Tacitus' *Dialogus* As Literary History[*]

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SUMMARY: The paper examines the conceptions of literary history found in Tacitus' *Dialogus*. It argues that the speeches in the work, despite being directly at variance with one another in other respects, develop between them with increasing sophistication a single account of literary history, with a complex interrelation of aesthetic and political factors. However, when one seeks to slot the *Dialogus* itself into that account, one finds that the form in which the work is written appears to challenge the very analysis that it has developed. The paper concludes by looking at the implications of this for the interpretation of the *Dialogus*.

MORE THAN TWENTY YEARS AGO Donald Russell's influential general study of ancient literary criticism described the topic of literary history as follows:

> There can be little doubt that the historical study of literature in antiquity was very rudimentary by modern standards … . Only isolated observations can be found about the relations between literary and political and social developments, and these seem to be confined to two topics: the association of oratory with republican liberty; and the widely-held view that affluence led to corruption, in literature as in other things.[1]

Russell does acknowledge that ancient scholars were often interested in questions of authenticity and of authorial biography, but he regards these as "es-

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[1] Russell 1981: 159.

sential preliminaries" to literary history, rather than as aspects of the discipline itself.

Russell's account here is as revealing for its own presuppositions as for what it says about literary history in the ancient world. Many literary historians would reject his implication that the role of literary history should be to provide a causal explanation for literary development in political or social terms.[2] An obvious alternative approach, with a number of distinguished proponents of its own, is to see literary history as being constructed primarily out of the relationship between different texts. This may be a narrative of particular influences visible in intertextual references; it may be an account of generic developments; it may even be an evolutionary narrative based in assumptions or arguments about the "organic" growth and development of literary forms.[3] Moreover, the very object of analysis may vary; not everyone would accept a clear distinction between the "literary" and the "non-literary" such as to allow the former a separate and distinctive sphere of analysis.[4] Hence especially if one is seeking to examine how thinkers in another culture conceived of literary history, one should not make a priori assumptions about which forms are to be considered valid. Even to label biography a "preliminary" to the actual discipline of literary history is to betray an ideological stance (albeit one that would nowadays find wide acceptance[5]); an intellectual culture in which biographical modes of criticism were more respectable than they are in our own would be unlikely to accept the marginality of biography to the "real" business of the literary historian.

Thus, although Russell's dismissal of literary history as practiced by the ancients may be representative of a good deal of past thinking on the subject, it cannot be accepted without question. And indeed there is good reason to

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[2] See, e.g., Wellek and Warren 104–5, 263–64, Patterson 250–55; and note Wellek (1982: 71): "We might speak of 'proximate causes' ... . But all this concerns biography or large-scale historical trends that might be described as 'conditions' but we never succeed in naming the cause or even a cause of a single work of art."

[3] On the latter see, e.g., Wellek 1963: 38–53, Perkins 155–58.

[4] Cf. Patterson 255–62, Conte 1994: 4. Especially challenging in this respect is Goldhill, arguing that in the ancient world there is no distinct category of "literature," and that ancient "literary critics" in fact treat their "literary" texts as just one part of a wider cultural commentary, our understanding of which is distorted by the modern tendency to abstract from those critics only those sections that correlate to our own category of the "literary." See also n. 20 below.

[5] Thus Wellek and Warren 69–74 (note esp. 73), though approaching the question of literary history from quite a different standpoint than that of Russell, nevertheless dismiss biography in terms very similar to his.

think that, once viewed from a broader perspective, literary history did flourish at Rome. A recent book by Schwindt has systematically analyzed Latin writings on literature up to the end of the 1st century A.D., and has demonstrated not only the range but also the sophistication of Roman conceptions in this area. He argues that such works have not been identified as "literary history" in the past primarily because of scholars' ideological expectations about what a "literary history" ought to contain.[6] Schwindt focuses on texts that give extended and overtly historical accounts of literature; other scholars have demonstrated the presence of literary history even more widely and in a greater variety of forms. Particularly fruitful has been the modern interest in *imitatio*, intertextuality, and allusion.[7] It has been recognized, for example, that when Roman poets place themselves self-consciously in relation to their predecessors, they are in effect assuming and/or constructing an historical picture of the development of literature and their own place within that history.[8] The writings thus analyzed are not presented by their Roman authors as "literary histories,"[9] but they do show a tendency to explain literature in historical terms that it would seem perverse to ignore—especially given that, as other scholars have argued, our own notions of "literary history" are not themselves always developed in a coherent manner.[10]

One potential danger that this brings to the modern scholar wishing to analyze ancient literary history is that the broader a conception one has of "literary history" the less useful the term might seem to be, since it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish "literary history" from other varieties of criticism. Nevertheless, such a distinction can be made, providing the central point is borne in mind that in order for a history of any sort to be present, there must be, either explicitly or implicitly, a chronological narrative into which the literary works under consideration are placed.[11] Of course, given

[6] Cf. the summary in Schwindt 22–44.

[7] On *imitatio* see, e.g., Russell 1979, Hinds, esp. 52–98; also Conte 1986, esp. 40–95 on the way in which the allusivity of poetry relies on and builds on the existing poetic tradition.

[8] See, e.g., Williams, and various of the essays in Schmidt.

[9] Note Schwindt 208–9 for the variety of terminology employed by even the most obviously "historical" Roman literary writers to describe their activities.

[10] On the question of the internal coherence of "literary history" as a discipline see Perkins.

[11] Crane 23, Conte 1994: 1–2. Wellek and Warren 30 likewise define literary history as "the study of the concrete literary works of art ... in a chronological series" (though they then at 30–37 argue for the essential interrelatedness of literary history, literary theory, and literary criticism).

what has already been said about the variety of modes of literary history available, it naturally follows that this placing can take different forms. It can involve examining the relationship between the work of literature and the external circumstances under which it was produced, or it can see the work simply in terms of its relationship to other texts.[12] It can present a developmental model, whereby changes in literature are mapped across time, or it can present a snapshot of works produced at a single time. Any of these—and of course any combination of them, even within a single work[13]—is possible. But the feature that unites them is the idea of "placement."

What evidence can the historian of literature use in order to justify such "placement"? In many cases, naturally, one can find references in external sources that will make the circumstances of the production of a text and the influences upon it apparent; the modern researcher into modern literature in particular rarely lacks for such evidence, although its value in practice may sometimes be questioned. In other cases, however, one is dependent upon the information contained within the text itself; this is especially true of historians of ancient literature, even those who themselves wrote in antiquity. In this context ancient literary biographies are revealing. Often manifest fictions constructed from apparent hints in the author's work, they are then, by a wonderfully ironic circularity, used to provide biographical explanations for that author's work.[14] But though indeed all too often fictional, they do at least reveal two crucial facts about histories of literature in antiquity: that reliable external sources to allow the historical placement of works were frequently not available, and that such placement was nevertheless thought relevant to the proper understanding of the work.

If external sources are lacking, it is of course inevitable that one depends upon the internal evidence of the texts themselves. In some cases, placement on the basis of internal evidence is easier than in other cases. If one is thinking about the relationship between the work and its external social and po-

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[12] On this distinction see above and compare Perkins 20–21: "A literary history also explains the past; that is, it gives reasons why literary works have whatever characteristics they do and why literature developed as it did. These explanations may be either contextual or immanent; in other words, they explain either by events and conditions of the historical world that produced the text or by reference only to the previous literature or literary institutions" (cf. also Fowler).

[13] For the need to analyze literary history from multiple perspectives see, e.g., Perkins 173: "Any sophisticated literary history must now draw on both immanent and contextual considerations"; also Conte 1994: 2–3.

[14] On the construction of ancient literary biography see Fairweather, Lefkowitz; cf. Conte 1994: 9.

litical circumstances, then Aristophanes provides us with more direct information than Sophocles; if one is thinking about the relationship of one text to another, Catullus offers us more to work with than Caesar. The text itself, in other words, can be more or less resistant to being incorporated into various historical schemas—although, as was said above, the historian of literature may nevertheless wish to incorporate it.

But this in turn leads to a further consideration. For people writing about literature in historical terms are not only dealing with texts, they are themselves producing texts. In some cases it may be that they are not aware of or interested in the potentially self-referential nature of their task; they regard the texts they produce as things that stand entirely outside the kind of historical schematizations they wish to impose upon others. But in the case of other writers, and particularly those where there is a close relationship of form or content between the works they discuss and their own writing,[15] such blindness is less likely; the writers are usually going to be aware that their own works are susceptible to the same manner of interpretation and that this will be governed by the internal features they themselves include, features that allow—or resist—"placement" of the sort they apply to other texts.[16] In other words, for such writers, in order to understand their account of literature in general, it is essential to incorporate into the interpretation those features of their works that reveal where they are "placing" themselves in their historical schemes.[17]

Tacitus' *Dialogus* is an especially promising work for an analysis of how a discussion of literary history situates itself in literary history. It is a work that still generates immense difficulty and controversy. Its analysis of the literary past comes not in a single voice, but in six separate and conflicting speeches spoken by three separate speakers.[18] Many attempts have been made to iden-

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[15] Compare Feeney, esp. 184–85 on the ways in which the conclusion of Horace's *Epistle to Augustus*, by a complex series of allusions, allows the *Epistle* itself to form part of the poetic tradition that he has recounted.

[16] Cf. Schmidt p. XII.

[17] Compare the discussion of Cicero's self-placement in the *Brutus* in Schwindt 113–21.

[18] This is assuming that Messala's speech does not merely fall into two halves, but that the interruption by Maternus in 27 signals the move from one speech to another, the first being a response to Aper's defense of modern oratory, the second being an analysis of the cause of decline, which will itself be responded to by Maternus. For this analysis see Barwick 1929: 107–8, Heubner 204–5. Gugel 116 (following a suggestion in Vretska 183–84) argues for Messala's having three speeches, with Maternus' intervention at 33.1–3 marking another break; but the continuity of subject matter over the second break, unlike the first, makes this analysis less satisfactory: see Häussler 1969: 47–49.

tify a single clear position in the work, yet those attempts have tended to founder upon the lack of clear authorial endorsement for any of the various speakers' apparently incompatible arguments. More promising accounts have been given by those scholars who have sidestepped the issue by recognizing the lack of a clear conclusion, and instead have sought reasons why Tacitus might have wished to avoid a straightforward endorsement of one position over another.[19] However, these scholars too have often sought to identify an underlying position that Tacitus might have endorsed, at least implicitly, and to this extent the plausibility of their accounts has therefore depended less on the direct evidence of the work than on more or less reasonable arguments and assumptions, whether stated or unstated, about how such a work might have been read in antiquity (sometimes also drawing on the evidence of Tacitus' stance in his other writings).

This paper's approach to the *Dialogus* will be more oblique, but it may generate, if not a decisive answer to these fundamental questions of interpretation, at any rate some data upon which firmer conclusions may be built. For alongside the obvious and overt debates in the work among Aper, Messala, and Maternus, there is, as I shall demonstrate, an underlying and developing account of considerable sophistication, one that draws on multiple approaches to literary history but combines them into a single picture of the way in which a history of literature is to work in principle: how one constructs the relationship of literary works both to other texts and to the society in which they are produced.[20] I shall explore how this account is developed through the different speeches in the work; I shall then consider the way in which Tacitus implicitly places his own work within such a scheme, and the significance of that for its wider interpretation.

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[19] So esp. Bartsch 98–125.

[20] Naturally, this should not be taken as implying that Tacitus or any other Roman would necessarily have conceived of the study of the relationship of literary works to other texts and to the wider society as a single phenomenon to be treated under a single heading; compare n. 9 above on the variety of Roman critical terminology in this area. One should emphasize that Tacitus does not discuss "literature" as a category per se (cf. n. 4 above); he focuses entirely on two genres, poetry and oratory, and largely on the latter. Nor is it necessarily unproblematic to unite all of the different aspects of his analysis under the single term "historical." However, both of the genres he considers happen to form subsections of the modern category of the "literary," and Tacitus clearly links them to one another. The arguments of this paper will work equally well on the basis that Tacitus is developing a critical methodology out of a combination of distinct critical approaches.

I

The first major speech in the work, containing Aper's opening attack on po-
etry and his arguments for the superiority of oratory (5.3–10.8), is not obvi-
ously "historical" in the way that those that will follow it are, in the sense that
it is not primarily concerned with the circumstances that govern the creation
of particular works within an historical period, but rather deals with oratory's
general significance as a genre, especially in terms of its benefits to the man
who practices it.[21] However, even this has at least an implicit historical sig-
nificance, since Aper provides a picture of the role that oratory can play within
a society such as his own. And, moreover, interwoven with this are occasional
hints at the sort of wider historical frameworks that will be picked up more
systematically later in the work. The parenthetical statement at 8.1 that "I more
gladly use new and recent examples than distant and forgotten ones" (*libentius
... novis et recentibus quam remotis et oblitteratis exemplis utor*) is an obvious
instance of this; it clearly prefigures the defense of modern orators that is to
form the topic of Aper's second speech, but also, since it contains within it
the implication that styles of oratory go out of fashion, it points to a close, if
as yet unanalyzed, link between oratory and the wider world within which it
is created.[22] But what Aper says immediately after this at 8.2 is no less impor-
tant: he parenthetically describes oratory as being something that has flour-
ished in every age,[23] implying that the general conditions that produce ora-
tory are universal rather than particular to any one society. This too prefigures
the general approach that Aper will take later (see below, section II).

    Poetry, by contrast—or at any rate good poetry—is something that in his
view can only be produced in detachment from society, in solitude.[24] In Aper's
speech this proposition is not given any particular historical framework (ex-

[21] Note Rutledge 114–15, who sees Maternus' last speech as responding to Aper's "largely
ahistorical argument" by giving his picture an historical framework.

[22] Unless otherwise noted, the text of the *Dialogus* is Winterbottom's with words in
square brackets omitted. Translations are my own.

[23] 8.2 *ipsa eloquentia, cuius numen et caelestis vis multa quidem omnibus saeculis exempla
edidit ad quam usque fortunam homines ingenii viribus pervenerint.* "Eloquence herself,
whose spirit and heavenly power has of course produced many examples in every age of
the fortune that men have reached by the power of their genius."

[24] 9.6 *adice quod poetis, si modo dignum aliquid elaborare et efficere velint, relinquenda
conversatio amicorum et iucunditas urbis, deserenda cetera officia, utque ipsi dicunt, in
nemora et lucos, id est in solitudinem, recedendum est.* "Add that if poets want to work out
and produce something worthwhile, they must leave behind intercourse with their friends
and the pleasure of the city, they must abandon their other tasks and, as they say them-
selves, retire into woods and groves—that is, solitude."

cept in as much as it is addressed to Maternus' own position). Maternus' response, however (11.1–13.6), takes the same point and gives it a quasi-historical touch (12.1–3):

> nemora vero et luci et secretum ipsum, quod Aper increpabat, tantam mihi adferunt voluptatem, ut inter praecipuos carminum fructus numerem quod non in strepitu nec sedente ante ostium litigatore nec inter sordes ac lacrimas reorum componuntur, sed secedit animus in loca pura atque innocentia fruiturque sedibus sacris. haec eloquentiae primordia, haec penetralia; hoc primum habitu cultuque commoda mortalibus in illa casta et nullis contacta vitiis pectora influxit: sic oracula loquebantur. nam lucrosae huius et sanguinantis eloquentiae usus recens et ex malis moribus natus atque, ut tu dicebas, Aper, in locum teli repertus. ceterum felix illud et, ut more nostro loquar, aureum saeculum, et oratorum et criminum inops, poetis et vatibus abundabat, qui bene facta canerent, non qui male admissa defenderent.

> Indeed the woods and groves and that very privacy that Aper was taunting bring me so much pleasure that I count it among the prime rewards of poetry that it is composed not amidst din nor with the litigant sitting at the door nor among the filth and tears of defendants, but the mind withdraws into pure and unsullied spots and enjoys a sacred home. These are the beginnings of eloquence, these its inner sanctuary. First ingratiating itself with mortals through this dress and demeanor, it flowed into those pure breasts untouched by vice; thus the oracles spoke. For the practice of the present remunerative and bloody eloquence is recent and born from immorality and, as you said, Aper, invented for use as a weapon. But that blessed and, to speak in our usual fashion, golden age, lacking both orators and charges, was overflowing with poets and prophets, who would sing of good deeds, not defend bad ones.

Maternus here fits poetry and oratory together into a single developmental historical framework, albeit a very rough and crude one.[25] The conditions that produce poetry are those associated with a primeval Golden Age, which the modern poet can recreate by his own withdrawal from the evils of modernity; oratory, on the other hand, is produced out of the evils of the surrounding society, and depends upon those evils in order to flourish. This interpretation of oratory is not followed up here, but is one that will play a substantial role in the arguments of the second half of the work.[26]

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[25] Cf. Schwindt 199.
[26] Cf. Döpp 1995: 213.

Maternus' positive statements about poetry deserve further analysis. By associating poetry with the Golden Age he appears to place the modern poet in some sense outside historical time;[27] poetry is not affected by the evils of the world that have led to the rise of oratory.[28] But this is not to say that his account of it is entirely ahistorical. He lists a number of poets whose fame, he argues, outweighs those of their oratorical counterparts, and in the case of two of them, he specifically sets them against the particular historical time in that they were writing: Virgil under Augustus (13.1–2) and Pomponius Secundus *nostris ... temporibus* (13.3). In some sense, therefore, the period at which a poem is produced seems to be relevant to him, although his account does not make it immediately obvious what precisely that relevance might be. As with Aper earlier, his account focuses more on the benefits to the poet than on the specific conditions that might have produced particular works of poetry at particular times.

However, if one examines his analysis more closely, an historical framework for poetry does emerge, but one quite different from the purely political. When listing the successes of past poets, he says (12.6), *nec ullus Asini aut Messalae liber tam inlustris est quam Medea Ovidi aut Varii Thyestes* "nor is any book of Asinius or Messala as famous as the *Medea* of Ovid or the *Thyestes* of Varius." In the context of the *Dialogus*, those examples cannot be accidental, for at the opening of the work we were informed that Medea and Thyestes (in that order) were the topics of Maternus' own tragedies.[29] In other words, although Maternus does not here present the poet as being influenced in his work by the external society, he does point to an alternative historical framework: the literary tradition, within which he himself also stands, in which writers' works are created partly as a recreation of or response to the works of their predecessors.

The idea of poetry as being primarily created as part of a tradition of literature emerges also from the quotation of Virgil's *Georgics* 2.475 (13.5–6):

[27] Heilmann 389.

[28] Note, for example, also 11.4: *nam statum cuiusque ac securitatem melius innocentia tuetur quam eloquentia.* "For innocence protects each man's position and security better than does eloquence."

[29] 3.4 "*adeo te tragoediae istae non satiant*" *inquit Aper* "*quo minus omissis orationum et causarum studiis omne tempus modo circa Medeam, ecce nunc circa Thyesten consumas.*" "Those tragedies," said Aper, "do not weary you, to the point that you neglect your occupations in speeches and cases and spend all your time recently around *Medea*, and now around *Thyestes*."

"me vero dulces" (ut Vergilius ait) "Musae," remotum a sollicitudinibus et curis et necessitate cotidie aliquid contra animum faciendi, in illa sacra illosque fontis ferant, nec insanum ultra et lubricum forum famamque pallentem trepidus experiar. non me fremitus salutantium nec anhelans libertus excitet.

As Virgil says, "Indeed, may the sweet Muses" remove me from worries and cares and the necessity of every day doing something against my inclination, and take me to those sacred places and those springs, nor let me in fear experience further the mad and slippery Forum and pallor-making fame. Let not the din of those greeting me or a panting freedman arouse me.

On the crudest level, of course, the mere fact of quotation demonstrates that literary works draw on other literary works; but there are further dimensions to this passage. One is that, as is well known, the allusion to Virgil is not limited to the four words quoted. The whole passage in Tacitus picks up and weaves together themes and phrases taken from right across the last section of *Georgics* 2: the *sacra* from 2.476, the *insanum forum* from 2.502, the *salutantium* from 2.462 (*salutantum*). By pointing to Virgil explicitly, and then backing the reference up with a dense web of implicit allusion, Maternus is giving a clear demonstration of the extent to which literature is permeated and governed by its own traditions. Although he is ostensibly discussing poetry alone, the very fact that he himself is obviously not making these allusions in the course of a poem indicates that this is a feature of "literature" more widely conceived. An extra dimension, moreover, comes from the context of the passage of Virgil that is being alluded to. The *Georgics* is there describing the farmer's life, employing two analogies to it in particular: one is the life of the Golden Age, and the other is the life of the poet. Maternus' argument here picks up both aspects, since for him, poetry is created precisely as a result of the poet reproducing for himself the conditions of the Golden Age.[30] So the Virgilian allusion both reinforces the general argument of poetry being created in near-timeless conditions and provides an alternative dimension of allusion by which poetic works may be placed historically.[31]

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[30] Cf. Heilmann 386–91, who however also observes that for Maternus, unlike Virgil, the Golden Age will not recur in historical time; see also Häussler 1965: 194–95.

[31] Heilmann 388 n. 6 also proposes that the reference to Linus, Orpheus, and Apollo as poets of the Golden Age at 12.4 alludes to Virg. *Ecl.* 4.55–57, where the same three names are likewise linked in a Golden Age context; this would have a similar effect, but in the absence of other verbal echoes it is less likely that the reader would see a specific Virgilian allusion here.

The reference to Asinius and Messala carries historical implications of a slightly different sort. Asinius Pollio in particular might appear an odd example for Maternus to pick in this context, because he was as much—or more—a tragedian as he was an orator; both Virgil and Horace famously singled out his tragedies as especially praiseworthy.[32] And as for Messala Corvinus, while his poetry was less significant than his oratory, it was, like Pollio's, singled out for praise by a contemporary writer (*Catalepton* 9.13–20, 23–24, 59–60),[33] and knowledge of it survived long enough for him to be mentioned (along with Pollio) in a list of senator-poets at Pliny, *Letters* 5.3.5.[34] They therefore seem poor examples if one is seeking major orators who can be shown to be less famous than their poetic counterparts. Moreover, Tacitus' phrasing makes it appear that he is aware of and indeed drawing attention to this oddity. Unlike with his other examples, with Pollio and Messala he refers to "books," not to the writer's fame as a whole, and consequently the effect of the first part of the sentence is to make it appear that he is about to compare not one writer with another, but different books of the same writers in different genres. However, he instead confounds expectations with the introduction of Ovid and Varius; having prepared the reader for references to poetic works, he treats Pollio and Messala as if their fame, like that of Demosthenes, Lysias, Hyperides, and Cicero, rested essentially on their oratory. The effect is thus very self-consciously to downplay the poetic products of orators—to imply that there is something fundamentally incompatible between the two, such that true fame cannot be achieved in both. This of course fits the general picture that Maternus is putting forward here; since what differentiates orator and poet is above all the style of life that is necessary to produce each of them, it is hardly surprising that he would challenge the notion that one could be genuinely successful in both. It also indeed fits the position that has been constructed for Maternus himself. The starting point of the discussion was Aper's argument that Maternus, as a talented orator, should be engaging in oratory rather than poetry, while Maternus has in turn challenged that with his argument for the superiority of poetry. The implication of both speakers is that the conditions for success in the two genres are so disparate that one cannot effectively obtain success in both. But the acknowledged reputations

[32] Virg. *Ecl.* 8.9–10, Hor. *S.* 1.10.42–3, *Carm.* 2.1.9–12. Note esp. 21.7, where Aper refers to Pollio in just these terms; see further my discussion of this passage in n. 52 below.

[33] On Messala's poetry and its reputation among his contemporaries cf. Nisbet, esp. 89–92.

[34] Pollio and Messala are, it is true, linked as orators in Tac. *Ann.* 11.6–7 and Quint. *Inst.* 10.1.113, but in neither case are they cited there as orators alone, which is what Maternus requires for his argument here.

of orator-poets such as Pollio and Messala might be felt to challenge that simple assumption. By introducing these figures here Tacitus appears to point to a major dimension that Maternus' analysis takes no account of: the genres are not as neatly divided as he wishes to suggest.

Moreover, as critics have observed, Maternus' own historical position tends to undermine the picture of an engaged oratory set against an abstracted poetry.[35] The problem has in fact already been pointed out by Aper himself: that Maternus' own poetry is not the result of detachment from its historical time but engages directly with contemporary politics.[36] Cato had been seen as an archetypal Republican and anti-tyrannical figure since his death, and selecting him as a protagonist had obvious political force. And that the political offense that was thereby caused was not merely the result of the naïveté of an unpolitical poet appears to have been confirmed by Maternus himself at the start of the work, where he implies that what he had done in his *Cato* was deliberate and premeditated.[37] This might appear to undermine the stance taken in his speech, and perhaps to suggest that his words in it are not meant to be taken at face value. However, such a reading is not straightforward. For one thing, Maternus' comment at the start, while he adamantly declines to alter what he had written, does not in fact explicitly relate his satisfaction with it to the political offense that he has caused; it could equally be read as a refusal to allow a satisfactory work of poetry to be altered as a result of extrane-

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[35] See esp. Bartsch 101–4, 119.

[36] 10.6 *nec pro amico aliquo sed, quod periculosius est, pro Catone offendis. nec excusatur offensa necessitudine officii aut fide advocationis aut fortuitae et subitae dictionis impetu: meditatus videris elegisse personam notabilem et cum auctoritate dicturam.* "You do not give offense on behalf of some friend, but, what is more dangerous, on behalf of Cato. Nor have you the excuse of the compulsion of duty or the advocate's pledge or the violence of a sudden and accidental comment; you seem deliberately to have selected a notorious character who would speak with authority."

[37] 3.2–3 "*an ideo librum istum adprehendisti ut diligentius retractares et, sublatis si qua pravae interpretationi materiam dederunt, emitteres Catonem non quidem meliorem sed tamen securiorem?*" *tum ille:* "*leges tu quid Maternus sibi debuerit, et adgnosces quae audisti. quod si qua omisit Cato, sequenti recitatione Thyestes dicet: hanc enim tragoediam disposui iam et intra me ipse formavi.*" "Have you taken up that book in order to revise it more carefully, and, once you have removed anything that gave an opportunity for misrepresentation, to publish *Cato*—not, to be sure better, but at least safer?" He responded: "You will read in the book what Maternus owed to himself, and you will recognize what you heard. But if *Cato* left anything out, *Thyestes* will say it at the next recitation. For I have arranged this tragedy and formed it within myself." One should note that the topic of *Thyestes* also looks pointed, since it was at Rome the paradigmatic theme by which one could tacitly attack tyranny; on this see Leigh, esp. 185–87.

ous offense.[38] In this respect it maintains the ambiguity that Tacitus introduced when he initially set the scene, where he offers—but does not endorse—the suggestion that Maternus had written in the way he had "as if ... forgetful of himself and thinking only of Cato" (2.1 *tamquam ... sui oblitus tantum Catonem cogitasset*).

A similar point may emerge from his statement at the opening of his speech (11.2), where he does seem to raise the idea of the political significance of poetry:

> ego autem sicut in causis agendis efficere aliquid et eniti fortasse possum, ita recitatione tragoediarum. et ingredi famam auspicatus sum, cum quidem †in Nerone† improbam et studiorum quoque sacra profanantem Vatini potentiam fregi; hodie si quid in nobis notitiae ac nominis est, magis arbitror carminum quam orationum gloria partum.

> But just as in conducting legal cases I can perhaps accomplish something and make an effort, so in the recitation of tragedies. I in fact began to enter on my reputation when under Nero / in *Nero* [?] I broke the wicked power of Vatinius that was moreover profaning the rites of literature; if today I have any fame and reputation, I believe that it came more from the success of poetry than of oratory.

Unfortunately, a probable textual corruption obscures Maternus' words at the most crucial point. If there is indeed a reference to Nero here, one needs to know whether it is the political circumstances of his rule or some literary work that provides the context for Maternus' comment, and this is not a question that modern scholarly conjecture has been able to answer with sufficient security. Moreover, the correct punctuation of the passage is uncertain. The text as printed here follows the punctuation of Stroux,[39] who suggested that *et ingredi ... fregi* should be concerned with speeches, corresponding to the first part of the *ego* clause, while *hodie ... partum* concerns poetry, corresponding to the second part of the *ego* clause. He saw the passage as referring to a speech that Maternus had made under Nero. However, as a number of objectors have pointed out, such an interpretation is improbable on historical grounds, and does not fit the overall case that Maternus is making, which ought to be emphasizing his exclusive vocation as a poet, not giving an easy handle to Aper by showing himself as an effective orator.[40] It is true that accepting Stroux's

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[38] *Contra* Bartsch 102–3.

[39] Stroux 338–49; he is followed by, among others, Mayer 122, as well as Güngerich 44–45 (although Güngerich acknowledges the difficulties in interpretation that this leads to, and proposes a lacuna after *tragoediarum*).

[40] So, e.g., Barwick 1954: 40–42, Mattingly 104–5, Kragelund 197–200, Bartsch 201–2.

punctuation does not depend on interpreting the passage as referring to a speech; it is also possible to read it as referring to tragedy alone.[41] Maternus would then be making a direct link between the sorts of thing that one can "accomplish" through oratory and that one can "accomplish" through poetry, with the "breaking" of Vatinius' power introduced as an example of the latter. But this interpretation would appear to suggest that Maternus is (contrary to the tenor of the rest of the speech) showing poetry no less than oratory governed by political aims.

Hence a good case can be made for following Lipsius in removing the full stop after *tragoediarum* and adding <*et*> after *fregi*. The two parallel clauses (*et ... et*) now both set out what Maternus achieved *recitatione tragoediarum*. With this reading there is a general parallel between "accomplishing something in legal cases" and "entering on my reputation through the recitation of tragedies," without any implication that the thing that created his reputation in poetry was similar to that which he accomplished through oratory. This appears to fit the immediate context better, since Maternus is simply responding to Aper's contention that one is only permitted to engage in poetry if one is incapable in oratory. The chief point of his reply therefore ought to be the fact that he is potentially capable in both fields (but chooses poetry anyway); to focus the response on the idea that poetry does the same sort of thing as oratory does would be a red herring. This is not conclusive proof (Tacitean sentences do sometimes introduce red herrings and send the argument off in unexpected directions), but on balance Lipsius's reading is probably preferable,[42] in which case Maternus, while proclaiming that he broke the power of Vatinius, does not necessarily imply that when doing so he was engaging in a similar political activity to that of the orator. Indeed even with Stroux's punctuation it is noticeable that while Maternus may appear initially to imply that poetry engages with politics in a way that is directly comparable to what oratory does, he links his "breaking" of Vatinius' power specifically to the fact that Vatinius had been profaning literature; far from relating poetry to the political, he has given a literary response to a literary offense. Hence, as far as we can make out the text of the passage, it does not undermine the picture that we are given in the rest of Maternus' speech and in the initial description of the effects of his poetry: of the poet's creation as—at least theoretically—detached from his political circumstances and governed solely by his responses to other works of literature.

[41] As noted by Bartsch 201.

[42] For further arguments in favor of it see Barwick 1954: 40–42, Kragelund 199, Bartsch 201–2.

However, even if Maternus can be argued to be broadly consistent in his stance here, the way that Tacitus presents it does not suggest that it is to be uncomplicatedly endorsed by the reader. The very mention of the breaking of Vatinius' power raises strongly the suggestion of a poetry that is far from politically detached, even if Maternus frames it differently in his argument. Likewise, the ambiguity of Tacitus' presentation of Maternus at the start of the work at least keeps the question in front of us of whether in fact poetry responds closely to its political environment; even if he does not clearly endorse the proposition that it does, he does not endorse the contrary proposition either. And another factor needs to be taken into account, namely, that even if neither Maternus nor Tacitus straightforwardly shows poetry as controlled by external political circumstances, at least some of the other characters in the work do read it that way: not only Aper (10.6 quoted above), but also Secundus at 3.2.[43] Indeed the response of the Romans in general to Maternus' recitation seems, in Tacitus' account, to center precisely upon its political implications.[44]

Maternus' first speech has therefore presented an historical framework for literature: a development from the sort of society that can produce only poetry to that which is more appropriate to the production of oratory; with the poet accordingly detaching himself from the latter society in order to continue producing his work, with poetry essentially developing autonomously through the influence of other poets. But this picture is, if not directly inconsistent with Maternus' own role as a poet, at any rate threatened by it, and the fact that poetry might not always be so detached is kept by Tacitus before our eyes. On the other hand, his vision of oratory as an art that has developed in response to and is governed solely by the external needs of an essentially corrupt society is one that nothing so far has required the reader to reject—though Aper's claim that oratory has flourished at every period (see above in this section) is at least implicitly a challenge to it.

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[43] 3.2 *tum Secundus* "*nihilne te*," *inquit*, "*Materne, fabulae malignorum terrent quo minus offensas Catonis tui ames?*" "Then Secundus said, 'Do the stories of the malicious not frighten you, Maternus, from loving the offense caused by your *Cato*?'"

[44] 2.1 *cum offendisse potentium animos diceretur, tamquam in eo tragoediae argumento sui oblitus tantum Catonem cogitasset, eaque de re per urbem frequens sermo haberetur* "when he was said to have offended the minds of the powerful, as if in the plot of the tragedy he had forgotten himself and only thought of Cato, and there was wide discussion about it throughout the city."

II

Aper's second speech (16.4–23.6) addresses the question of whether modern or ancient oratory is better; he is, of course, the defender of the former. To this end he spends a great deal of time in simple definition: the question of what precisely is to count as "ancient." From the standpoint of Ulysses and Nestor, 1300 years ago, let alone that of the grand cycle of the ages, Demosthenes and Hyperides would appear virtually contemporary to the time of the dialogue. As for the orators of the age of Cicero, he argues, these are essentially people of his own time (17.1–3):

> sed transeo ad Latinos oratores, in quibus non Menenium (ut puto) Agrippam, qui potest videri antiquus, nostrorum temporum disertis anteponere soletis, sed Ciceronem et Caesarem et Caelium et Calvum et Brutum et Asinium et Messalam: quos quid antiquis temporibus potius adscribatis quam nostris non video. nam ut de Cicerone ipso loquar, Hirtio nempe et Pansa consulibus, ut Tiro libertus eius scripsit, VII idus <Decembres> occisus est, quo anno divus Augustus in locum Pansae et Hirti se et Q. Pedium consules suffecit. statue sex[45] et quinquaginta annos, quibus mox divus Augustus rem publicam rexit; adice Tiberi tres et viginti, et prope quadriennium Gai, ac bis quaternos denos Claudi et Neronis annos, atque illum Galbae et Othonis et Vitellii longum et unum annum, ac sextam iam felicis huius principatus stationem qua Vespasianus rem publicam fovet: centum et viginti anni ab interitu Ciceronis in hunc diem colliguntur, unius hominis aetas.

> But I pass to Latin orators, among whom you always prefer to the eloquent men of our own day not only (I suppose) Menenius Agrippa, who can appear ancient, but Cicero and Caesar and Caelius and Calvus and Brutus and Asinius and Messala. But I do not see why you ascribe these men to ancient times rather than to our own. For to speak of Cicero himself, as his freedman Tiro wrote, he was killed, of course, on December 7 in the consulship of Hirtius and Pansa, the year in which the deified Augustus made himself and Q. Pedius suffect consuls to Pansa and Hirtius. Reckon 56 years in which the deified Augustus subsequently ruled the state; add the 23 of Tiberius and almost four of Gaius and fourteen years twice over of Claudius and Nero and that long single year of Galba and Otho and Vitellius, and what is now the sixth stage of this blessed principate in which Vespasian cares for the state; this adds up to 120 years from the death of Cicero to this day—the life of one man.

[45] This is Lipsius' emendation of the MSS *novem*, which is a manifest scribal "correction" to try to reconcile the arithmetic with the claimed total of 120 years; but see further the next note.

What is the point of Aper's argument here? It is of course this passage that provides an exact dramatic date for the *Dialogus* (A.D. 75),[46] and in a work that centers on precise historical placement, being able to identify the timeframe of the speakers is more than a casual effect. What is at issue is the dispute between the "modern" and the "ancient," and how one understands the type and reason for the changes from the one to the other. For this argument to have its fullest effect it is essential that the reader should be able to pin down easily and without complex deduction the precise period of time that comprises the "modern," and the opening of Aper's second speech, where the modern/ancient conflict is coming to the fore, is the obvious point at which to introduce it.

That explains why Tacitus included such a passage within his work; it does not, however, explain why he introduces it as part of an argument by Aper that, frankly, looks rather sophistic. Messala in his response treats the point as nothing more than a quibble,[47] and most modern interpreters have concurred.[48] However, there may be more to the argument here than initially meets the eye. It is noticeable that Aper's account of the history elides the end of the Republic and the Second Triumvirate into the age of Augustus; the year

[46] There is an apparent contradiction between this date and the "120 years" since the murder of Cicero (also 24.3), since the numbers in fact add up to 118 (counting inclusively); but the "120" is surely a loose approximation (see, e.g., Peterson xii–xv, Gudeman 55–62, Heubner 196–97). Beck has recently argued that the "120 years" is to be taken as correct, that *sextam* is to be read as "the sixth element in the calculation," not as meaning the sixth year of Vespasian's reign, and hence that the dramatic date of the work is 77/8. However, his arguments are improbable. Granted that *sextam ... stationem* is an unparalleled phrase, that is no especial surprise in Tacitus, and it is readily comprehensible, while Beck's own interpretation founders on the *iam*; he wants to interpret it as meaning *denique*/ *postremo* (167 n. 33, citing *TLL* VII 1.123.70ff.), but *iam* in that sense would be expected to appear first word in its clause (unless attached to another adverb like *denique* whose meaning is unambiguous).

[47] 25.1–2 *primum, ut opinor, nominis controversiam movit, tamquam parum proprie antiqui vocarentur quos satis constat ante centum annos fuisse. mihi autem de vocabulo pugna non est; sive illos antiquos sive maiores sive quo alio mavult nomine appellet, dum modo in confesso sit eminentiorem illorum temporum eloquentiam fuisse.* "He [*sc.* Aper] first, in my opinion, created a dispute over a name, as if people who are agreed to have lived more than a hundred years ago are incorrectly called 'ancients.' I am not going to fight about a word; let him call them 'ancients' or 'ancestors' or anything else he likes, provided it is admitted that their time possessed superior eloquence."

[48] E.g., Gudeman 293, von Fritz 287, Barnes 237; exceptions are Desideri 88, Luce 35, Goldberg 1999: 231.

of the death of Cicero was also that of the beginning of Augustus' rule.[49] In other words, Aper is presenting an essential unity of external circumstances between the age of Cicero and the time when he is speaking. It is not only that the life of one man could—just—have spanned the two periods; it is also that such a long-lived individual would, he implies, have seen no real change in the political circumstances under which he was living.[50]

However, although arguing for a general unity of external circumstances, Aper does recognize a change in the manner of oratory across time, including a change from the age of Cicero to his own. Unlike Messala, he regards it as a change not for the worse, but for the better. No less significantly, he constructs it not primarily in terms of changes in political or social circumstances, but as an essentially aesthetic response; the change is governed above all by the relationship between different works of oratory across different times.[51] This theme is adumbrated directly after his denial of the "ancient" (18.1–2):

> sunt enim horridi et inpoliti et rudes et informes et quos utinam nulla parte imitatus esset Calvus vester aut Caelius aut ipse Cicero. agere enim fortius iam et audentius volo, si illud ante praedixero, mutari cum temporibus formas quoque et genera dicendi. sic Catoni seni comparatus C. Gracchus plenior et uberior, sic Graccho politior et ornatior Crassus, sic utroque distinctior et urbanior et altior Cicero, Cicerone mitior Corvinus et dulcior et in verbis magis elaboratus.

> For they [*sc.* Galba, Carbo, et al.] are rough and unpolished and crude and coarse, and I wish that your hero Calvus or Caelius or Cicero himself had in no way imitated them. For I want to proceed now more boldly and daringly, in that I shall make the point beforehand that forms and types of speaking also change with the times. Thus Gaius Gracchus is fuller and richer by comparison with the elder Cato, Crassus more polished and decorated than Gracchus, Cicero more lucid and civilized and lofty than both, Corvinus milder and sweeter and more verbally ornate than Cicero.

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[49] According to Mayer 21 this computation of 56 years for Augustus is only otherwise found in Tac. *Ann.* 1.9.1 and Suet. *Aug.* 8.3; but it is at least implicit in Augustus' *Res gestae* that his career was a single phenomenon that ran seamlessly from the death of Caesar to the end of his period of rule.

[50] Desideri 88 claims that for Aper the change from republic to principate is only political, and so irrelevant to oratory. This is true, in that for Aper development in oratory is based on aesthetic, not political grounds, but it seems to overlook the fact that Aper does not overtly acknowledge even political changes; see section 11 below. Cf. the comments of Mayer 41, though he seems to suggest that this point is only an accidental by-product of Aper's argument.

[51] On this point see Michel 105–6, Döpp 1995: 215.

Aper here makes two essential points. One is that styles of oratory develop across time; the second is that one major influence on the style of oratory is the work of other writers. These two points are not related here—from this passage alone it might appear that imitation of other writers is something that retards development rather than encouraging it—but the connection emerges more directly shortly afterwards in his speech (20.5):

> exigitur enim iam ab oratore etiam poeticus decor, non Acci aut Pacuvi veterno inquinatus sed ex Horati et Vergili et Lucani sacrario prolatus.

> Poetic beauty is now demanded from an orator, not discolored with the in-grained dirt of Accius or Pacuvius, but introduced from the shrine of Horace and Virgil and Lucan.

The good modern orator develops, in other words, and forms his work by abandoning antique models and looking to contemporary aesthetic values. Conversely, the orator who fails to keep up with the times, and looks to models of the past, is justifiably condemned.[52] But what unites these two figures is that the major influence governing their manner of writing is the literary models that they choose to imitate and to incorporate into their work, models that are as much taken from other genres as narrowly rhetorical.[53] Aper thus substantially challenges and corrects the simplistic division of genres that had been implied by the previous speech (cf. section 1 above).

Why should an orator prefer the aesthetic values of the present to those of the past? Aper's answer is clear (19.2–5):

> vidit namque, ut paulo ante dicebam, cum condicione temporum et diversitate aurium formam quoque ac speciem orationis esse mutandam. facile perferebat prior ille populus, ut imperitus et rudis, impeditissimarum orationum spatia, atque id ipsum laudabat si dicendo quis diem eximeret. iam vero longa principiorum praeparatio et narrationis alte repetita series et multarum divisionum ostentatio et mille argumentorum gradus et quidquid

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[52] So, e.g., 21.7 *Asinius quoque, quamquam propioribus temporibus natus sit, videtur mihi inter Menenios et Appios studuisse; Pacuvium certe et Accium non solum tragoediis sed etiam orationibus suis expressit, adeo durus et siccus est.* "Asinius also, although he was born in more recent times, seems to me to have studied with the Meneniuses and Appiuses—at any rate, he reproduced Pacuvius and Accius not only in his tragedies but also in his speeches, so hard and dry is he." It is interesting to note that Aper, unlike Maternus (above, n. 32), treats Pollio as much as a tragedian as an orator, and indeed links the two together into a single style. This fits the general tenor of his piece, which in providing an "aesthetic" reading of oratory emphasizes its close links with other literary products.

[53] Cf. Michel 177–78.

aliud aridissimis Hermagorae et Apollodori libris praecipitur in honore erat.
quod si quis odoratus philosophiam videretur atque ex ea locum aliquem
orationi suae insereret, in caelum laudibus ferebatur. nec mirum; erant enim
haec nova et incognita, et ipsorum quoque oratorum paucissimi praecepta
rhetorum aut philosophorum placita cognoverant. at hercule pervulgatis
iam omnibus, cum vix in cortina quisquam adsistat quin elementis
studiorum, etsi non instructus, at certe inbutus sit, novis et exquisitis
eloquentiae itineribus opus est, per quae orator fastidium aurium effugiat,
utique apud eos iudices qui vi et potestate, non iure et legibus cognoscunt,
nec accipiunt tempora sed constituunt, nec exspectandum habent oratorem
dum illi libeat de ipso negotio dicere, sed saepe ultro admonent atque alio
transgredientem revocant et festinare se testantur.

He [*sc.* Cassius] saw, as I said just now, that along with the conditions of the
times and the changes in audiences the shape and appearance of oratory must
change. The people earlier were crude and inexperienced and had no trouble
putting up with the length of utterly encumbered speeches, and if someone used
up the whole day in speaking, they saw it as a point of praise. Then indeed long
preparatory introductions and a narrative thread taken right back and a parade
of multiple divisions and a thousand levels of argument and everything else in
those sterile books of Hermagoras and Apollodorus were held in respect. But
if someone seemed to have a smattering of philosophy and inserted some point
from it into his speech, he was praised to the skies. It is hardly surprising; these
things were new and unfamiliar, and very few even of the orators themselves
were acquainted with the precepts of the rhetoricians or the views of the phi-
losophers. But, good God, now that everything is widely known, and virtually
everyone who comes to stand in the audience has at least a basic knowledge of
these areas, if not expertise, one needs new and choice paths of eloquence, by
which the orator may avoid wearying the ears, especially among those judges
who decide according to power and force, not codes of law, and who determine
the length of time to spend, rather than accepting it, nor do they have to wait
on an orator until he chooses to talk about the actual case, but they often actively
remind him and call him back if he digresses, and affirm that they are in a hurry.

What forces the orator to develop his style is the demands made by his audi-
ences. This is the sort of "external" criterion that might have been presented
in wider social or political terms;[54] but in fact Aper introduces it in a way that
reinforces rather than challenges the essentially aesthetic focus of his analy-
sis. Audiences are themselves increasingly well-read and educated, and there-
fore make increased demands upon the orator, who could previously have
appeared sophisticated and impressive merely by offering some crude inser-

[54] Compare Perkins 157–59 for the potential slippage from "immanent" into "exter-
nal" explanations in literary history (for the terminology, cf. the quotation in n. 13 above).

tions from his rhetorical and philosophical readings; now that such things are commonplace in education, other modes are needed if one is to impress.[55]

One might have expected from the opening of this passage that Aper's developmental model would be a neutral one, that he is an aesthetic relativist, someone who claims that certain styles are associated with certain times but that no one style is fundamentally better than any other.[56] We can compare his comment earlier in his speech that differences do not necessarily imply superiority, and that indeed even at a single time styles varied (18.3):

> hoc interim probasse contentus sum, non esse unum eloquentiae vultum, sed <in> illis quoque quos vocatis antiquos plures species deprehendi, nec statim deterius esse quod diversum est, vitio autem malignitatis humanae vetera semper in laude, praesentia in fastidio esse.

> Meanwhile I am happy to have proved this: that there is not one form of eloquence, but also in those whom you call "ancient" many types can be found, nor is something instantly worse because it is different; but it is the fault of human malice always to praise the old and loathe the modern.

However, such a "neutralist" interpretation would be mistaken. It is true that this passage denies the sort of simple determinism that would associate one form of oratory with a particular time, and it emphasizes that the aesthetic value of a writer is independent of whether his work is of a particular set form. But to say that there are many good forms of oratory does not entail that all forms are equally good, and in fact Aper repeatedly denies exactly that.[57] His entire speech is loaded with value judgments—after all, he is precisely claiming that modern oratory is better than ancient: in the past writers were often crude, because they could get away with being so, but nowadays audience pressures have the benign result that orators are encouraged to write more attractively.[58] His concession to multiplicity of styles simply allows his analy-

[55] Fantham 114–15 claims that Tacitus uses Aper's focus on audiences to undermine his position, since (she suggests) he shows the modern audience as frivolous and debased; but such an interpretation is hard to reconcile with the numerous positive descriptions that Aper gives of the improvement in modern tastes.

[56] This is, for example, the conclusion of Gugel 89–90, Martin 62.

[57] The fact that Aper's criticism of past orators is incompatible with an interpretation of him as a "relativist" is observed by von Fritz 287–89 and (more briefly) Döpp 1995: 215. However, instead of concluding that the "relativist" interpretation is mistaken, they both wrongly treat this as an inconsistency in his position; cf. den Boer 197–98.

[58] Compare, e.g., 21.3–4 *ex Caelianis orationibus nempe eae placent, sive universae <sive> partes earum, in quibus nitorem et altitudinem horum temporum agnoscimus. sordes autem †regulae† verborum et hians compositio et inconditi sensus redolent antiquitatem: nec quemquam adeo antiquarium puto ut Caelium ex ea parte laudet qua antiquus est.* "Naturally,

sis to be wider and more flexible than it might otherwise have been; he can show the orators of the past containing varying elements, even while moving in the general direction of the refinement of the present.

To summarize: Aper, like Maternus before him, views literary history as fundamentally controlled by aesthetic criteria. The orator writes his work in particular ways as a consequence of his readings and his imitations and borrowings of what he has read. His audience provides an external control, but their responses are themselves largely governed by the expectations and desires provided by their own readings. Where he differs from Maternus is that while Maternus' analysis was crude and one-dimensional, Aper has incorporated a substantial flexibility: he recognizes the variety of literary product at any particular time and the extent to which one genre may fertilize another. Even more significantly, he also recognizes its development across time and provides a model that seeks to account for that development. To this extent it can be seen that his argument, while ostensibly opposed to Maternus', is refining and building substantially upon it.

But interspersed with Aper's arguments are certain hints at other sorts of forces that underlie literary development. The very fact of referring to audiences might be felt instantly to introduce factors that cannot be readily confined within the purely aesthetic, even though that is the general thrust of his argument. For the fundamental purpose of rhetoric—or at least the kind of rhetoric that appears to be at issue in his speech—is persuasion, and it is hard to divorce the form of persuasion from its content, or the content from the situation that has generated it, even though Aper appears to be seeking to do so. This becomes especially clear in 19.5 (quoted above): the *iudices* before whom a modern orator has to speak have the power to compel him to reach the point, and are prepared to use that power if they feel that he has become too long-winded. It is true that Aper has introduced this point as part of his general argument about the knowledgeability of modern audiences, but the reference to judges who *tempora … constituunt* reminds the reader of respects in which it is more than simple knowledge that has changed since the Republic, and that that affects the form of oratory one may practice. The comment that such judges decide *vi et potestate, non iure et legibus*, which might have appeared extraneous to the general argument, becomes much more pointed in this context; despite Aper's initial suggestion of the lack of fundamental

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we like those things in the speeches of Caelius, whether entire speeches or parts of them, in which we recognize the polish and grandeur of our own day. But the shabby language [?] and faulty construction and shapeless periods savor of antiquity, and my view is that no one is so much of an antiquarian to praise Caelius for those parts of him that are antique."

change, it is clear that the world in which the contemporary orator moves is different in more ways than in the precepts of rhetoricians now being widely known. As Aper had said in 19.2, changes in oratory were generated *condicione temporum et diversitate aurium*; when that phrase was originally used, the reader might have thought it a hendiadys, but by the end of the speech it would be hard to forget that the "condition of the times" had changed in other respects as well as in the aesthetic preferences of audiences.[59] And this becomes especially pointed in Aper's concluding remarks, where he praises his interlocutors as themselves being fine examples of contemporary oratory, combining the best of the past with the present (23.6):

> nam et te, Messala, video laetissima quaeque antiquorum imitantem, et vos, Materne ac Secunde, ita gravitati sensuum nitorem et cultum verborum miscetis ... sic exprimitis adfectus, sic libertatem temperatis, ut etiam si nostra iudicia malignitas et invidia tardaverit, verum de vobis dicturi sint posteri nostri.

> For I see both you, Messala, imitating all the brightest things of the ancients, and you, Maternus and Secundus, so mix into your serious thoughts polished and refined language ... you so express emotions, you so moderate your freedom, that even if malice and envy hinder our judgment, our descendants will say the truth about you.

This once again appears to show the primary influence on the orator as being his place within the tradition of oratory as modified by aesthetic developments, but the implications of the passage hardly end there. *Libertatem temperatis* is of course an ambiguous phrase. It could have a purely aesthetic interpretation, with the modern orator controlling his style in a way that his predecessors failed to do. But the word *libertas* was always strongly politically loaded at Rome, and in the context of the *Dialogus* as a whole, where it is later argued to be precisely the absence of the *libertas* of the Republic that has caused the change in modern oratory, it is hard not to see overtones of that point here also. Once again, even within Aper's "aestheticized" picture, the image of the style of oratory being determined by external social and political factors occasionally slips through.

[59] On this, note also Rutledge 54–57, arguing that the very fact of Aper's use of Cassius Severus in this passage as a watershed between the older and modern forms of oratory (19.1–5) implicitly reminds the reader of Cassius' own style of oratory, which was associated with the *delatores* (of the sort, ironically, by whom he was himself ultimately denounced), and hence of the influence of the Principate in determining the apparently autonomous aesthetic changes.

III

Messala in his reply (25.1–26.8) is prepared to allow Aper to deny that the age of Cicero was "ancient" (25.1–2, quoted n. 47 above)—providing, he says, that it is admitted that the orators of the past were superior to those of the present. That conclusion is, of course, one that Aper is not going to draw, since to do so would concede the essential point at issue. However, in saying this we should not overlook that Messala's concession to Aper is more than merely formal; he accepts Aper's presentation of the terms of the debate. For Messala's first speech in many respects can be seen as an inversion of Aper's second.[60] Like Aper, Messala sees oratory as something that has developed across time; like Aper (18.3, quoted above), Messala accepts a variety of valid forms of eloquence, while also arguing that not all forms are equally valid.[61] More importantly, in this speech he appears to accept the essential model that Aper was putting forward, namely, that this change may be analyzed in terms of literary influences and affinities (25.7–26.3):

> quod ad Servium Galbam et C. Laelium attinet et si quos alios antiquorum agitare non destitit, non exigit defensorem, cum fatear quaedam eloquentiae eorum ut nascenti adhuc nec satis adultae defuisse. ceterum si omisso optimo illo et perfectissimo genere eloquentiae eligenda sit forma dicendi, malim hercule C. Gracchi impetum aut L. Crassi maturitatem quam calamistros Maecenatis aut tinnitus Gallionis, adeo melius est orationem vel hirta toga induere quam fucatis et meretriciis vestibus insignire. neque enim oratorius iste, immo hercule ne virilis quidem cultus est quo plerique temporum nostrorum actores[62] ita utuntur ut lascivia verborum et levitate sententiarum et licentia compositionis histrionales modos exprimant; quodque vix auditu fas esse debeat, laudis et gloriae et ingenii loco plerique iactant cantari saltarique commentarios suos: unde oritur illa foeda et

[60] Cf. den Boer 207.

[61] 25.2–4 *ne illi quidem parti sermonis eius repugno †si cominus fatetur† pluris formas dicendi etiam isdem saeculis, nedum diversis extitisse ... omnes tamen eandem sanitatem eloquentiae ferunt, ut, si omnium pariter libros in manum sumpseris, scias quamvis in diversis ingeniis esse quandam iudicii ac voluntatis similitudinem et cognationem.* "I do not even object to the part of his speech in which he says [?] that there are numerous ways of speaking even in the same age, let alone different ones ... but all have the same health of eloquence such that, if you take the books of all of them equally in your hand, you may know that though the talents were different there was a certain similarity and relationship between their judgment and intentions."

[62] The manuscripts in 26.2 vary between *actores* and *auctores*. Most editors have preferred the former, although *histrionales modos* in the subsequent clause would perhaps be more pointed if *auctores* were read here. On either reading, however, the referent is the same; cf. Güngerich 115.

praepostera sed tamen frequens exclamatio, ut oratores nostri tenere dicere, histriones diserte saltare dicantur.

As far as Servius Galba and Gaius Laelius go, and any other ancients whom Aper did not stop harrying, no defender is needed, since I admit that something was missing in their eloquence, which was still coming into being and not yet full-grown. But if we were to have to leave aside that excellent and most faultless form of eloquence when selecting a style of speaking, by God, I would prefer the force of Gaius Gracchus or the ripeness of Lucius Crassus to the curling-tongs of Maecenas or the jingles of Gallio, so much better is it to dress up a speech even in a shaggy toga than to decorate it with the dyed dresses of whores. That culture is not oratorical—by God, it is not even manly—the one that most of the actors/authors of our times use in such a way that through wantonness of language and triviality of thought and looseness of arrangement they set out theatrical rhythms. Something that ought to be barely proper to listen to, it is treated as a point of praise and glory and genius when most people boast that their notebooks sing and dance. This is the source of that foul and perverse but nevertheless regular comment, that our orators are said to speak delicately, and our actors to dance eloquently.

Messala here considers the decline of oratory in terms of influences, but those influences are described as the use of inappropriate literary models, and specifically models taken from the theater. The phrase *histrionales modos* is revealing. The word *histrio* included performers in all theatrical genres, from the "high" genre of tragedy to the "sub-literary" mime,[63] and acting in general had strongly negative cultural connotations for the Romans.[64] By his reference to "dancing" in the following sentence Messala loads his argument in the specific direction of pantomime. However, his complaint is nevertheless about the specifically literary side to the genre; he is concerned with language rather than delivery,[65] and pantomime at Rome was a textual as well as a performed art-form (even if not a very prestigious one), with a number of distinguished literary exponents including Lucan and Statius.[66] In other words, for Messala as for Aper, the quality of the oratory of particular times appears

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[63] In this period the term often denotes pantomime artists in particular (*TLL* s.v. *histrio* I A.4, and see also below), but it continued to be used even without qualification for other performers as well (*TLL* s.v. *histrio* I A.1–3): note Quint. *Inst.* 6.2.35, using the word to refer to tragic as opposed to comic actors.

[64] Edwards 98–136.

[65] In this respect Messala's argument differs markedly from the standard Roman complaints about orators becoming too "theatrical," which typically focus on delivery above all: e.g., Quint. *Inst.* 1.11.1–3, 11.3.57, 11.3.91 ,11.3.181, Gel. 1.5.2–3; cf. Gunderson 117–48.

[66] Juv. 7.86–97; Vacca, *Vita Lucani* p. 3, 12 (Endt).

to be determined by the orator's choice of models. Aper regarded it as a positive thing that modern orators took their lead not from the past but from contemporary writers in other genres, Messala regards it as a negative thing; but the same essential account of literary development underlies both speakers. Likewise, in Messala's backhanded compliments to Cassius Severus he treats his superiority to his successors in terms that focus on his literary affinities.[67]

But although Messala's argument seems to be structuring literary history according to the same form as Aper's, there are some substantial extra dimensions. First, it is worth noting that although his picture of the change in oratory after Cicero is based on the idea of influences, unlike Aper he does not present the improvements up to Cicero's day in those terms. Rather the language he uses gives the impression of an internal and organic development of the genre (*nascenti adhuc nec satis adultae*), as if it was undergoing a natural and inevitable growth. By modern standards such "biological" metaphors are difficult to take seriously, but they went back at least to Aristotle,[68] and have a long pedigree up to and including the twentieth century (cf. n. 3 above). Messala's introduction of them here suggests one respect in which Aper's account could be seen as unsatisfactory: that by looking at the question solely in terms of readings and audiences, he had failed to take into account that the genre has a "natural" life-cycle independent of what the orators happen to be reading.

This is admittedly not the chief focus of Messala's account, which still centers on defined factors that influenced the development of oratory. But, significantly, these influences are not limited solely to the type of literary considerations that formed the center of Aper's account. Messala's account of the influence on orators from the theater is not only expressed as something to be deplored, but is described using imagery that indicates influences of a much wider sort.[69] The idea that the modern orators by taking on theatrical manners have effeminized themselves is both expressed directly (*ne virilis quidem*) and supported by the imagery of the passage (*impetum*, *maturitatem*, and *hirta toga* set in opposition to *calamistros*, *fucatis et meretriciis vestibus*, *tenere dicere*). This language presents the orator's choice of literary influences as not merely governed by preferences towards refinement and modernity, in the manner

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[67] 26.5 *et varietate eruditionis et lepore urbanitatis et ipsarum virium robore* "variety of erudition and charm of civility and the strength of his actual power."

[68] Arist. *Poet.* 1449a15, 23–24; see Halliwell 92–96. Compare Goldberg 1995: 6–7, arguing for Cicero's *Brutus* similarly having a teleological and biological model of literary change.

[69] On the imagery here see Gugel 77–78.

that Aper had previously set out, but as something related to the moral struc-
ture of society as a whole. In other words, even when Messala adopts Aper's
"aestheticizing" framework, he does so in terms that increasingly bring into
the foreground influences of the external society, which in Aper's speech were
present only intermittently.[70]

It is this aspect that is then developed in Messala's second speech (28.1–
35.5), which is his response to Maternus' request to explain, rather than prove,
the decline of oratory. Literary influences are certainly not abandoned as an
aspect of that explanation—after all, since his account centers upon the role
of education in forming the orator,[71] it would have been surprising had the
question of what the aspiring orator reads not played a major role. Thus his
complaints about modern education include the comment that *nec in
auctoribus cognoscendis nec in evolvenda antiquitate nec in notitia vel rerum
vel hominum vel temporum satis operae insumitur* (30.1 "Not enough effort is
spent either in studying authors or in reading history or in knowing events
or people or times"), and his account of the ideal education system followed
by men like Cicero in the past includes several references to the importance
of appropriate reading, especially in philosophy.[72] But the difference here is

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[70] On these two tendencies in Messala's speech cf. Michel 113–15, though he analyzes
them rather differently.

[71] The centrality of this theme is clear from the start of the speech: see, e.g., 28.2 *quis
enim ignorat et eloquentiam et ceteras artes descivisse ab illa vetere gloria non inopia
hominum sed desidia iuventutis et neglegentia parentum et inscientia praecipientium et
oblivione moris antiqui?* "For who is unaware that both eloquence and the other arts de-
clined from their old glory not through the lack of men, but through the sloth of youth
and the negligence of parents and the ignorance of teachers and the forgetting of ancient
custom?"

[72] Notably at 31.5–6 *sunt apud quos adstrictum et collectum et singula statim argumenta
concludens dicendi genus plus fidei meretur; apud hos dedisse operam dialecticae proficiet.
alios fusa et aequalis et ex communibus ducta sensibus oratio magis delectat; ad hos
permovendos mutuabimur a Peripateticis aptos et in omnem disputationem paratos iam locos.
dabunt Academici pugnacitatem, Plato altitudinem, Xenophon iucunditatem. ne Epicuri
quidem et Metrodori honestas quasdam exclamationes adsumere iisque prout res poscit uti
alienum erit oratori.* "There are people who will find more convincing a style of speech
that is sharp and organized and proves each point straightforwardly and separately; when
one is in front of them it will be helpful to have paid attention to dialectic. Other people
get more pleasure from a looser and smoother prose drawn from shared experience, and
to influence them we will introduce instead suitable commonplaces from the Peripatet-
ics that are prepared for every argument. The Academics will give belligerence, Plato lofti-
ness, Xenophon pleasantness. It will not be inappropriate for the orator to take on board
even some of the moral exhortations of Epicurus and Metrodorus and to employ them
as appropriate to the case."

that Messala now discusses explicitly what was only implicit earlier, that while oratory may be influenced by the orator's studies, the choice of what to study is not made in an aesthetic vacuum but is itself fundamentally related to the wider society. If, as he had described in his previous speech, modern oratory is now excessively influenced by the effeminized theater, this, he now argues, is the inevitable consequence of a system of education that imbues children from an early age with triviality and immorality in place of serious study (29.1–3):

> at nunc natus infans delegatur Graeculae alicui ancillae, cui adiungitur unus aut alter ex omnibus servis, plerumque vilissimus nec cuiquam serio ministerio accommodatus. horum fabulis et erroribus virides statim et rudes animi inbuuntur; nec quisquam in tota domo pensi habet quid coram infante domino aut dicat aut faciat. quin etiam ipsi parentes non probitati neque modestiae parvulos adsuefaciunt, sed lasciviae et dicacitati, per quae paulatim impudentia inrepit et sui alienique contemptus. iam vero propria et peculiaria huius urbis vitia paene in utero matris concipi mihi videntur, histrionalis favor et gladiatorum equorumque studia: quibus occupatus et obsessus animus quantulum loci bonis artibus relinquit?

> But now a baby at birth is handed over to some Greekling maidservant, to whom is added one or two out of all the slaves, usually the cheapest, someone unsuited to any serious task. The children's green and unformed minds are from the start steeped in their stories and errors, and no one in the whole house is at all concerned about what they say or do in front of the young master. In fact the parents themselves do not accustom the little ones to honesty and moderation, but to wantonness and coarseness, whereby immodesty and contempt for themselves and others has gradually crept in. And now the particular and individual vices of this city—the support of actors and enthusiasm for gladiators and horses—seem to me to be conceived virtually in the mother's womb. When a mind is occupied and obsessed with these, how little room is there for noble pursuits?

Hence for Messala changes in oratory may come as a result of changes in what people read and study, but that is a matter that cannot be considered in isolation from the structure of society itself. The same point emerges in the second part of his speech, where he contrasts at length the contemporary education system with the training in rhetoric that prevailed in the late Republic. The latter was in effect an apprenticeship to an expert in the course of his actual practice, the former centers on declamational exercises that bear no resemblance to reality. The result is that the student in the past learned effective oratory precisely because he was continually exposed to examples of effective oratory upon which he could model himself (34.4):

igitur vera statim et incorrupta eloquentia inbuebantur, et, quamquam unum sequerentur, tamen omnes eiusdem aetatis patronos in plurimis et causis et iudiciis cognoscebant, habebantque ipsius populi diversissimarum aurium copiam, ex qua facile deprehenderent quid in quoque vel probaretur vel displiceret.

Therefore they were from the start steeped in true and uncorrupted eloquence and, although they were following one man, nevertheless were acquainted with all the advocates of the same generation in many cases and courts, and they had an abundance of highly varied listeners among the people themselves, from which they could easily grasp in each situation what was approved of and what was displeasing.

In effect, Messala here argues for a model of oratorical development that depends on imitation of predecessors, as in both Maternus' and Aper's earlier accounts. But here the models being imitated are available to the student through their direct experience rather than simply on the page, and effective oratory is thus perpetuated by the fact that students are able to see which aspects of their models actually work in practice. According to Messala's argument, the nature of oratory under the Republic was dependent on works of literature (both speeches and in other genres) that provided the context against which it was written; but the effective exposure of writers to their models depended on the entire system of society within which the educational system was structured.

It is easy to be dismissive of Messala's arguments. His position involves an idealization of the past that is often felt to be naive,[73] combined with an account of modern degeneration that appears to be partly based in a crude xenophobia. But such criticisms should not obscure the fact that his account of literary history shows a conceptual sophistication that significantly develops the models of the earlier speeches. Whereas the earlier speakers had largely treated literary influences and aesthetic development as independent of society, Messala argues for the essential interrelation of the two; it is only in societies of particular sorts that particular literary influences are present and are seen as appropriate models for the writer.

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[73] It is noticeable that Messala takes Cicero's avowedly idealized account of the education of the perfect orator and presents it as if it were everyday reality in the Republic; cf. Luce 20–11, Mayer 182; also Rutledge 63–66, though he less plausibly goes on to suggest that this is to be seen as part of a deliberate strategy by Messala to show up the unreality of Quintilian's program of reform of modern oratory.

IV

This provides the departure point for Maternus' final speech (36.1–41.5),[74] although the loss of its opening (as well as the end of Messala's speech) in the lacuna after 35.6 means that we cannot know precisely how Tacitus effected the transition. In the speech as we have it, however, the argument has moved entirely away from a consideration of oratory as influenced by the orator's reading. It focuses instead on the external circumstances under which the orator works. For Maternus, what allowed for great oratory in the late Republic was above all the chaos of the period, which caused the competition for power and in turn fueled eloquence (e.g., 36.1, 4–8). The chaos also led to major issues being at stake, another prerequisite for great oratory (37.5). Moreover, he argues that the restricted circumstances under which modern speakers practice militate against the production of effective oratory (39.1–4). Such effectiveness as still remains in oratory, he suggests, is only possible because in some respects society has retained the features that enabled oratory to flourish in the past (e.g., 41.1).

This speech has long been the most controversial of all in the *Dialogus*, both because of its apparent incompatibility with Maternus' attitude towards the contemporary principate earlier in the work, and in its relationship to the presumed attitudes of Tacitus himself to imperial rule. It has at various times been proposed that it must be taken as to some degree ironic (see further below, section v).[75] But for the question that is under consideration here we need only observe that Maternus' arguments develop further, rather than contradict, the general model of literary history that Messala had put forward. Messala had begun by treating oratorical development as a matter of literary influences, as Aper had, but then had provided an explanation for those influences in wider social and political terms. Maternus here does not explicitly acknowledge the role of literary influences at all (he may, of course, have done so in the lost opening of his speech, but that cannot be known); but he also does not directly deny that they may play a role. However, any role that they may play is now entirely subordinated, as it was to a lesser degree in Messala's argument, to the general social and political context, which provides the final explanation for the style of oratory that existed in the past and that has largely ceased in the present. The explanation in general form does not contradict Messala's, although there are substantial disagreements in points

[74] Cf. Schwindt 204–5.

[75] So, e.g., Köhnken, Heubner 208–9, Heldmann 280–86, Desideri 91, and esp. Bartsch 106–25 (though she rejects the term "irony" in favor of "doublespeak"). Scholars who read it "straight" include Manuwald and Mayer 17, 43–44.

of detail, as well as in the implicit attitude to the Republic. The chief differ-
ence, however, is that it examines the issue at a more fundamental level.[76]
Messala saw aesthetic choices arising from an educational system that in turn
arose from the general moral choices being made in society; Maternus argues
for the ultimate underlying explanation being the change in political struc-
ture.[77] He does not (in the surviving part of the speech) deny that modern
education is different from that in the past, but the implication of what he
says is that even were the system of apprenticeship in ancient education some-
how to be restored, it would still not lead to a fundamental change in oratory,
since the orators could not under modern political structures be engaging in
rhetorical activity of that sort in the first place. This point is only occasion-
ally implied by Messala (e.g., 34.4, quoted above), but for Maternus it forms
the heart of his analysis.

V

Hence the *Dialogus*, as I suggested at the start, draws on a wide range of ap-
proaches to literary history, but develops them with increasing sophistication
through its competing speeches into a single analysis. Aper initially presented
a snapshot of oratory as engaged within its time, but with only bare hints as
to how the two are related. Maternus then extended that into a broad picture
of historical development, according to which oratory arose in the first in-
stance in response to the evils of society (but no further detail of its develop-
ment was given), while for poetry external society was of little or no impor-
tance, with poets forming their works entirely by reference to their literary
forbears. Aper then discussed oratory within a similar "aesthetic" framework,
but in a much more flexible and subtle way, with cross-fertilization of genres
and a broad model of aesthetic development and improvement. That model
was then taken over by Messala, but he treated it not merely as a matter of
autonomous aesthetic choices but as the result of broader structural changes
in educational systems and moral values. Finally Maternus looked to a more
fundamental level of explanation and examined changes in oratory in terms
of the underlying structure of society as a whole. Although the speakers are
overtly and strongly disagreeing on substantial issues, which are not in any
obvious way resolved, when one looks at the question of how literature is to
be analyzed, the development of their debate points to far clearer conclusions,
with each speaker building upon and improving the account of his predeces-
sor. The richness of this, and the way in which the different modes of analysis

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[76] Cf. Döpp 1986: 20–21, 1995: 217.
[77] Cf. Mayer 17.

are combined and played off against one another, demonstrates as strongly as anything could that the historical conception of literature in Tacitus—and by extension in antiquity[78]—is far removed from the unsophisticated and monolithic picture that older scholarship might sometimes lead one to expect (cf. the opening remarks above).

But, as I also said at the start, there is a further dimension that needs to be taken into consideration, namely, the indications that Tacitus gives of how his own work is to be fitted into the literary-historical scheme here developed. In one respect he has provided a very obvious answer: he is writing a dialogue about oratory, which would immediately make a reader think of Cicero's dialogues on the same subject. The overall form is close to *de Oratore* in particular,[79] and he moreover writes in a strongly Ciceronian style.[80] In case one has missed the point, in the course of the work he repeatedly alludes to Cicero's dialogues both directly and indirectly, and implicitly places his work in the Ciceronian tradition. One obvious example is his handling of Aper (24.1–2):

> quae cum Aper dixisset, "agnoscitisne" inquit Maternus "vim et ardorem Apri nostri? quo torrente, quo impetu saeculum nostrum defendit! quam copiose ac varie vexavit antiquos! quanto non solum ingenio ac spiritu sed etiam eruditione et arte ab ipsis mutuatus est per quae mox ipsos incesseret! ... ac ne ipse quidem ita sentit, sed more veteri et a nostris philosophis saepe celebrato sumpsit sibi contra dicendi partes."

> When Aper had finished speaking, Maternus said, "Do you recognize the force and passion of our Aper? With what a torrent, with what power he defended our age! With what fullness and variety he harassed the ancients! How great was not only his talent and spirit, but also his learning and skill, borrowing from those very people the weapons with which he then assaulted them! ... Not that he himself feels that way; but according to the old custom that is often practiced by our philosophers he took on himself the role of speaking in opposition."

[78] With my account of the sophisticated interplay in Tacitus of different modes of literary history, it interesting to compare Williams, who analyzes *imitatio* as literary history in the Latin poets in terms of an interplay (albeit a far less systematic one than I have demonstrated in Tacitus) between two different forms of imitation: *imitatio exemplorum*, by which writers take over past material in order to place themselves in relation to their literary tradition, and *imitatio vitae*, by which they incorporate material from their own world in order to demonstrate their own innovations within that tradition.

[79] For the parallels see Gudeman 83–85; cf. Luce 12–13. For a detailed analysis of the *Dialogus*' similarities to and differences from its Ciceronian models see Hass-von Reitzenstein.

[80] Cf. Mayer 27–31.

How far Maternus' words are to be taken at face value here is debatable. Various scholars have argued that Aper's case is to be taken more seriously than this would seem to imply.[81] But the claim that Maternus is making here links Tacitus' work to Cicero's *de Oratore*, where Crassus makes a similar accusation against Antonius (1.263):

> operarium nobis quendam, Antoni, oratorem facis atque haud scio an aliter sentias et utare tua illa mirifica ad refellendum consuetudine, qua tibi nemo umquam praestitit; cuius quidem ipsius facultatis exercitatio oratorum propria est, sed iam in philosophorum consuetudine versatur maximeque eorum, qui de omni re proposita in utramque partem solent copiosissime dicere.

> You make our orator quite a laborer, Antonius, and I strongly suspect that you think differently and are employing your remarkable habit of refutation, at which no one has ever surpassed you; indeed the practice of that very skill properly belongs to orators, but now it is the habit of philosophers, especially those who are accustomed to speak most fully on either side of any issue.

Here too one may question how far Crassus is representing Antonius' position fairly;[82] but the closeness of this to what Maternus is saying in the *Dialogus* is noteworthy.[83] The reference to "philosophers" in the two passages is pointed; the philosophical school that was especially associated with "speaking on both sides of the issue" was of course the New Academy, the school of which Cicero was himself a follower, and whose methodology he adopts in several of his philosophical dialogues as well as in *de Oratore*.[84] Moreover, Maternus' comment that Aper argued in the manner of the ancients, and in particular that he spoke *copiose ac varie*, provides a further link: both Crassus and Antonius had used almost the same phrase to describe the essential features that made for a successful orator.[85]

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[81] So, e.g., Luce, Champion, Goldberg 1999; cf. also Deuse for an interesting analysis of the whole question.

[82] Note Goldberg 1999: 233–35.

[83] On the relationship between Aper and Antonius cf. Michel 27–28, Hass-von Reitzenstein 131–43.

[84] Notably *de Finibus*, *de Natura deorum*, and *de Divinatione* (on which see Beard and Schofield).

[85] Cic. *de Orat.* 1.59 *oratorem plenum atque perfectum esse eum, qui de omnibus rebus possit copiose varieque dicere.* "The complete and perfect orator is the man who can speak on all subjects with fullness and variety." 2.120 *alterum est, in quo oratoris vis illa divina virtusque cernitur, ea, quae dicenda sunt, ornate, copiose varieque dicere.* "The other thing, in which the divine force and virtue of the orator is seen, is to say what must be said with decoration, fullness, and variety."

Hence the role of Aper in the *Dialogus* is closely linked to that of Antonius in *de Oratore*, which reinforces the general sense that the entire work is being created within a Ciceronian tradition. There are various other allusions to Cicero's works on rhetorical theory, which keep his role as a model for Tacitus before the reader's eyes. Thus Messala, in arguing for the central part to be played by philosophy in the orator's education, cites Cicero's *Orator* directly as an authority for his position (32.6 *et Cicero his, ut opinor, verbis refert, quidquid in eloquentia effecerit, id se non rhetorum <officinis> sed Academiae spatiis consecutum.* "And Cicero tells in, I think, these words, that whatever he accomplished in eloquence, he obtained it not in the workshops of the rhetoricians but the walkways of the Academy").[86] Aper, on the other hand, alludes to Cicero's own debates with his contemporaries (as illustrated especially in *Brutus* and *Orator*) in support of his contention that oratory improves over time, and that objections to the modern are due merely to people's tendency to idealize the past (22.1 *ad Ciceronem venio, cui eadem pugna cum aequalibus suis fuit quae mihi vobiscum est: illi enim antiquos mirabantur, ipse suorum temporum eloquentiam anteponebat.* "I come to Cicero, who had the same fight with his contemporaries as I am having with you: they admired the ancients, he preferred the eloquence of his own time").[87] We may note that Aper's entire conception of the role of an orator in his first speech recalls Cicero's own account in *de Oratore*;[88] in both cases the emphasis is on the need for skill in

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[86] Cf. Cic. *Orat.* 12 *fateor me oratorem, si modo sim aut etiam quicumque sim, non ex rhetorum officinis sed ex Academiae spatiis extitisse.* "I confess that whatever ability I possess as an orator comes not from the workshops of the rhetoricians but from the walkways of the Academy."

[87] For Aper's complaints about nostalgia for the past cf. 18.3. Aper also cites Cicero as an authority at 16.7, but there it is a work of philosophy (the lost *Hortensius*), not of rhetoric.

[88] 5.5 *nam si ad utilitatem vitae omnia consilia factaque nostra derigenda sunt, quid est tutius quam eam exercere artem qua semper armatus praesidium amicis, opem alienis, salutem periclitantibus, invidis vero et inimicis metum et terrorem ultro ferat, ipse securus et velut quadam perpetua potentia ac potestate munitus?* "For if all our planning and actions are addressed to what is useful in life, what is safer than to practice that art, always armed with which one may actively bring protection to friends, help to strangers, safety to the endangered, indeed fear and terror to the envious and to enemies, while you yourself remain secure and, as it were, fortified by a sort of endless power and influence?" Compare Cic. *de Orat.* 1.32 *quid tam porro regium, tam liberale, tam munificum, quam opem ferre supplicibus, excitare adflictos, dare salutem, liberare periculis, retinere homines in civitate? quid autem tam necessarium, quam tenere semper arma, quibus vel tectus ipse esse possis vel provocare integer vel te ulcisci lacessitus?* "What is so royal, so free, so generous, as to bring help to suppliants, to raise up the afflicted, to give help, to free from dangers, to keep men in the state? And what is so necessary as to hold always the weapons with

oratory if one is to defend oneself and others. When both Aper (18.3) and Messala (25.2–4; cf. sections ɪɪ–ɪɪɪ above) argue that there are many valid forms of style, they echo Cicero in *de Orat.* 3.25–34 (cf. *Brut.* 204). Similarly, Messala's stress on the importance of the orator knowing human nature (31.2)[89] is closely modeled on *de Orat.* 1.53, while Maternus' comment about the orator's need for an audience (39.4) is based on Cicero's account at *de Orat.* 2.338.

A more complex example of the same theme comes with 40.2:

> non de otiosa et quieta re loquimur et quae probitate et modestia gaudeat, sed est magna illa et notabilis eloquentia alumna licentiae, quam stulti libertatem vocant ... contumax temeraria adrogans, quae in bene constitutis civitatibus non oritur.

> I am not talking about a tranquil and calm thing that takes pride in honesty and moderation; that great and famous eloquence is the foster-daughter of license, which idiots call liberty ... it is something offensive and rash and arrogant, which does not come about in well-ordered states.

As is well known, this evokes Cicero, *Brutus* 45:

> pacis est comes otique socia et iam bene constitutae civitatis quasi alumna quaedam eloquentia.

> Eloquence is the companion of peace and the ally of tranquillity and, as it were, some sort of foster-daughter of a state that is now well-ordered.

In one sense Maternus is ironically reversing Cicero's point by linking oratory to disorder rather than to peace. However, in another way the underlying position that they are putting forward is identical, since each of them—albeit on different grounds—associates successful oratory with the same period, the period of the Republic.[90] The essential assumption of the *Brutus* is that, with the end of the Republic and the dominance of Caesar, great oratory has ceased to be possible (*Brutus* 6–9, 331–32); that, of course, is precisely the claim that Maternus is making.

The general sense that one has is thus of a work that is not only Ciceronian in form, but also introduces characters who are aware of their Ciceronian

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which one may oneself be protected or can challenge unscathed or when attacked can avenge yourself?" Cf. Michel 36–38, Goldberg 1999: 230. Compare also Aper's comments on the pleasures of oratory at 6.4 with *de Orat.* 1.116.

[89] Note that in this passage Messala refers to the ideal orator as one who speaks *copiose et varie et ornate*, picking up the same passage from *de Oratore* that Maternus had alluded to a few pages earlier (above, n. 85).

[90] This point is well argued by Döpp 1986: 21–22, Bartsch 110–11.

models, each of them self-consciously jockeying to present himself as the essential heir to the Ciceronian legacy.[91]

But although Tacitus' work is in these ways clearly, deliberately, and self-consciously Ciceronian, in one crucial respect the gap between it and Cicero is massive. For in Cicero's dialogues on rhetoric he overtly places both himself and the circumstances under which he is composing the work before the reader's eyes. This is most obvious in the *Brutus*, which not only concludes with a lengthy passage in which Cicero presents something like a rhetorical autobiography of himself, describing his education and the circumstances under which he rose to prominence, but also at the start indicates the political situation that led to Cicero's retirement from the practice of oratory. But it is no less true of *de Oratore*, despite the fact that in that work, like the *Dialogus*, the author is not one of the speakers in the debate, which is presented as having taken place years before during his youth; the *de Oratore* begins with an address to his brother Quintus in which he summarizes the point his career has now reached (1.1–3), and in the preface to each of the three books Cicero presents a highly personal account of his attitude to the discussion he is setting out and his reasons for writing it. And this too is an aspect of Cicero's writing that Tacitus makes a point of bringing to the reader's attention: in *Dialogus* 30.3 Messala alludes directly to the way in which Cicero places himself in the *Brutus* as the culmination of the tradition of oratory that he has spent the bulk of the work describing.[92] But while Tacitus reminds the reader of this aspect of the Ciceronian model, he does not follow it himself. The figure of the author is largely absent from the work (see below), and the historical circumstances under which he composed it are completely so[93]— hence the long-running debate among scholars about the date when it was

[91] For other examples of Ciceronian influence see Klaiber, Gudeman 83–89, Döpp 1986: 16–22.

[92] 30.3 *notus est vobis utique Ciceronis liber qui Brutus inscribitur, in cuius extrema parte (nam prior commemorationem veterum oratorum habet) sua initia, suos gradus, suae eloquentiae velut quandam educationem refert.* "You know that book of Cicero called *Brutus*, at the end of which (for the first part contains his record of the old orators) he describes his beginnings, his first steps, in some sense the education of his eloquence."

[93] There is of course the dedication to Fabius Justus (1.1), which it has been proposed might indicate that the work is to be dated to his suffect consulship in 102 (Kappelmacher 127–28). However, this is purely speculative, given that there are fewer parallels for such consular dedications than Kappelmacher seems to have believed, especially when one takes into account the problem that his consulship is not expressly mentioned (Murgia 99–100, Brink 269–71). All in all, the dedication to Justus tells nothing more about the historical circumstances of the work's composition than could be inferred from the bare knowledge of Tacitus' authorship.

written (and even the uncertainty in the past about whether Tacitus was genuinely its author).

Thus while Tacitus' version of literary history appears relatively straightforward, as soon as we try to slot his own work into it multiple paradoxes are generated, paradoxes of which Tacitus seems to be aware, and to which he pointedly draws the reader's attention. Any meaningful literary history, as I said at the start, inevitably concerns varieties of "placement." Tacitus "places" his work very clearly and firmly within a particular literary tradition by his repeated and overt allusions to Cicero and by his characters' repeated and overt determination to claim Cicero as a model. But that literary model precisely had the author not merely placing himself in a literary tradition, but explicitly setting out his own position in wider society and the precise historical circumstances under which he was writing; yet that aspect of his work is one that Tacitus hardly imitates at all. And the paradox of this is accentuated by the general nature of literary history that Tacitus appears to be generating within the work. For the whole development of his argument, as I have set it out through this paper, tends to the conclusion that one cannot validly analyze literary history solely in terms of the interrelation of texts and aesthetic choices, but that those choices can themselves only be properly understood in the light of the historical background against which a writer is working. Yet for Tacitus' own work the information that would allow one to perform such an analysis is almost entirely absent.

One explanation for the absence of Tacitus from the *Dialogus* is that he is seeking in some respect to distance himself from its conclusions.[94] The work, especially in its later parts, is often felt to have strong political overtones; by removing himself from the debate and simply reporting it as an inconclusive set of speeches made by others[95] Tacitus avoids responsibility for any politi-

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[94] Cf. von Fritz 298–300, Hass-von Reitzenstein 18–19.

[95] Cf. esp. 1.2–3 *cui percontationi tuae respondere, et tam magnae quaestionis pondus excipere … vix hercule auderem si mihi mea sententia proferenda ac non disertissimorum, ut nostris temporibus, hominum sermo repetendus esset, quos eandem hanc quaestionem pertractantes iuvenis admodum audivi. ita non ingenio sed memoria et recordatione opus est, ut quae a praestantissimis viris et excogitata subtiliter et dicta graviter accepi, cum singuli diversas †vel easdem† sed probabiles causas adferrent, dum formam sui quisque et animi et ingenii redderent, isdem nunc numeris isdemque rationibus persequar, servato ordine disputationis.* "To respond to your request, and to undertake the weight of such a great enquiry … by Hercules I would scarcely dare to do it if I had to put forward my own opinion, instead of repeating the conversation of the most learned men found in our day, whom I heard examining precisely this topic when I was quite young. So what is needed is not intelligence, but memory and recollection, so as to go through, preserving the same stages

cal implications that the reader may draw as a result of it.[96] This may well be right (depending upon what conclusions precisely one thinks that Tacitus might want the reader to draw, and what degree of irony one sees in the apparently positive statements about imperial rule that are made in Maternus' final speech in particular), but more needs to be said, for two reasons. First, one needs to take account of the extent to which Tacitus' entire analysis of literary history, as I have set it out, leads the reader to expect that some sort of historical background will be provided, such that this work can be assessed and explained according to the same criteria that it applies to others. Second, one needs to take into account not only Tacitus' absence from the work, but also his presence in it. For it is not true that no information at all about the author is given. Right at the start Tacitus tells us not merely that he was present at the debate that the work purports to report, but also something about his own relationship to the participants (2.1):

> nam postero die quam Curiatius Maternus Catonem recitaverat ... venerunt ad eum M. Aper et Iulius Secundus, celeberrima tum ingenia fori nostri, quos ego utrosque non modo in iudiciis studiose audiebam, sed domi quoque et in publico adsectabar mira studiorum cupiditate et quodam ardore iuvenili, ut fabulas quoque eorum et disputationes et arcana semotae dictionis penitus exciperem.

> For the day after Curiatius Maternus had recited *Cato* ... there came to him Marcus Aper and Julius Secundus, the most famous talents of our Forum at that time. I not only used to listen to both of them assiduously in the courts, but also at home and in public I attended them with remarkable eagerness for my studies and a certain youthful ardor, so as to immerse myself in even their stories and their discussions and their private and esoteric talk.

This relates Tacitus in more than one way to Ciceronian precedents. The most obvious point is that this passage too imitates the *de Oratore*, specifically 2.1–4, in which Cicero sets out how as boys he and Quintus had sat at the feet of Crassus and Antonius. But it is also Ciceronian in a secondary way, because it sets Tacitus within a model of apprenticeship, according to which the aspir-

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and the same arguments and keeping the order of the discussion, the things that I heard minutely thought out and spoken seriously, each putting forward different yet probable reasons, but each showing his own cast of mind and intellect." We may contrast this with Cic. *de Orat.* 3.16, in which he emphasizes that he did not hear the conversation in person, and is reconstructing it from the information he received from Cotta about the topics discussed, combined with his own knowledge of the speakers' general manner.

[96] So Bartsch 124–25.

ing young orator learns his craft by observing all aspects of his mentors' be-havior. This model is of course precisely the one that Messala describes in detail later in the *Dialogus* (cf. above, section III)—but that he associates specifi-cally with the Ciceronian age. This appears to undermine Messala's position, by pointing to its unreality,[97] but it also means that the only actual descrip-tion of Tacitus himself given in the work is one whose details are not specific to a particular time, such as would provide a distinctive explanation for his work in historical terms. Instead, the reader's attention is focused on the Ciceronian imitation. Nor even does the fact that this apprenticeship is pre-cisely dated to the dramatic time of the work (above, section II) serve as an adequate historical point to indicate its circumstances of writing. The con-versation he is reporting took place *nostris temporibus* (1.2, cf. 1.4), suggest-ing that he is uniting his own time with the setting of the dialogue—but then he simultaneously distances his own situation from it by referring to himself as *iuvenis admodum* (1.2; cf. 2.1 quoted above). All in all, just enough of Tacitus is present to raise our expectations that the author will place his work in his-torical time as well as in a literary tradition, but the indications of time dissi-pate and the historical turns back into the literary.

The result of all this is that Tacitus' presence serves only to reinforce the paradox of his absence; his brief appearance draws attention to the form of historical "placement" that both the Ciceronian precedent he is claiming and the analyses developed in the work itself would lead us to expect, but then leaves the reader with that "placement" unprovided. This in turn suggests that it is not merely in order to avoid endorsing a particular standpoint that Tacitus does not include himself directly within his work; the teasing paradoxes of his position go well beyond that. By ostentatiously hinting at and then refus-ing to include the very information that everything else about the work would imply was vital for explaining any literary product, he appears to be opening up challenges to his own arguments. What sort of historical circumstances could generate a work like Tacitus' own, a Cicero-like dialogue written in a neo-Ciceronian style? There is no hint within the work of how this could have come about, or how it would relate to the different historical patterns that he has developed, yet his brief references to his own position seem to invite the reader to look for evidence of precisely that sort. We can, if we wish, test his account against the individual speakers' own speeches within the work—we are, after all, told the precise historical circumstances under which they are supposed to be speaking. But we are not given the evidence that would allow us to assess the work as a whole in the same way.

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[97] Cf. Luce 21, Rutledge 67–69, Goldberg 1999: 235.

Thus, unless we are convinced by the fiction that Tacitus is merely reporting rather than creating these speeches (1.2–3 quoted in n. 94 above), we are in an uncomfortable situation. We can, if we wish, seek to forget the Tacitean frame, fragment the work and read its individual parts according to the Tacitean model of literary-historical analysis. Yet Tacitus' references to himself make that reading undesirable by reminding us that the author has a position separate from that of the characters. Moreover, it is only through assembling the speeches into the complete work that the model itself is derived, and a form of reading that encourages us to break the work down and assess each part separately will also be one in which the model itself ceases to be apparent. Alternatively, we can give full emphasis to the Tacitean frame, and so derive the form of analysis that Tacitus apparently wishes to recommend—but then the absence of evidence for the historical background to the work means that we will be faced with our inability to understand the work itself in the terms that he is establishing.

This conclusion is disconcerting, but at the same time salutary. We are, it seems, being pushed simultaneously towards two different sorts of reading. On the one hand, we have a "fragmented" reading, which gives full weight to the dialogue form and to the separate arguments that the individual speakers are making, and where we have a clear picture of the literary-historical background to their arguments—but where we are not given a single firm literary-historical method for reading those speeches. On the other hand, we are also invited to a "global" reading, which gives full weight to a coherent overall authorial position and provides us with that literary-historical way of reading—but which ostentatiously refuses to provide the evidence that would allow us to apply that way of reading to the work itself. The second, "globalizing," reading is the one towards which most modern readers are instinctively drawn; there is a strong tendency nowadays to seek to discover thematic coherence within literary works and to seek to interpret them in those terms—and of course, such coherence may often uncontroversially exist, and would have been recognized in antiquity as well. But ancient readers were also strongly predisposed to see the coherence of a literary work in terms of its effective combination of disparate elements, which inevitably led to readings that emphasized the particularity of individual sections rather than the connections between them; this would encourage a reading of the sort that I have described as "fragmented."[98]

[98] For the acceptability of a non-thematically unified literary work in the ancient world see above all Heath, the implications of whose important book do not seem to have been fully taken on board within the scholarly world. Heath describes a contrast between the

It is not surprising that modern interpreters have tended to an understanding of the *Dialogus* that seeks to demonstrate coherence within it, given that this is the way in which we automatically tend to read texts within our culture. Nevertheless, a "fragmented" reading of the work in order to resolve some of the interpretative difficulties people find in it has been effectively argued for by Luce, who emphasizes the significance of the fact that the work is a dialogue between competing positions.[99] The individual speeches are there, Luce suggests, to be assessed individually by the reader, rather than treated as stepping-stones towards an authorially-sponsored conclusion. The paradoxes that I have identified within the work provide support for Luce's position, but also suggest that this is not the whole story. While these do indeed pull us towards an atomized examination of the separate speeches, other aspects of the work simultaneously draw us towards reading the work "globally" as a coherent whole, not least in order to generate a single methodology that can only be obtained from a combination of those speeches, but that can then be used in their analysis.

In this respect, the most interesting thing about the *Dialogus* is perhaps less that it reaches no firm conclusion, but rather the extent to which, despite reaching no firm conclusion, it nevertheless provides a complex and subtle global methodology for understanding literature in historical terms. But this methodology cannot readily be applied to the work as a whole, and its paradoxes leave neither our readings of individual speeches nor those of the entire work looking satisfactory. For all its sophistication, therefore, we cannot take even this methodology entirely at face value, because various aspects of the work undercut it, thus leaving not a single literary-historical method, but only the fragmented and discontinuous methodologies that emerge from each of the speeches taken separately. In short, the role of literary history within the *Dialogus* is ultimately to set in the sharpest relief the limitations to which all literary history is inevitably subject.

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modern commitment to (in his terminology) "centripetal" readings, which seek to show the unity of works in terms of their thematic coherence, and ancient tolerance of "centrifugal" readings, which find works acceptably unified in their combination of varied elements and despite their lack of such thematic coherence.

[99] Luce, esp. 26–38.

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