth considering the total silence maintained on this topic by Ségur; not only does he have the survivors of the Grand Army stumble onto the site of Borodino without at first realizing where they are, but he asserts that they found there “trente milliers de cadavres à demi dévorés.”⁷⁰ Since one cannot accuse him plausibly of Byronic romanticism, it is more likely that he suppressed all reference to the smell of the field because he wished to horrify, but not to disgust—and so distract—his readers. Outside Smolensk in mid-August 1812, after all, Napoleon repeated the alliterative part of the comment that Suetonius attributes to Vitellius and, so says Caulaincourt, “chacun fut suffoqué de cette réflexion.”⁷¹ In much the same way, a modern audience will be highly sensitive to gruesome scenes of combat, but disgusted and distracted by any comment on any unpleasant smell associated therewith. This seems to be why almost everybody who has seen Francis Ford Coppola's 1979 film, *Apocalypse Now*, remembers one line in particular, given to the army colonel played (to the hilt) by Robert Duvall: “I love the smell of napalm in the morning . . . [it] smells like—victory.”

68. *Ann.* 4.49.3, for the stylistics of which see E. Koestermann, *Tacitus, Annalen*, vol. 2: *Buch 4–6* (Heidelberg, 1965), p. 159. There is one more reference to note, the figurative use of *odoratus* at *Dial.* 19.3 (comparable with *Suet. Aug.* 86.1).

69. Saara Lilja, *The Treatment of Odours in the Poetry of Antiquity* (Helsinki, 1972), pp. 214–27 and 168 respectively.

70. The account is tacitly rationalized by R. K. Riehn, *1812: Napoleon's Russian Campaign* (New York, 1990), p. 336, asserting that the corpses had by now been mummified, tacitly corrected by C. Cate, *The War of the Two Emperors* (New York, 1985), p. 346.

71. Armand-Augustin-Louis de Caulaincourt, *Mémoires du Général de Caulaincourt, duc de Vincennes*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1933), p. 395; he gives Napoleon's words as “rappelez-vous, messieurs, ce mot d'un empereur romain: le corps d'un ennemi mort sent toujours bon” (p. 394).

Here, surely, we have the key to any understanding of Tacitus' chapter on Vitellius' visit to Bedriacum. Though Tacitus appears anyway to have been disinclined simply to bow to convention, to the extent that he makes one oblique reference to the smell of victory, his aim was not to disgust his audience with the specific details of the emperor's conduct at the site or his comments on its unpleasantness. Rather, he was seeking to bring out the horrors of the scene as a whole, playing Vitellius off against the other participants, military and civilian, living and dead. To have been more explicit about the stench of decomposition would have created a tale of unrelieved ugliness, destroying all possibility of compassion (cf. 3.84.5). Skillful exploitation of the visual aspect, by contrast, set the scene squarely before his readers and achieved his ends, literary, moral, and historiographical. For his efforts to have their desired effect, in short, there had to be art to mediate between reality and reader.⁷²

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