

A LUGUBRIOUS PROSPECT: TACITUS, *HISTORIES* 1.40

Histories 1.40 is designed to set the scene for Galba's assassination. It begins by bringing the emperor into the crowded Forum, but then it switches to Otho and his followers, dwelling on the horror, not of the act they plan (that is reserved for chapter 41), but of their readiness to commit it. The text is not problematical, but since the point behind the first two sentences is not entirely clear, this has prompted occasional emendation, repeated discussion, and continuing perplexity. The difficulty arises, in good measure, from the assumption that Tacitus is saying much the same as Plutarch (*Galb.* 26.4–6). As has been remarked more than once, the two authors no doubt drew their material from the common source, but they have in mind different time-frames and different viewpoints.¹ Nor does this end the matter. A skewed perspective on these sentences has also led one scholar to dissect the chapter in a manner purporting to show that Galba's fate, not the Othonians' willingness to bring it about, is Tacitus' main concern.²

Let us begin by quoting the text usually printed by the editors:³ [1] Agebatur huc illuc Galba vario turbæ fluctuantis impulsu, completis undique basilicis ac templis, lugubri prospectu. neque populi aut plebis ulla vox, sed attoniti voltus et conversæ ad omnia aures; non tumultus, non quies, quale magni metus et magnæ iræ silentium est. Othoni tamen armari plebem nuntiabatur: ire præcipientes et occupare pericula iubet. [2] igitur milites Romani, quasi Vologæsum 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.

Since the words 'Othoni tamen' announce a change of subject, they prove that the first two sentences make up one unit, and its overall sense is clear. Drawn from the Palace by a false report of Otho's death, but cautious enough to don a breastplate (35.1–2), Galba has come down to the Forum in a litter (39.1–2). Plutarch declares that the emperor had two aims, to make a thank-offering on the Capitol for the supposed failure of the coup and, in the process, to show himself to the citizenry (*Galb.* 26.3). This Tacitus ignores, preferring to focus on the confusion, first among Galba's advisers (39.1), then as his litter is jostled by the crowd which fills the Forum as well as the basilicas and temples all around. There is nothing to suggest that the throng is enthusiastic: not even the emperor's partisans were that (39.2: 'languentibus omnium studiis, qui primo alacres fidem atque animum ostentaverant'). But nor are

¹ E. Groag, 'Zur Kritik von Tacitus' Quellen in den Historien', *Jahrbuch für class. Philologie*, Supp. 23 (1897), 711–99, at p. 743; P. Fabia, *RPh* 36 (1912), 106; P. Ammann, *Der künstlerische Aufbau von Tacitus, Historien I 12–II 51 (Kaiser Otho)* (Diss., Zürich, 1931), p. 41; R. Waltz, 'Examen d'une phrase de Tacite (*Hist.*, I, 40)', *Mélanges de philologie, de littérature et d'histoire ancienne offerts à Alfred Ernout* (Paris, 1940), pp. 377–82.

² U. Rademacher, *Die Bildkunst des Tacitus* (Hildesheim and New York, 1975), pp. 128–31, discussed below, pp. 241–4.

³ This is the text printed by H. Heubner (Teubner, Stuttgart, 1978). There is no significant difference in the editions of C. D. Fisher (Oxford, 1911); C. Halm and G. Andresen (Leipzig and Berlin, 1928); C. Giarratano (Rome, 1939); E. Koestermann (Leipzig, 1961); or P. Wuilleumier, H. Le Bonniec and J. Hellegouarc'h, *Tacite, Histoires Livre I* (Paris, 1987). For the various emendations which have been proposed, see below, notes 12, 13, and 33.

the people hostile, still less—what is usually asserted—indifferent. The mood is one of expectancy. There is no talking, and every sound catches their attention. So they are neither noisy nor yet quiet.

The problem is to fit into this framework the awkward expressions ‘lugubri prospectu’ and ‘quale magni metus et magnae irae silentium est’. To explain the former, it is customary to look to Plutarch’s version of events. But as was emphasised especially by Waltz,⁴ he tells a different story. The crowd, so the biographer avers, was driven from the Forum and into the surrounding porticos by the arrival of the Othonians, and the people scattered, not in flight, but to find a safe place from which to see what would happen next, ‘as if’—according to the received text—‘present at a spectacle’ (*Galb.* 26.8: ὡσπερ θέαν καταλαμβάνόντων). Since Tacitus describes the situation before the Othonians irrupt into the Forum, we cannot bring the two narratives into complete agreement, unless we read into ‘lugubri prospectu’ an element of futurity it does not carry, no matter what kind of ablative it is,⁵ and offer a translation like ‘in expectation of a mournful scene’.⁶ Hence most scholars, guided more by the underlying idea than by the actual wording of Plutarch’s account, take ‘lugubri prospectu’ as an ablative absolute, coordinate with ‘completis... basilicis’, and hold that it means ‘and dismal was the prospect’ for those at the scene at the time.⁷ On this view, of course, the expression glosses both the sentence which has preceded and that which follows, and refers somehow to the behaviour of the crowd. And this is where the interpretation runs into major difficulties. It appears generally to be assumed that Plutarch and Tacitus, with their awareness of Galba’s imminent murder, have in mind the imagery of a gladiatorial show, and that Tacitus is criticising the people for their indifference to the outcome of the struggle for power. And so commentators almost invariably cite his account of the crowd’s conduct as the Vitellians and Flavians fought for possession of Rome (3.83.1): ‘aderat pugnantibus spectator populus utque in ludicro certamine, hos, rursus illos, clamore et plausu fovebat’.⁸

In Plutarch’s case the imagery is undoubtedly gladiatorial. One can point out that θέαν καταλαμβάνειν, which he uses only here, need mean no more than it does in Demosthenes, to take one’s seat at a show;⁹ that while θέα is the noun the biographer employs regularly in Roman contexts to denote a spectacle, that spectacle can be a chariot race (*Rom.* 5.5; 14.5), a *venatio* (*Cic.* 36.6), a gladiatorial show (*Flam.* 18.6),

⁴ Waltz, *op. cit.*, pp. 377–9.

⁵ The ablative has been defined as of quality, of accompaniment/attendant circumstances, or—most commonly—absolute. Since the distinctions between them can be subtle (cf. J. Vallejo, *Emerita* 9 [1941], 158), L. Valmaggia, *Tacito, Il libro primo delle Storie* (Turin, 1891), p. 66, and W. A. Spooner, *Taciti Historiarum Libri* (London, 1891), p. 145, try to sit on the fence.

⁶ This was Ritter’s view, according to G. A. Davies, *Tacitus, Histories Book I* (Cambridge, 1896), p. 114. In general, the commentators take *prospectus* to mean ‘a view’, the ability to see some distance (cf. 3.20.2; *Ann.* 2.23.2), rather than a thing seen, a ‘sight’ (cf. *Ann.* 15.42.1).

⁷ Cf. Valmaggia, *loc. cit.*; Davies, *loc. cit.*; A. Gerber and A. Greef, *Lexicon Taciteum* (Leipzig, 1903), p. 1223; W. Heraeus, *Taciti Historiarum Libri*, Buch I and II⁶ (Leipzig and Berlin, 1929), p. 64; H. Heubner, *P. Cornelius Tacitus, Die Historien*, Band 1: *Erstes Buch* (Heidelberg, 1963), p. 92; Willeumier, *Le Bonniec and Hellegouarc’h*, *op. cit.*, p. 167 n. 3; D. Longrée, *ANRW* ii.33, 4 (Berlin, 1991), pp. 2550–1.

⁸ See above all R. W. Husband, *CPh* 10 (1915), 321–5, industriously collecting all the passages where Tacitus and the other sources advert explicitly to the people’s indifference; also E. Courbaud, *Les procédés d’art de Tacite dans les ‘Histoires’* (Paris, 1918), pp. 162 and 189; M. M. Sage, *ANRW* ii.33, 2 (Berlin, 1990), pp. 913–14.

⁹ Demos. 21.178–9 (compare Plutarch’s use of the verb with τόπον at *Mor.* 149 A). Note too the employment of προκαταλαμβάνειν by Lucian, *Herm.* 39, and of προκατάληψις by Josephus, *A.J.* 19.86.

a *naumachia* (*Caes.* 55.4), a triumphal procession (*Aem.* 33.9), or a play in the theatre (*Flam.* 19.8; *Cic.* 13.2); even that Plutarch was not enamoured of gladiatorial imagery.¹⁰ Nonetheless, the spectacle which the crowd wanted to see involved an armed clash between Galba's supporters and the Othonians. So the allusion must be to the amphitheatre, and Plutarch surely took this phraseology from the common source because he could see no alternative.¹¹ But Tacitus' account is built around another kind of spectacle altogether, the chariot race.

Not only is it improbable that Tacitus would consider a gladiatorial show 'lugubris'.¹² More important by far, it may be legitimate to infer from his narrative that the people were indifferent to the outcome of the struggle between Galba and Otho, but what he comments on explicitly is, not their indifference to its end, but their anticipation of its start. This explains the emphasis on silence. There was no talking ('neque... ulla vox').¹³ Their expressions betrayed, not—as translators will have it—astonishment (Fyfe), terror (Moore) or fright (Wellesley), but their being struck dumb, 'frappé de stupeur'.¹⁴ Here, as elsewhere in Tacitus, 'attonitus' conveys a silence imposed from without, as is best illustrated by the formulation 'attonita... magis quam quieta contione' (*Ann.* 1.39.6).¹⁵ Being quiet, then, both of their own accord and because thunderstruck, the throng listen for any and every sound ('conversae ad omnia aures'). After this progression from the oral through the visual to the aural, Tacitus reverts to the silence as such, with the remark that there was no uproar and no quiet ('non tumultus, non quies'). The people try not to make any noise, and yet cannot keep completely still. And to reinforce and round out the peculiar nature of this silence, he concludes with a generalisation designed to gloss the entire clause, 'quale magni metus et magnae irae silentium est'.¹⁶

As Burnouf was apparently the first to recognise, this sentence echoes the wording Xenophon uses to describe the intensity of the battle between the Spartans and the Thebans at Coronea in 394 B.C. (*Ages.* 2.12): καὶ κραυγὴ μὲν οὐδεμία παρήν, οὐ μὴν οὐδὲ σιγὴ, φῶννῃ δέ τις ἦν τοιαύτη, οἷαν ὀργή τε καὶ μάχῃ παράσχουτ' ἄν.¹⁷ Of late,

¹⁰ See F. Fuhrmann, *Les images de Plutarque* (Paris, 1964), pp. 48–9, 53 and 241–2 (taking our passage as a reference to the theatre).

¹¹ That the common source took the same line as Plutarch, likely enough anyway, is suggested also by Tacitus' describing Hordeonius Flaccus as *spectator flagitii* apropos of the mutiny in Germany (1.56.1). An odd expression in context (cf. *CQ* 43 [1993], 278 n. 23), this looks like an example of Tacitus' transferring phrasing from one situation to another, a practice discussed by G. B. Townend, *AJPh* 85 (1964), 350–1. For further examples see below, notes 41 and 45.

¹² Elsewhere Tacitus uses 'lugubris' only with *cultus* (*Ann.* 13.32.3) and *bellum* (*Hist.* 2.46.3). The latter example does not explain our passage. The Romans were no more inclined to moralise about what moderns consider the cruelty of the games (cf. below, note 32), than they were to justify it (cf. G. Ville, 'La guerre et le *munus*', in J.-P. Brissson, *Problèmes de la guerre à Rome* [Paris and the Hague, 1969], pp. 185–95, especially pp. 193–4). To this extent, K. Wellesley, *Taciti Historiae* (Leipzig, 1989), p. 188, has reason to object to 'lugubri'. But his own suggestion, 'velut ludicri ad prospectum', cannot stand: cf. R. H. Martin, *CR* 41 (1991), 75; J. Hellegouarc'h, *Gnomon* 63 (1991), 273.

¹³ Since the lack of talk, not its unanimity, is the point at issue, we can reject 'una vox', the emendation proposed by J. J. Hartman, *Mnemosyne* 42 (1914), 419.

¹⁴ Courbaud, op. cit., p. 141.

¹⁵ For the rest, see 2.29.2; 42.1; 3.13.1; 4.49.3; 72.3.

¹⁶ Cf. Spooner, op. cit., p. 12; Courbaud, op. cit., p. 270. Despite the awkwardness that results (conceded by Husband, op. cit., p. 325), modern commentators prefer to take the clause as a gloss on 'quies' alone: see Davies, op. cit., p. 115; Heubner, op. cit., p. 92; G. E. F. Chilver, *A Historical Commentary on Tacitus' 'Histories' I and II* (Oxford, 1979), p. 99; K. Wellesley, *JRS* 71 (1981), 224.

¹⁷ Burnouf was credited with the observation by Orelli, who endorsed it (G. B. A. Fletcher, *Latomus* 30 [1971], 384). The point was made afresh by L. Radermacher, *RhM* 58 (1903), 316.

however, scholars have tended to embrace Husband's view that Tacitus was drawing rather on Livy (1.29.2), who declares, apropos of the legions' entry into Alba, 'non quidem fuit tumultus ille nec pavor, qualis captarum esse urbium solet'.¹⁸ Yet the Livian passage contains no reference to the most striking element in Tacitus' sentence, the anger.¹⁹ Nor does it convey the intensity of feeling to be found in the accounts of Tacitus and Xenophon alike. And, a point Husband simply ignored, there is nothing in the least improbable about Tacitus' having read the *Agésilas*, if only as preparation for the writing of the *Agricola*.²⁰ Besides, there is another passage in the Greek work which seems to have coloured an episode in the *Histories*. The statement that the Great King had people searching every land for food and drink with which to tickle his palate (9.3) and, in order to live well, had to draw material from the ends of the earth (9.4), is surely reflected in the scouring of land and sea to meet Vitellius' appetites (2.62.1): 'epularum foeda et inexplabilis libido: ex urbe atque Italia inritamenta gulae gestabantur strepentibus ab utroque mari itineribus'. That is, after all, a segment of narrative in which Vitellius is represented more than once as some kind of oriental despot.²¹

The reason for insisting on the debt to Xenophon lies in the fact that it makes the reference to anger an integral part of the expression, whereas the *metus* is Tacitus' substitute for the original *μάχη*. The silence induced by fear is, of course, a commonplace in his writings (cf. *Agr.* 3.2; *Ann.* 5.3.2); and since some fear produces only some silence (*Ann.* 2.38.4: 'haec atque talia ... plures per silentium aut occultum murmur excepere'), the 'magnus' is not rhetorical amplification, but the means of stressing the depth of the silence on this occasion. As for the anger, Tacitus will talk of the ire suppressed by tyrannical emperors (*Agr.* 42.3; *Ann.* 1.69.5), but he is less inclined to state in terms whether the silence of others comes from their swallowing their rage.²² For all that, the emperors' behaviour is but a variation on another commonplace, that of people stifling their anger in order to avoid creating or worsening an awkward situation (cf. Plaut. *Pers.* 296–7; Livy 9.38.13–14; Quintil. 9.2.54). And since the repression of great anger would require great effort, there is reason to attach 'magnae' to 'irae'. As the older commentators recognised, therefore, the clause is a generalisation rather than a specific reference to the crowd in the Forum and the emotions they actually felt; it depicts a near stillness caused by a mixture of pressures, internal ('magnae irae') and external ('magni metus'); and it aims to bring out the peculiar nature of the silence that prevailed on this occasion.

¹⁸ See especially Husband, *op. cit.*, p. 322, accepted by Heubner, *loc. cit.*, and by Chilver, *loc. cit.* The suggestion that Tacitus shows an affinity with Lucan 1.258–61, made by A. Borgo, *Vichiana* 6 (1977), 126–31, seems to me improbable, unless by affinity *aemulatio* is meant.

¹⁹ Witness the perplexity of Rademacher, *op. cit.*, p. 130 with n. 588, and of Chilver, *op. cit.*, p. 99; the same puzzlement underlies Husband's entire case. None of this, however, is meant to discount Livy's delight in the topos: see E. Dutoit, 'Silences dans l'oeuvre de Tite-Live', *Mélanges de philologie, de littérature et d'histoire anciennes offerts à J. Marouzeau* (Paris, 1948), pp. 141–51.

²⁰ The case was argued eloquently by A. Gudeman, *Tacitus, Agricola and Germania* (Boston, 1928), pp. 313–22, although he doubted that Tacitus quotes Xenophon in the biography of his father-in-law (*ibid.*, p. 337).

²¹ At 2.70.2 ('regium in morem') the reference may be rather to Alexander the Great than to the Great King (*CPh* 87 [1992], 19), but for our present purposes this is a distinction without a difference; at 2.73, on the other hand, the purport is clear ('tum ipse exercitusque ... in externos mores proruperant'). Note also 2.89.1 and 90.1. For all that, Tacitus' phrasing probably owes something to Seneca, *ad Helv.* 10.3.

²² So, in reporting the praetorians' reaction to Galba's speech at 1.18.3, Tacitus refers to their 'maestitia ac silentium'. This may be hendiadys (A. L. Irvine, *Tacitus: Histories Books I & II* [London, 1952], p. 119), but then again it may not.

A gladiatorial show never produced this kind of edgy expectation, nor indeed did any other kind of spectacle except the chariot races. Just as the sources report on the people's eagerness to see these contests, strong enough for them to vie noisily for seats in the middle of the night,²³ so they emphasise the tense silence which immediately preceded the start of a race.²⁴ Ennius even employs this very moment of suspense to convey the rapt attention with which everyone waited to see whether the augury, and the honour, for founding Rome would be granted to Romulus or Remus, and Tacitus plays off that passage, when he reports the omen of the eagle vouchsafed to Fabius Valens and his troops.²⁵ Here, however, it is the chariot race that interests him, and he alerts the reader to this, first by encouraging him to expect some kind of spectacle (hence 'prospectu'), then by switching abruptly to the aural with an extensive description of the silence: only at a chariot race would these elements come together. Nor does Tacitus drop the imagery. Otho bids his followers 'occupare pericula'. The phrase looks straightforward, but since this is the only case where he employs the verb in this precise sense, it is hardly coincidental that 'occupare' regularly denotes taking the lead in a race, especially a chariot race.²⁶ The next reference is purely equestrian: the Othonians set out to attack their emperor 'quasi Vologaesum aut Pacorum...depulsuri', a task for which cavalry would be essential.²⁷ This is one reason for Tacitus' mentioning solely Otho's horsemen, not the foot soldiers who followed at their heels according to Plutarch (*Galb.* 26.5), as is demonstrated by both 'proculcato senatu' and 'truces armis rapidi equis'.²⁸ But the motif of the race reappears at the beginning of the next chapter. Once the chariots were given the signal to start, the audience would leap to their feet and cheer on their favourites.²⁹ This Tacitus surely echoes when he declares that, the moment Atilius Vergilio threw down Galba's effigy (41.1), 'eo signo manifesta in Othonem omnium militum studia'.

Given this much, there are two ways of understanding 'lugubri prospectu'. One is to regard it as an ablative absolute, coordinate with the preceding 'completis...templis'. In this case, the phrase gains its effect when the reader spots the chariotteering imagery and recognises the oxymoronic application of 'lugubris' to what was normally a joyous, even a manic occasion. But if we look at the row of ablatives with which the sentence ends, and make due allowance not just for Tacitus' liking for *variatio* but also for the highly wrought nature of the entire passage, it is probably better to hold that each of these ablatives is different, one causal ('vario...impulsu'), one absolute ('completis...templis'), and one appositional

²³ Suet. *Cal.* 26.4; Tertull. *de spec.* 16.1; SHA *Elagab.* 23.2; cf. Sil. Ital. *Pun.* 16.303-4; Joseph. *A.J.* 19.86.

²⁴ Ennius, *Ann.* 79-80 Skutsch; Sil. Ital. *Pun.* 16.314-16; Tertull. *de spec.* 16.2; cf. Verg. *Aen.* 5.137-8 (of the contestants, not the spectators).

²⁵ For the debt of 1.62.3 to Ennius, *Ann.* 72-84 Skutsch, see 'Two Omens in Tacitus' Histories', *RhM* (forthcoming).

²⁶ For Tacitus' usage (Gerber and Greef, op. cit., p. 1008), all the more noteworthy after 'rostra occupanda' at 39.1, Heubner, op. cit., p. 92 compares Seneca, *EM* 24.5; *de ira* 3.10.3; *Octav.* 531. The verb is applied to a footrace by Statius, *Theb.* 6.617, to a ship by Ovid, *Trist.* 1.10.6, and to chariot races by Pliny, *N.H.* 8.160; *CIL* 6. 10048, line 10 and 10050, line 17.

²⁷ According to Suet. *Galb.* 19.2, the order to kill the emperor was given specifically to the cavalry ('equites, quibus mandata caedes erat'); but the biographer has them pause momentarily upon reaching the Forum ('parumper restiterunt'), a detail Tacitus ignores (see below).

²⁸ We should not separate 'truces armis' from 'rapidi equis' and take it as a reference to the infantrymen (so Heubner, op. cit., p. 93; cf. Townend, op. cit., p. 359), even though 'milites Romani...truces armis rapidi equis' is a variation on the standard collocation of men, arms and horses discussed by Heubner, *Gymnasium* 70 (1963), 226-30.

²⁹ Verg. *Aen.* 5.140-1 and 147-50; Sil. Ital. *Pun.* 16.317-19; Tertull. *de spec.* 16.3-4; cf. Plin. *N.H.* 8.159.

('lugubri prospectu') and, as such, a comment made by Tacitus in his own voice.³⁰ The expectancy of the crowd, that is, struck him—and was meant to strike the reader—as a lugubrious prospect. Exploiting the imagery of the chariot race to illustrate the pitch of the crowd's anticipation, he fashions from this a criticism of their behaviour with the unusual 'lugubri prospectu',³¹ no more willing to condone their conduct at this juncture than is Seneca to approve the spectators' deportment at the regular shows.³² This view has found few supporters, and the most determined among them, Waltz, preferred after all to emend the text.³³ For this, however, there is no more warrant than there is for the claim that such an appositional ablative is unparalleled.³⁴ Though our passage did not figure in the discussion, Nutting long ago published a series of papers to demonstrate that these ablatives are found in Catullus (101.7–8: 'nunc tamen interea haec prisco quae more parentum / tradita sunt *tristi munere* ad inferias'), in the Younger Pliny (*Epist.* 6.20.17), and most important, in Tacitus himself (*Ann.* 3.74.4: 'Tiberius... id quoque Blaeso tribuit, ut imperator a legionibus salutaretur, *prisco* erga duces *honore*, qui bene gesta re publica gaudio et impetu victoris exercitus conclamabantur').³⁵

These findings should be sufficient to disprove Rademacher's contention that 'das Schicksal Galbas im Mittelpunkt dieser Schilderung steht'.³⁶ The emperor is not the focus even of the two opening sentences. He may be the grammatical subject of the initial verb ('agebatur'), and that verb may be so positioned as to announce a tableau,³⁷ but beyond that we cannot go. Nor, if we are to tease out the train of thought, can we leave aside the third sentence ('Othoni tamen... pericula iubet'). For a start, it provides us with another vital piece of information about the crowd in the Forum, that they—like their emperor—were unarmed. And though Otho's being informed otherwise seems at first to excuse the orders he gives his men, the effect achieved is exactly the opposite. They are instructed to go hell-for-leather ('ire praecipites'), that is, to let nobody and nothing stand in their way, and to forestall danger ('occupare pericula'), that is, to act before any danger can arise to threaten them.³⁸ And insofar as 'occupare' continues the imagery of the chariot race, these instructions point to the Othonians' determination to win by any means and at any cost.³⁹

³⁰ For another string of ablatives see 3.12.1 with the discussion by G. Sörbom, *Variatio sermonis Tacitei aliaque apud eundem quaestiones selectae* (Diss., Uppsala, 1935), pp. 126–7.

³¹ See above, note 12; also Wuilleumier, *Le Bonnic et Hellegouarc'h*, op. cit., p. 167 n. 3.

³² M. Wistrand, 'Violence and Entertainment in Seneca the Younger', *Eranos* 88 (1990), 31–46.

³³ E. Wolff, *Taciti Historiarum Libri, Buch I und II* (Berlin, 1914), p. 107; H. Goelzer, *Oeuvres de Tacite, Histoires Livres I–II* (Paris, 1920), p. 83; Waltz, op. cit., p. 382, suggesting 'lugubre prospectu'.

³⁴ Thus Waltz, op. cit., p. 381; Vallejo, op. cit., pp. 155–8.

³⁵ H. C. Nutting, 'The Ablative as an appositive', *CPh* 15 (1920), 389–92; 'The utor, fruor group (Preliminary Paper)', *U. Cal. Publ. in Class. Philol.* 10, 1 (1928), pp. 10–11; 'The Ablative Absolute and the Stenographic Ablative', *ibid.* 10, 8 (1930), pp. 209–11; cf. J. B. Hofmann and A. Szantyr, *Lateinische Syntax und Stilistik* (Munich, 1972), p. 429.

³⁶ Rademacher, op. cit., p. 129.

³⁷ Since Tacitus often sets the verb at the head of the sentence (see Courbaud, op. cit., p. 259 and n. 1), it is perilous to claim that this alone marks the start of a tableau (so Rademacher, op. cit., pp. 128–9, perhaps misled by Courbaud, op. cit., p. 273). Here it prepares the transition to a new subject, the crowd: cf. E. Wolff and G. Andresen, *Taciti Historiarum Libri, Buch III, IV und V* (Berlin, 1926), p. 88; also F. Jones, *PCPhS* 37 (1991), 90–3.

³⁸ There is irony here, to the extent that this fulfils Otho's undertaking not to call the praetorians to war and danger (38.2).

³⁹ Once a chariot race was under way, deliberate fouling was permitted: see, e.g., H. A. Harris, *Sport in Greece and Rome* (London, 1972), pp. 205 and 209.

There is no knowing whether Tacitus adopted this imagery because of the important part played in these events by a unit of the guard which was both small and seldom mentioned.⁴⁰ He could as easily have wanted to find a new context for the language in which Plutarch, and probably the common source, had described the clash between Vindex and Verginius Rufus,⁴¹ and then have given the praetorian cavalry greater prominence than they merited. In either case, he continues the motif by refusing to report, as does Suetonius, that the horsemen paused momentarily before debouching into the Forum or, as does Plutarch, that they were followed by infantrymen.⁴² Having expended considerable effort on the calm before the storm, he is concerned now to portray what he calls elsewhere an 'equestris procella' (3.53.2).

This brings us to the other function fulfilled by the third sentence, to prepare for the sequel. As a whole, the fourth sentence ('igitur milites... forum inrumpunt') is a magnificent creation, eminently deserving of the detailed analysis it received from Courbaud,⁴³ but even the three opening words, 'igitur milites Romani', are remarkable for the artfulness with which they tie it to the preceding sentence. Thus, the 'igitur', far from being some kind of generalised 'signpost', stresses the readiness of the guard to carry out Otho's commands. The 'milites' underlines their being serving soldiers, who owe loyalty to their 'imperator', not to the usurper Otho. And the 'Romani' points to the total perversion of Roman values inherent in their conduct.

At the same time, these three words look forward to the rest of the sentence they introduce. From this point of view, the 'igitur' demonstrates that the praetorians' behaviour is the logical result of their adhesion to Otho. The 'milites' perhaps masks the incongruity contained in the idea of the praetorians' fighting a foreign enemy (cf. 1.23.2), but it brings out their readiness to butcher an unarmed old man. And the 'Romani', besides setting up an antithesis with the Parthians who appear next, underscores the barbarity of their conduct, the thought elaborated in 'disiecta plebe, proculcato senatu, truces armis rapidi equis forum inrumpunt'. As we shall see, it is the scattering of the common people and the trampling down of the senate that have caught the attention of modern scholars. But the rest of the main clause is just as noteworthy. Livy, after all, had expressed horror that Gauls went armed to their assemblies (21.20.1), and Tacitus had not been impressed by Germans who did the like (*Germ.* 13.1). Yet here were Roman soldiers bursting into the *Forum*, not just wildly brandishing weapons but on galloping horses too.

So far as concerns the inset subordinate clauses ('quasi Vologaesum... trucidare pergerent'), one of their purposes is clearly to highlight not so much Galba's demise as his predicament. The idea of comparing the emperor with Vologeses I of Parthia and his brother Pacorus, ruler of Media Atropatene, seems to be Tacitus' own work,⁴⁴ and the reason for bringing up Pacorus too appears to lie in a wish to balance 'inermem et senem', itself an expression by no means as innocent as it looks: Plutarch, and almost certainly the common source, had used these words to characterise one of Galba's first victims, Petronius Turpilianus.⁴⁵ In any event, the

⁴⁰ See M. Durry, *Les cohortes prétorienne* (Paris, 1938), pp. 99–100.

⁴¹ Plut. *Galb.* 6.4 uses the image of a crash between chariots out of control, the associations of which with war are surely Roman (see, e.g., Verg. *Georg.* 1.511–14).

⁴² See above, notes 27–8.

⁴³ Courbaud, op. cit., p. 238.

⁴⁴ Chilver, op. cit., p. 99.

⁴⁵ For Turpilianus see Plut. *Galb.* 15.4: γέροντα γυμνὸν καὶ ἀνοπλὸν (but cf. *Otho* 62). As for Pacorus, he had fought alongside his brother during the wars with Rome in Nero's reign: N. C. Debevoise, *A Political History of Parthia* (Chicago and London, 1938), pp. 179–96.

comparison throws 'inermem et senem' into the strongest relief: little as we know about Vologeses, he was surely a good deal younger than Galba (he reigned until 79),⁴⁶ and if faced with the threat of being driven from 'avito Arsacidarum solio', he would no doubt have armed himself to the teeth. Even without the reference to Turpilianus, however, none of this makes of Galba a tragic figure. Nowhere hitherto has his old age been held to excuse his conduct,⁴⁷ while his being unarmed save for the breastplate represents merely another of his miscalculations. Just as the comparison with the Parthian forces the reader to recognise that the praetorians view their legal ruler as an enemy of the state, thereby answering the question Otho had put to them in his speech (37.1) and drawing attention to their disloyalty, so the pathetic details Tacitus provides—as Rademacher has said—illustrate the guardsmen's utter lack of *miser cordia*, for Galba's situation, and for the civilians through whom they must charge to reach their target.⁴⁸ The second purpose of these subordinate clauses, therefore, is yet again to comment adversely on the behaviour of Otho and his hirelings.

This is not all. To put across the idea that the praetorians were not merely disloyal and devoid of compassion, but also impervious to the constitutional proprieties, Tacitus sets up in sequence the plan to murder the emperor, the scattering of the people, and the trampling down of the senate. And in enumerating in this way the three elements which made up the Roman state, he accords to each treatment commensurate with its importance in and to the state: the emperor is marked for assassination, the people are thrust aside, and the senate is trampled underfoot.⁴⁹ This exaggeration for effect has, of course, drawn modern comment, but on the wrong grounds. It may seem self-evident that, if cavalry are turned loose on a crowd, the latter—whether armed or not—will suffer heavy casualties and not a few deaths.⁵⁰ Hence, on the one side, Spooner's conviction that Tacitus was a witness to this scene;⁵¹ on the other, denunciations of the historian for writing melodrama, in that we hear of no senatorial deaths save those of Galba, Piso and Vinius.⁵² In fact, Tacitus' account is plausible as it stands, since horsemen alone are singularly ineffective in confrontations with crowds.⁵³ During the London riots of 1765, when cavalry charged a mob in Bloomsbury Square, the only person hurt was a horseman. As the commander put it, 'I ordered the men to form and charge through the mob, which was done three times, without any effect; unfortunately the last time, one of the men's horses fell down, by which he had his arm broke'.⁵⁴ So when the praetorians charged through the crowd in the Forum, there may well have been some injuries, and it is not without interest that Tacitus talks later of Otho's making his way to the Capitol 'cruento adhuc foro per stragem iacentium' (47.2). But no matter how vivid

⁴⁶ R. N. Frye, *The History of Ancient Iran* (Munich, 1984), p. 241.

⁴⁷ See 1.5.2; 6.1; 7.3; 12.2; 14.1; 16.3 (particularly noteworthy); 18.3; 21.1; 22.2; 35.1.

⁴⁸ Rademacher, *op. cit.*, p. 131; cf. Etienne Aubrion, *Latomus* 48 (1989), 388 n. 23.

⁴⁹ Compare Galba's treatment of senate and people at 1.17.2.

⁵⁰ For more recent examples of such thinking see Tony (A. J.) Hayter, *The Army and the Crowd in Mid-Georgian England* (London and Totowa, N.J., 1978), pp. 151, 168, 171, 173, 175.

⁵¹ Spooner, *op. cit.*, pp. 12 and 145.

⁵² P. Fabia, *RPh* 36 (1912), 107; Courbaud, *op. cit.*, p. 85 n. 4; Heubner, *Commentary*, pp. 102–3; Chilver, *op. cit.*, pp. 99–100. Tacitus' describing Marius Celsus as 'Galbae usque in extremas res amicum fidumque' at 45.2 may imply that he was present in the Forum.

⁵³ Hayter, *op. cit.*, pp. 24, 120, and especially 181–2, pointing out that the most effective expedient is a mixture of foot and horse (p. 182), a detail to be borne in mind when assessing Plutarch's narrative.

⁵⁴ This is one of three cases recorded and discussed by Hayter, *op. cit.*, pp. 174–5 and 180.

or dramatic his phraseology here, the collective 'senatu' (rather than 'senatoribus') is meant to balance 'plebe', and to drive home the point that the praetorians ignore all three elements in the state.

The logical conclusion to this train of thought appears in the final sentence ('nec illos...quisquis successit'): neither religion nor *Realpolitik* can deter the Othonians from the murder. The men show no reverence for the gods, not for the Capitoline Triad, nor for the deities whose temples flanked the Forum (a detail those familiar with the city could relish, since the roster included Saturn, the Castores, Concordia, and the Divus Iulius).⁵⁵ Nor can they see that any emperor would not let such an assassination go unpunished. We need not tie together the two parts of the sentence with the assumption that a legal *princeps* must have the gods on his side, since that had not proved true for Galba (1.29.1). But nor is it helpful to see in 'prios' a reference to the statues of past emperors which decorated the Forum.⁵⁶ Here the desire for *amplificatio* creates awkwardness, inducing Tacitus to try to build up the weight of the expression by talking of 'prios' as well as 'futuri principes' (Galba being cast, apparently, as the undistributed middle). The point is the one made, more tellingly but also with some overstatement, when he records that Vitellius put to death the murderers 'non honore Galbae, sed tradito principibus more munimentum ad praesens, in posterum ultionem' (44.2).⁵⁷ But whereas that statement is specific, we have here another generalisation, a lesson of history. Hence the 'est' in 'cuius ultor est', as if this were a natural law,⁵⁸ while the 'quisquis' in 'quisquis successit' hints, if it does not indicate, that one usurpation will lead to another, and so on, until a new dynasty can be established and peace restored—precisely the horror of 69.⁵⁹

Tacitus' devoting a chapter to the attitudes, first of the crowd gathered in the Forum, then of Galba's would-be assassins, is itself a manifestation of his wish to bring out the 'varios motus animorum...in urbe apud patres aut populum aut urbanum militem' (1.4.2). That the crowd should be excited but unwilling to intervene is a criticism, to be sure, as much of Galba as of the people themselves. Nor is it so surprising that Tacitus should have conveyed their mood with imagery drawn from the chariot races: he had already declared the populace 'circo ac theatris sueta' (1.4.3; cf. 32.1). But continuing the motif into the description of the praetorians, besides helping to unify the chapter, plays a major role in explaining their attitude. It was not bribery alone that made the guard the 'proprius Othonis miles' (2.46.3). Their devotion to Otho was as fanatical as the people's to the chariot races (cf. 2.49.3–4). In this light, it was understandable that they would be oblivious to all else in their determination to murder Galba and place their own favourite on the throne—just as it was that Galba's escort would abruptly change sides (1.41.1; cf. 38.2). But dwelling on the praetorians' mood increased the suspense, by delaying the moment of the murder, and cataloguing all the considerations of which the assassins should have been aware added to the enormity of that murder. At the time and, perhaps, still more in retrospect it was a lugubrious prospect.⁶⁰

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⁵⁵ Cf. Waltz, *op. cit.*, p. 379 n. 1.

⁵⁶ Thus Spooner, *op. cit.*, p. 145; Davies, *op. cit.*, p. 115; Chilver, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

⁵⁷ The overstatement lies in 'tradito'; only Caligula had been assassinated prior to 69 (cf. Heubner, *op. cit.*, p. 93).

⁵⁸ Cf. Irvine, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

⁵⁹ Cf. Wolff, *Taciti Historiarum Libri, Buch I und II*, p. 108; Goelzer, *op. cit.*, pp. 84–5.

⁶⁰ I wish to thank Prof. David Armstrong and Dr Jean Alvares for their valuable help during the composition of this paper, the Editors and the anonymous referee for their contributions to its improvement.