

Unbecoming Conduct in the Reign of Tiberius According to Tacitus

David Appleby

Besides, there is a great difference between doing what one does not approve of and feigning approval of what one does: the one is the part of a weak man, but the other belongs only to the habits of a valet.

—De Tocqueville¹

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the few positive characteristics Tacitus attributed to Tiberius was an interest in public moderation: the proper, the decorous, and the fitting. A memorable example occurs in 22 AD, a year of peace abroad but anxiety in Rome about possible measures to curb rampant luxury. Aware of the princeps' old fashioned frugality, and in view of widespread neglect of the existing sumptuary law, the senate simply referred the matter to Tiberius. He had often remarked in private that attempting to limit these excessive appetites might not be worth the indecency (*indecorum*) of trying and failing, or succeeding through coercive measures and bringing great men into dishonor and ill-repute (*ignominiam et infamiam*). He answered the senate in a letter decrying shameful luxury: vast houses and domestic retinues, rich furnishings and ornament, foppish attire for men, exotic gems for women, over-the-top banquets. All were symptoms of an illness of the soul, one that harms the state even as it ruins great families. "May decency (*pudor*) change us for the better—the poor because they must; the wealthy because they have had enough."²

The *Annales* make it clear that self-interest, ambition, and

David Appleby is a tutor at Thomas Aquinas College in Santa Paula, California.

vice led Tiberius to present himself as an enemy of unbecoming conduct. By contrast, Tacitus's own concern for *decorum* was deep and sincere. The obligation to speak and behave with dignity and seemliness, with the attendant imperative to avoid unbecoming conduct, was a principle of his moral and social world-view. I shall argue that one of his greatest objections to the new regime under the Caesars was that it created a climate in which members of the senatorial order, Roman society's natural leaders, were induced to behave in disreputable ways. When the public arena in Rome became a sort of theater in which great men routinely presented themselves in ways that were false, unworthy, and ridiculous, not only individuals and their families were disgraced, but the whole class was placed in an unflattering light. In Tacitus's judgment, this was one of the most unforgivable effects of the tyranny.

Why did Tacitus take such an interest in seemliness? Two main reasons present themselves, the first more obvious than the second. In the first place, Tacitus was keenly aware of style and its effect upon readers. As we shall see, an important aspect of decorous speech and behavior was paying attention to how others perceive one's words, gestures, and facial expression. Educated Romans knew that identifying what is seemly involves anticipating how one's interlocutors will perceive one's words and appearance. As annalist, historian, biographer and ethnographer, Tacitus represented reality in a highly personal and even idiosyncratic manner. But his words seem always to have been chosen for their likely impact upon readers. He created the effects that he sought through vivid description, asymmetrical construction, oblique narration, and epigrammatic brevity, disposing readers not only to behold the spectacle in a certain light, but to judge along with the author. Anticipated impact upon his reader seems to dictate word choice, sentence structure, and narrative strategy. What he described—wars and mutinies, plots and murders, above all the gloomy sense of impending dread under the

Julio-Claudians—is memorable in large part because of the way he described it.³

His arresting style tends to obscure the second reason for his interest in seemliness, namely his practical experience as magistrate and orator. The son of a senatorial family in southern Gaul or northern Italy, Tacitus belonged to a privileged social order whose members felt entitled to honor their ancestors by exercising authority and generally playing the leading roles in affairs of state. Along with this came an obligation to present oneself in word, gesture, and deed in conformity with one's social standing. With this innate sense of duty and appropriateness, he began an official career under Vespasian (r. 69-79), continued it during the difficult reign of Domitian (r. 81-96), and in 97 became consul under Nerva (r. 96-98). Under Trajan (r. 98-117), Tacitus delivered an important funeral oration, joined his friend Pliny the younger in a high profile prosecution, and served as proconsular governor of Asia. He was known as an impressive speaker, and around the year 100 he published a treatise on style and various sorts of oratory. In short, as man of action no less than as man of letters, Tacitus was attuned to appearance and how one is perceived.

2 DECORUM

Before investigating seemliness in the *Annales*, it is worth considering the idea in the tradition within which Tacitus worked and in the pages of one of his distinguished Roman predecessors. The noun *decorum* refers in the first place to the beauty or pleasing appearance of a thing or person; it applies secondarily to non-visual beauty, elegance, charm, and distinction; and then it opens onto other things that are appropriate, seemly, and fitting in ways that attract honor and approval. Like *to prepon*, its Greek counterpart, *decorum* is hard to render consistently with one word in English because of its range of aesthetic, histrionic, forensic, and moral meanings. In the rhetorical tradition *to prepon* had been a principle

since Aristotle and Theophrastus, and by the time of Quintilian (d. ca.100) *decorum* applied to invention, style, arrangement, and delivery. Quintilian owed an immediate debt to Cicero (106-43 BC) whose remark in *De oratore* that “by action the body talks, so it is all the more necessary to make it agree with the thought”⁴ bears some relation to the subject at hand.

Cicero’s expansive account of *decorum* as a moral concept in Book I of his *De officiis* helps us to approach the intellectual milieu of the *Annales*; for Tacitus, while not himself a Ciceronian, still wrote for, and belonged to, a class that understood itself as embodying the urbanity and standards of conduct that Cicero assumed as normative.⁵ The discussion of what is honorable that occurs in Book I of *De officiis* includes a consideration of the four cardinal virtues as the source of all moral goodness, and hence the source of all that is honorable.⁶ *Decorum* and the duties it entails spring from the broader virtue of moderation.⁷

Decorum consists in thinking, saying, and doing what one should, and in appearing to be as morally well ordered as one is. Since the decorous is neither deficient nor excessive, it reflects moderation, and this is understood not only with respect to particular objects or actions, but as the overall balance, order, and harmony of the soul, and as the beauty of the life of one who enjoys such moral equilibrium. Cicero presents *decorum* as the outward manifestation of the soul’s integrity, the moral analogue of physical beauty.⁸ *Decorum* is thus the perceptible aspect of moral goodness; every act of moral rectitude, whether in thought, word, or deed, reveals some element of propriety. Just as the beauty of the body reflects bodily health, *decorum* reflects moral virtue.⁹

Cicero also emphasizes the social aspect of *decorum*: the good person’s speech, actions, and appearance make his moral virtue discernible to others; and the good person has modesty (*verecundia*)—that is, he shows consideration for the sensibilities of others. Much of the discussion of *decorum*

in *De officiis* aims at instilling in the reader a greater awareness of the impression he makes upon others. Cicero explains that playwrights have just this aspect of *decorum* in mind when they craft words and actions to express the qualities of a particular role (*persona*).¹⁰ The audience knows the characters in the play only by what it can infer from their words, expressions, gestures, and deeds. As a sort of playwright outside the theater, nature assigns us the parts (*personae*) of consistency, moderation, and self-control, but also teaches us to have respect for others and to attend to how we appear to them. Once again comparing *decorum* to physical beauty, Cicero says that just as the order and symmetry of the limbs of a body attract the eye and please the viewer, *decorum*, which illuminates the whole life, is an order, consistency, and moderation of every word and deed that attracts the approval of the people among whom we live.¹¹

According to Cicero, the duties associated with propriety are rooted in nature. This means, in the first instance, submitting the appetites to the control of reason, especially in one's pastimes, joking, and pleasures. One thereby avoids the vulgarity and sensuality of an uncontrolled, irrational, or bestial life, and instead lives with the self-control and steadiness appropriate to man's rational nature.¹² These are fundamental matters of decency, but are not the only duties associated with propriety.

Specifying these other duties is hard, not only because propriety is assessed with respect to circumstance, occasion, and context, but because it is also inextricably linked to one's personality and character. Cicero explains that nature clothes each of us in two roles (*personae*), one common and universal, the other individual and proper to each. Our common human role provides us with our dignity as rational beings, our moral goodness, and thus our *decorum*; we must use our rationality to control our appetites and observe at least minimal standards of decency and consideration.¹³

The particular role that nature has assigned each one of

us accounts for the other duties associated with propriety. Just as one person differs from another in bodily size and physical constitution, so too we find diversity of manner, temperament, and aptitude. While harmless in themselves, these differences have to be taken into account when determining what is fitting and proper for each person. Cicero explains that, within the limits set by universal human nature, the gentleman will attend carefully to his own particular nature in order to determine what is proper and seemly: “nos studia nostra nostrae naturae regula metiamur.”¹⁴

On the other hand, just as nothing is so becoming as to find the way of life suited to one’s own nature and then to follow it in a steadfast and consistent way, the inconsistency of a moral lightweight is highly indecorous.¹⁵

Decorum of the sort Cicero described stayed on the minds of educated Romans during the principate. Lucius Annaeus Seneca (d. 65), for example, pictured the happy life of the self-consistent man in terms reminiscent of Cicero’s account.¹⁶ Again, the correspondence of the younger Pliny shows that in its general outline Cicero’s view of *decorum* was still influential during the lifetime of Tacitus. Although these letters adhere to a different formality than that of the philosophical manual or discourse that Cicero and Seneca had written, the elements of upper-class seemliness nevertheless appear frequently.¹⁷

3 *PRINCEPS* AS TONE-SETTER

Like Cicero, Tacitus was aware of *decorum* and its social dimension, and like him Tacitus accepted it as a principle of civilized conduct. But as moralist and political philosopher, Cicero concerned himself with action as it should be, with theory more than practice. As historian, Tacitus reported how people actually behaved, which in many cases fell far short of the norms and ideals of the theorist. Perhaps there had once been a time when prominent citizens had conformed to standards of decency and comportment rooted in nature and dis-

covered by reason. What Tacitus saw in his own generation, and what he could learn of the reign of Tiberius, however, was that the princeps himself more and more became the axial pole of *decorum*; that is, the place that Cicero had attributed to nature and reason in determining the criteria of decorous behavior, Tacitus found, in practice, had been taken over by the princeps himself. This is not to say that Tacitus knew nothing of nature as norm, or of reason as the guide to understanding nature. Indeed, as we shall see, the men he praised had moral strength and good character consistent with, if not explicitly related to, natural law. But for many prominent Romans the preponderance of the first citizen eclipsed any view of a natural standard. For them it seemed more expedient to conform themselves to his perspective and his way of doing things than to an abstract ideal of natural virtue. The reason they used to determine their behavior was the prudence involved in first trying to discern the expectations of the princeps and then attuning themselves accordingly.

The princeps came to set the standard of decorous behavior because of the character of the regime. Force and political inequality lay at the root of the principate, but its day-to-day aspect was the tone set by the princeps himself. Augustus himself had established the pattern of effective autocracy tacitly juxtaposed with republican institutions and the semblance of liberty for the senatorial elite. He took the lead in matters of public behavior, holding or declining certain magistracies and official posts, nominating friends as candidates for others. Sometimes setting the tone meant giving direct advice and instructions, but more often it involved modeling this or that behavior, enacting or showing how things were to be done. The poetry of Virgil and the histories of Livy reflect the classicizing and patriotic outlook of Augustus and his circle. So do buildings and statues like the *Ara Pacis* and the *Augustus of Prima Porta*.¹⁸ Even Augustus's epitaph, which he composed for himself, has a calm tone, evokes a sense of

its author's modesty, and presents an image of strength in service of the common good.¹⁹

Noble Romans accommodated themselves as best they could to the example or standard of the first man. As Tacitus puts it, "with political equality gone, everyone looked to the commands of the princeps."²⁰ They did this for various reasons. Tacitus is aware that people often unconsciously emulate their superiors, and sometimes this urge to get into line (*amor aemulandi*) is more effective than the threat of punishment in promoting conformity of mores and behavior.²¹ Other people realized that the new social and political order presented opportunities for advancement or enrichment to those who could adapt properly. But apprehension and outright fear were more important incentives to conformity. Augustus had dealt harshly with his opponents in the civil war and afterwards, and from the outset it was evident that Tiberius was not a man to cross if one could avoid it.

But how was one to avoid crossing him? Conformity was bound to be difficult insofar as the standard to which people sought to conform kept shifting. A mutable standard of propriety was to some extent endemic to the new regime. Always in the principate there was disparity between appearance and reality, between the appearance of liberty of a republic restored by the first citizen and the fact of one man's hegemony.²² The norm of behavior always tended to oscillate between the image of liberty and the reality of domination, because such oscillation reflected the nature of the regime itself. A princeps whose public character was affable, fair, and steady might minimize this oscillation and thereby make it easier for others to attune themselves. He would moderate his own speech and behavior in ways the leading men could decipher and respond to with as much dignity as the circumstances of the autocracy would allow. But a weaker princeps might not.

Whether Tacitus judged Augustus to be a better ruler, less tyrannous than Tiberius, is not clear. There are signs that he

viewed the regime's founder with irony and skepticism.²³ But at least Augustus had presented a consistent figure and a steady face. This made it possible to live with the new order and its master. According to Tacitus, life was more difficult under Tiberius because of the dissonance between his public mask and his real thoughts and intentions.

Tacitus's censure and disapproval of Tiberius are open, though at first somewhat muted, for he mentions that the tyranny emerged in stages, as the man's character gradually showed itself. Before the death of Tiberius's son Drusus in 23, business had been conducted in the senate, where there was still some free discussion. The princeps himself had discouraged flattery, and tried to make sure that offices and magistracies went only to those whose birth, merit, and distinction made them worthy. Taxes and provincial administration were handled equitably. After 23, with Drusus out of the way, Sejanus, Tiberius's sinister lieutenant, gained greater influence, with the consequence that moderate policies were dropped, and Tiberius eventually withdrew from the city.²⁴ Another turning point came in 29 at the death of the Augusta, Tiberius's mother. Livia, who had been a match for her smooth and voluble second husband, Augustus, was also equal to the secretiveness and dissimulation of her son. She had exercised a moderating influence upon Tiberius and Sejanus, but once she was dead, they openly took action against those they perceived to be enemies of the government.²⁵

The depth of Tiberius's corruption may have become more apparent over the years, but all along he had been hard to deal with because he was cryptic and obscure, cruel and vindictive. Even before he assumed overall power, he was secretive and prone to dissemble. When Augustus grew old and ill, speculation as to his successor quickly brought Tiberius into consideration. He had the maturity and the military experience necessary to rule but suffered from the congenital arrogance of the Claudian family, and "many signs of a cruel character broke out, try though he might to control

them.” His time spent on Rhodes, which was called retirement but was in fact exile, had been filled with anger, deceit, and hidden passions.²⁶

The first notable deed of Tiberius’s principate was one of violence and deception. He ordered the murder of Postumus Agrippa, grandson of Augustus and possible rival for supreme power, and then pretended his father had commanded it.²⁷

In his treatment of the senate and the magistrates Tiberius was also hard to read. Immediately after the death of Augustus, he acted “as though the republic still existed and as though he was doubtful about taking up command: even the edict by which he summoned the senators to assemble was issued in virtue of the tribunician power that he had accepted from Augustus. The words of the edict were few and very modest.”²⁸ But in sharp contrast to the edict and his apparent concern for republicanism were his actions. He had armed guards at the court, soldiers in the forum, soldiers in the senate house; he sent letters to the army as a veteran leader would, and never showed hesitation except when he spoke in the senate.²⁹ Tacitus reports that the main cause of Tiberius’s fear was the thought that his nephew, Germanicus, who commanded a large army and was extremely popular at home, might prefer to have rule instead of just waiting for it. Also, Tiberius wanted to make it seem that he had been called and chosen by the state rather than forced on it through his mother’s ambition in getting Augustus to adopt him. Tacitus adds that it later became known that Tiberius pretended to hesitate in order to ferret out the intentions of the senators, carefully remembering what he took to be their expressions of hostility so that he could eventually exact revenge.³⁰

At times it seemed that Tiberius was reserved and cryptic because he suspected treachery. Certainly he had enemies, some open, others camouflaged. Germanicus, Agrippina, and their supporters he considered rivals, and mistrusted.³¹ Augustus was said to have given Tiberius a list of men to

watch.³² In public or private, he was capable of receiving insult with apparent equanimity, but he did not forget a slight, storing up his anger even over a period of years.³³ Sejanus knew Tiberius's suspicious and credulous (*suspicionum et credendi temeritas*) character, and after the princeps' withdrawal to the island of Caprae in 28 he supplied information carefully selected to arouse and channel it.³⁴ People even wondered about the quality of the relationship between Tiberius and his mother, which looked amicable on the surface but which included unmistakable indications of bitterness.³⁵

Misdirection was a tactic for Tiberius, as, for instance, in 16 when he showed favor and friendship to Marcus Scribonius Libo Drusus, who had been denounced privately for treasonous plotting. In private conversation with Libo, "Tiberius could have halted all his words and deeds, but he preferred to know them."³⁶ But in the sequel the utility of concealment was less apparent. Once Libo came to trial before the Senate, he directed supplications to Tiberius who listened with a blank expression, and Tiberius read out the charges and names of the accusers in a moderate tone of voice that seemed neither to minimize nor exaggerate the charges.³⁷

At other times, shame caused Tiberius to avoid the public gaze. Tacitus reports that Tiberius's son Drusus led a life of frivolity—theater and arena by day, banquets by night—pursuing the pleasures often sought by young men. His father, by contrast, kept to himself and led a joyless life of dark watchfulness and malevolent undertakings.³⁸ Tacitus suspects that Tiberius withdrew permanently from Rome in 26 not only because of the influence of Sejanus and an aversion to his mother, but to lead his vicious and licentious life in secret.³⁹

Quite aside from their utility, however, opacity and concealment seemed to suit Tiberius. He prized dissimulation as his own greatest virtue, clinging to it all his life.⁴⁰ He projected his personal preference for secrecy onto the divine

when in 15 he rejected a proposal to open the Sibylline books to seek guidance in responding to recent destructive flooding of the Tiber.⁴¹ He habitually mingled jest and earnestness,⁴² and routinely spoke in euphemisms.⁴³ Only shock or crisis provoked outbursts of frankness, and these could be dangerous, as when anger toward personal enemies caused lapses in his prudent moderation.⁴⁴ Even when advanced age and illness brought him close to death, Tiberius pretended (*simulans*) to be healthy, and Tacitus remarks that dissimulation (*dissimulatio*) was the last power to leave him.⁴⁵

Although the speeches of Tiberius often carried a double meaning,⁴⁶ sometimes they were simply inscrutable. After the funeral of Augustus, his address to the senate was so uncertain and ambiguous that his intended meaning was impossible to understand.⁴⁷ Again, in 20, at the trial for treason, magic, and adultery of Lepida from the illustrious gens Aemilia, Tiberius “mixed signs of anger and clemency,” and intervened in the proceedings in ways that some considered non-autocratic, but others saw as prejudicial to the defendant. Lepida was condemned and exiled.⁴⁸

Doubt often enshrouded the real thoughts and feelings of Tiberius, but it must have been apparent to all that he was watching. The more they looked to him for clues of his expectations, the more they were aware of being under scrutiny. He and his friends and informers attended to their words and actions, their gestures and appearances.

He watched the senators carefully, twisting their words and facial expressions into criminal significance, and storing them away in his memory, as was mentioned earlier.⁴⁹ Even at a distance Tiberius was informed not only about the actions of important men, but about their appearance and comportment. While Germanicus toured Egypt, word reached Tiberius of the manner of his dress and behavior, that it was disagreeably informal and Hellenic, comparable to that of Scipio Africanus while he was in Sicily.⁵⁰ Thus, finding themselves under scrutiny, those around him sought to make sense

of Tiberius's thoughts and desires so as to conform themselves to his expectations.

4. VARIETIES OF CONFORMITY

People who came into contact with Tiberius behaved in ways that reflected not only the opacity of the princeps but also their own fear, ambition, corruption, and sometimes even moral strength. That is, in most—but not all—cases their words and comportment mirrored not a Ciceronian standard of nature and reason but their more or less accurate reading of how best to save themselves, or how best to profit in the prevailing climate. Here I shall survey the main varieties of conformity as Tacitus presents them.

Those who were most like Tiberius accommodated themselves best to him. Men like the astrologer Thrasyllus⁵¹ understood him, and so were able to conform their behavior to his expectations. It is no accident that the two people Tacitus presents as most successfully attuning themselves to him were the villainous Lucius Aelius Sejanus and Gaius Julius Caesar Germanicus. Sejanus was an equestrian whom Tiberius appointed commander of the Praetorian Guard and then came to depend upon to carry out his policies in the Senate, especially after retiring to the island of Capreae. To Sejanus alone Tiberius disclosed his secret designs in an unguarded way. Decent outwardly, inwardly Sejanus was consumed with lust for power.⁵² He hounded the adherents of Agrippina in a series of treason trials, but his hope to marry into the imperial family came to nothing, and he was eventually purged for aiming at the principate itself. Ominously, it was Gaius, or Caligula as he was called, the grandson and terrible successor of Tiberius, who came to mirror the mood and even the words of Tiberius more closely than any other person Tacitus mentions.⁵³ His reign began with the murder of Tiberius.

Those who were not like Tiberius, or less like him, found life challenging. Most conformed in more or less indecorous

and shameful ways. Some went beyond disgrace to the active commission of crimes. Some refused to conform and usually perished before their time. A few managed to serve and lead public careers worthy of their ancestors almost as though the free republic still existed. All experienced a public discourse that was “narrow and slippery under a princeps who feared liberty but hated flattery.”⁵⁴

From the outset many dishonored themselves by composing their appearance and words in false, and therefore indecorous, ways. When the news arrived in Rome that Augustus was dead and Tiberius in charge, “consuls, senators, and knights rushed headlong into servitude; the more noble were also more false and hasty, with expression carefully arranged to appear neither happy at the death of the princeps nor sad at the accession, they mingled tears and joy, lament and flattery.”⁵⁵

People tried to read the meaning behind Tiberius’s words, and then to articulate responses that mirrored well enough—but not too clearly—what the listener thought Tiberius was getting at. The results were always dishonorable, sometimes absurd, and occasionally dangerous.

In 14, after the funeral of Augustus, Tiberius ostentatiously refused the leading role. The senators, who were afraid to show that they saw he wanted to be asked and to be persuaded to accept power, poured out tearful prayers to him, reaching toward the gods, the statue of Augustus, Tiberius’s knees. Declining to bear the whole burden of government, Tiberius expressed a willingness to accept whatever part was entrusted to him. Gaius Asinius Gallus then made the mistake of asking what part of the government Tiberius wished to be given. Tiberius registered his annoyance with a dark look and protracted silence, but then reiterated his preference to be excused altogether, and said he refused to pick and choose. Gallus tried to smooth over his blunder, saying that he had only tried to get Tiberius to acknowledge that rule could not really be divided at all. This and further flattery failed to allay

Tiberius's irritation with Gallus, who was also the object of hostility for having married Tiberius's ex-wife, Vipsania.⁵⁶

Flattery took the form of undeserved civil or military honors.⁵⁷ An ironic example occurred in 29 when, seeking a remedy in flattery (*remedium adulationis*) for the fear generated by the wave of treason trials, the senators voted to erect altars to Mercy and Friendship, the latter flanked by statues of Tiberius and Sejanus.⁵⁸

Flattery often shaped elections, as in the year 21, when Tiberius recommended two men to the senate for consideration as governor of Africa, one a distinguished noble, the other the uncle of Sejanus. It was assumed that the latter was the approved candidate. While both men begged to be excused, Sejanus's uncle was less convincing, and a chorus of flatterers urged him to accept.⁵⁹

Flattery also led men beyond disgrace into active wrongdoing. In the year 22, the new consul, Decimus Haterius Agrippa, proposed death as the fitting punishment for the equestrian author of scurrilous verses about Tiberius's son, Drusus. Marcus Aemilius Lepidus countered by proposing a lesser sentence better proportioned to the offense. All but one of the senators, Gaius Rubellius Blandus, supported Haterius, and the equestrian was immediately put to death. Tiberius rebuked the senate, but with enough ambiguity not to preclude similar punishments in future. Lepidus and Blandus had been unable to prevent shameful adulation from becoming outright injustice.⁶⁰

Although at first it seemed a means of attaining safety, flattery quickly became equivocal, for in an environment of corrupt mores, express servility could be dangerous by its presence as well as its absence.⁶¹ This fact may have intensified the search for new strategies to protect the frightened, and new strategies of advancement for the ambitious.

Servitude rapidly assumed the colors of liberty. In the year 14, when Marcus Valerius Messalla Messallinus proposed in the senate that the oath of allegiance to the new prin-

ceps be repeated annually, Tiberius asked him to acknowledge that he had not put him up to that proposal. Messalla said that when it came to public business, he would express his own thoughts, no matter who took offense. The historian's terse judgment is that this was the only sort of flattery left.⁶²

Again, in 22, Lucius Ennius, an equestrian, found himself before the senate charged with treason for melting down a silver statue of the princeps. In response to Tiberius's intercession on behalf of the accused, Gaius Ateius Capito made a show of independence, urging that the senate's power of judgment ought not be diminished, and pointing out that the offense had serious public implications, even if Tiberius was willing to overlook the injury to himself personally. Tacitus remarks that Capito's behavior was all the more infamous because, as a civil and religious jurist of note, he dishonored these arts as well as himself.⁶³

Shameful displays of independence became competitive. In 16, the senators Gaius Asinius Gallus and Cnaeus Calpurnius Piso disagreed over whether the senate should conduct business during the absence of Tiberius. Piso claimed the "speciem libertatis" by asserting that it would be worthy of the republic that senators and equestrians could continue their official work even in the absence of the princeps. Gallus answered that nothing would be more illustrious or worthy of the Roman people than to do business only in the presence and under the eyes of Caesar. Tiberius listened in silence to these undignified invocations of the dignity of the state. No action was taken.⁶⁴

Unbecoming conduct grew worse. Just as the treacherous path of public discourse led great men to competitive adulatory assertions of liberty, so too did compliance and obsequiousness gradually degenerate into wickedness, as members of the aristocracy turned informer.⁶⁵

A remarkable instance occurred in 16, when Firmius Catus, a senator eager for advancement, and Lucius Fulcinius Trio, a well-known prosecutor who hoped to increase his no-

tority, brought Marcus Scribonius Libo Drusus to trial for conspiracy against the princeps. The charges were trumped up; Libo's consultations of astrologers and necromancers were inept and pathetic, not threatening. But Trio presented the matter as "*res magna et atrox*," and by the time the case came before the senate, Catus and Trio had been joined by Fonteius Agrippa and Gaius Vibius Serenus. Libo anticipated the guilty verdict by taking his own life. His property went as reward to the accusers, along with the rank of extraordinary praetor to those of the senatorial order.⁶⁶

Libo's posthumous condemnation triggered a flurry of sycophantic proposals and resolutions in the senate. Tacitus omits nothing: Cotta Messalinus moved that the image of Libo be barred from the funeral processions of his descendants; Cnaeus Cornelius Lentulus proposed that no Scribonianus should bear the cognomen of Drusus; Lucius Pomponius Flaccus suggested that days be set aside for public thanksgiving; Lucius Munatius Plancus, Gaius Asinius Gallus, Marcus Papius Mutilus and Lucius Apronius voted thank-offerings to Jupiter, Mars, and Concord, and they moved that 13 September—the date of Libo's death—should be a public holiday. Two astrologers were executed, and the senate ordered that the rest be expelled from Italy. The historian's explicit purpose in cataloguing all this is to make known how early the public disgrace began.⁶⁷

Some of the doings of spies, informers and accusers were ludicrously outrageous. In 28, four senators hoping for advancement sought to please Sejanus by prosecuting an illustrious equestrian friend of Germanicus, Titius Sabinus, ostensibly on charges of treason, but really because of the enmity between Sejanus and Agrippina, the widow of Germanicus. Tacitus records the names of the four, and explains how one of them, Latinius Latiaris, lured Sabinus into his confidence and induced him to complain about Sejanus and Tiberius. To strengthen their case, the others hid between the roof and the ceiling with their ears pressed to holes and cracks

while Latiaris conversed with Sabinus in the room below about recent hardships. Then in a letter to Tiberius, the four detailed their findings as well as their disgraceful (*dedecus*) ploy.

This was material better suited to the comedian or satirist than to the historian, but the unfortunate truth was that the main actors were among the most prominent members of the senatorial order. Sabinus was immediately condemned and put to death. Tacitus reports this event's chilling effect upon public life: fear emptied the roads and squares; conversation ceased even among friends; people eyed the very walls and ceiling with suspicion; it was assumed that Tiberius was tightening the noose on Agrippina and her son.⁶⁸

Since they were entitled to claim a part of the property of those condemned for treason, accusers had strong incentive to file charges. The grotesque results went beyond injustice to impiety, as son accused father and brother sister.⁶⁹ The senate was filled with informers; friends turned against one another; no place, public or private, was safe for open conversation. It was like a plague in the city.⁷⁰

Those foolish or honest enough to speak their minds were at risk, as Agrippina discovered. After the poisoning of Drusus, son of Tiberius, there was widespread but secret rejoicing at the prospect of one of Germanicus's sons eventually succeeding Tiberius. While the senate and people "concealed their joy with expressions of sorrow," Agrippina, widow of Germanicus, concealed her hope less effectively, and thereby brought down a quicker ruin, when Sejanus, who had planned the murder of Drusus and had imperial ambitions for himself, was able to point to Agrippina's hope and her popularity in order to intensify Livia's animosity toward the sons of Germanicus.⁷¹ It seems likely that the brutal Sejanus would have targeted these boys whether or not their mother had disguised her thoughts more effectively. But according to the historian her failures to dissemble and conceal her true thoughts at least hastened (*acceleravere*) their destruction.

Another example of the high cost of open expression is the outspoken and independent-minded Lucius Calpurnius Piso. He openly registered his disgust with the corruption and aggressive tactics of prosecutors, and was bold enough to bring charges against a protégée of Livia. Although he announced his withdrawal from public affairs and resolved to leave the city, he apparently did not leave, and a few years later was charged with treason. Piso's timely death, whether by suicide or natural causes, prevented the case from coming to court.⁷²

In the year 25, the historian Aulus Cremutius Cordus faced the senate charged with treason for praising the assassins of Julius Caesar in his own *Annales*. Because his accusers were minions of Sejanus, and judging by the grim expression (*trux vultus*) of Tiberius, the outcome of the case was not in doubt. Knowing that death was near, Cremutius defended himself with dignity, calmly adducing examples from the Roman tradition of legitimate free expression. Cremutius was allowed to starve himself to death. The senate voted to have his books burned.⁷³

Because Tacitus's *Annales* contain many examples of the danger of openness and candor, we suspect irony when he reports candor going unpunished. In the wake of Sejanus's fall, the backlash that engulfed his associates prompted most people to pretend they had not been his friends. But the equestrian Marcus Terentius was unapologetic. He had been the friend of Sejanus, who was himself the friend of Caesar; it was more fitting for an equestrian to obey than to challenge the policies of his superiors; and his friendship with Sejanus had ended when Tiberius's did. Terentius escaped punishment. His accusers suffered exile or execution. Tacitus cannot have missed the irony that the only person saved by telling the truth in a brave speech (*constantia orationis*) was an associate of Sejanus.⁷⁴

Although he admired their refusal to accommodate themselves to the expectations and tone set by the autocrat, Tacitus

did not give his highest praise to those who courted death through outspoken opposition. Whether what bothered Tacitus about these men was the jarring quality of their extreme dissonance or their failure to benefit the state in a more sustained way, he did not say. But it is clear that he reserved his highest admiration for those who managed to have dignified and honorable public careers despite the princeps. Doing so under Tiberius was very difficult—but not impossible.

Marcus Aemilius Lepidus was praised as dignified and wise because he so often managed to reduce the harm done by flatterers, and because he possessed enough moderation to stay on working terms with Tiberius. His case even led Tacitus to wonder whether fate and chance of birth control men's destinies, or whether their own decisions allow some men to find a safe course between dangerous insubordination and ugly servility.⁷⁵ In 17, Marcus Furius Camillus, the proconsular governor of Africa, revived his family's ancient reputation for military glory (*decus militiae*) by defeating the Numidian leader Tacfarinus. Tiberius praised him in the senate, and he was voted an honorary triumph which he lived to enjoy, Tacitus comments, because of his modest behavior.⁷⁶ We read of some others who also lived in a manner worthy of their great family and died peacefully.⁷⁷

In the *Annales*, references to distinguished men in the reign of Tiberius who managed to avoid the extremes of base conformity and perilous honesty but still have careers of public service are few and not presented in much detail. To see clearly portrayed the career and record of the sort of man Tacitus most admired, one may turn to his own father-in-law, Gnaeus Julius Agricola (40-93), about whom Tacitus composed a *Vita*.⁷⁸

The son of a senator from Gallia Narbonensis (the modern Provence), he had an impressive administrative and military career. His extensive military campaigns in Britain occurred during the reign of the tyrannical Domitian (81-96), and Tacitus admired his ability to distinguish himself on be-

half of the state without incurring the lethal wrath of the princes.⁷⁹ When confronting the notoriously hot-headed Domitian in person, Agricola softened him with his prudence and moderation, and refrained from seeking renown and a swift end by open defiance and the useless assertion of liberty.⁸⁰ “Let those who habitually admire disobedience know that even under bad rulers there are great men, and that a decent regard for authority, if backed by hard work and military toughness, is even more praiseworthy than the death-seeking perilous course, of no use to the state, through which some became famous.”⁸¹ In short, Tacitus praised Agricola for his noble public service under difficult circumstances. Avoiding both craven compliance and ostentatious martyrdom, Agricola played his part with a seemliness worthy of his forebears. He might have lived longer but could not have lived better.⁸²

5. CONCLUSION

With few exceptions, then, the Tiberian books of the *Annales* are as somber as the reign they chronicle. Tacitus was aware of this, and expressed regret over the tedious character of the ills he catalogued,⁸³ and in general over the narrow and inglorious scope of his project (*in arto et ingloriosus labor*).⁸⁴ The times he chronicled were infected and dirty with servility (*infecta et adulatione sordida*). But the historian had a moral purpose, to record the virtue of those who had measured up, and the disgrace of those who had fallen so short of the dignity of their family and order. The wicked might be deterred by the certainty of posthumous infamy.⁸⁵ Even when the books of historians are burned, it is folly to imagine that the power of today can snuff out the memory of the future. Quite the reverse, for repressed thought grows in prestige, and conquerors, together with those who behave as brutally as conquerors, only achieve dishonor (*dedecus*) for themselves and renown for their victims.⁸⁶

Besides its moral aim, Tacitus mentioned one other value

of the work. Admitting that the dossier of minor events centered on the princeps makes tedious reading, Tacitus insisted that such a history is useful for examining “matters that seem trivial at first glance, from which the movements of great things often arise.”⁸⁷ Here, the modern reader might anticipate a reference to patterns of group behavior that set in motion impersonal and potentially disruptive social forces. Persistent dishonorable behavior of the leading men might bring their entire order into disrepute. In turn, questions about the possible disjunction between reality and appearance in the leading order could easily provoke tremors of doubt about social hierarchy. In such a scenario, *decorum* would be not only a matter of the self-respect of a few score senators, it would also ultimately be linked to something elemental and tectonic in Roman society itself. Whether Tacitus thought along these lines is not clear. But he wrote that, since the balanced and mixed form of government is seldom found in practice, and is short-lived even when it is found, the prudent man will familiarize himself with the leading actors in whatever form of government happens to prevail currently: the rule of the best men, of the many, or, as in Tacitus’s time, of the autocrat. For most people, the best way to learn how to behave effectively and honorably is to study the experience of others.⁸⁸

Half a century ago Ronald Syme remarked that as “a form of government the principate was essentially equivocal, and the *nobilitas* was called to play a false role therein, forfeiting power but ostensibly retaining honour and prestige.”⁸⁹ False the part might have been, but at least under a morally and psychologically steady princeps one could play it with some dignity. As de Tocqueville saw, weakness might compel one to play a false part, but one who feigns approval of that false part is truly base. Under Tiberius, however, the quest for security or advancement led men to guess at, and conform to, his desires and expectations. They gradually attuned themselves to a standard far removed from any *persona* nature

might assign or reason discern. It was Tacitus's somber genius to recognize that the danger of such attunement was that a man might become the person he pretended to be, thereby confirming the contemptuous judgment of Tiberius himself that the senators were "men fit to be slaves."⁹⁰

NOTES

1. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Harvey Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 246. For their helpful comments on drafts of this essay, I am grateful to Bob Haynie, John Goyette, and Meghan Parker. I dedicate the article to Mark Morford, my teacher and friend.

2. *Cornelii Taciti Annalium ab excessu divi Augusti libri*, ed. C. D. Fisher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1906), 119-120. (Hereafter abbreviated *Annales*.) For comments on Tacitus's views within the context of Roman thought about luxury, see Christopher Berry, *The Idea of Luxury: A Conceptual and Historical Investigation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 67-70. See also *Annales*, 92-95 for Tiberius's statement about decorous and moderate public mourning.

3. As Ronald Syme put it, "men and dynasties pass, but style abides." Ronald Syme, *Tacitus*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958), Vol. 2, 624. Still worthwhile for understanding Tacitus's literary strategies are Einar Löfstedt, "On the Style of Tacitus," *Journal of Roman Studies* 38 (1948): 1-8, and Uwe Rademacher, *Die Bildkunst des Tacitus* (Hildesheim: Olms Verlag, 1975). Francesca Santoro L'Hoir, *Tragedy, Rhetoric, and the Historiography of Tacitus' Annales* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006) draws attention to the influence of Greek drama upon Tacitus.

4. Cicero, *De oratore*, trans. E. W. Sutton and H. Rackham, Loeb Classical Library, Vol. 349 (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1942), 178: "Est enim actio quasi sermo corporis, quo magis menti congruens esse debet."

5. That Tacitus wrote for "elite males of senatorial and equestrian status," is demonstrated in S. H. Rutledge, "Trajan and Tacitus' Audience: Reader Reception of *Annals* 1-2," *Ramus* 27.1 (1998): 141.

6. Cicero's view of decorum occupies a place within a longer moral tra-

dition that reached back at least as far as Panaetius of Rhodes (second century BC), whose own treatise, *On Duty*, was a main source for Cicero's *De officiis*. See the editorial introduction to *Cicero: On Duties*, ed. M. T. Griffin and E. M. Atkins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), xix-xxi.

7. Cicero, *De officiis*, Loeb Classical Library, Vol. 30 (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1913), 182.

8. Cicero, *De officiis*, 14-16.

9. Cicero, *De officiis*, 98.

10. Cicero, *De officiis*, 97; see also Cicero, *De oratore*, Loeb Classical Library, Vol. 348 (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1942), 378, for another example of the convergence of theatrical and oratorical *decorum*.

11. Cicero, *De officiis*, 100.

12. Cicero, *De officiis*, 102-108. Still illuminating for a discussion of Cicero's place within the history of doctrines of natural law is Felix Flücker, *Geschichte des Naturrechtes: Altertum und Frühmittelalter* (Zurich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1954), 221-238.

13. Cicero, *De officiis*, 108.

14. "We may judge our activities by the measure of our own nature." Cicero, *De officiis*, 112. In connection with discerning what is right for oneself, Cicero mentions two more *personae* that we must play, one imposed by chance or circumstance, the other a matter of our own choice. See *De officiis*, 116-118; and for discussion see Christopher Gill, "Personhood and Personality: The Four-Personae Theory in Cicero, *De Officiis* 1," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 6 (1988): 169-199.

15. Cicero, *De officiis*, 122 and 126-128.

16. Seneca, Letter 120 in *Epistola*, trans. Richard M. Gummere, Loeb Classical Library, Vol. 77 (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1925), 386 and 388. On this passage within a larger context see Christopher Gill, *The Structured Self in Hellenistic and Roman Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 163. See also Seneca, *De constantia sapientis*, Loeb Classical Library, Vol. 214 (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1928), 102 and 104.

17. Pliny praises those who manifest *constantia*, *dignitas*, *verecundia*, or *decor* in word, deed and appearance; his disapproval attaches to their opposites. For a careful study of the letters see Stanley Hoffer, *The Anxieties of Pliny the Younger* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1999).

18. See Paul Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1988).

19. See *Res gestae divi Augusti: The Achievements of the Divine Augustus*, ed. P. A. Brunt and J. M. Moore (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 34-36.

20. Tacitus, *Annales*, 3: “omnes exuta aequalitate iussa principis aspectare.”

21. Tacitus, *Annales*, 121: “obsequium inde in principem et aemulandi amor validior quam poena ex legibus et metus.”

22. Two examples from the reign of Tiberius should suffice to illustrate a characteristic that Tacitus attributes to the regime as a whole. When Tiberius speaks of free elections open to men of talent, Tacitus (*Annales*, 47) comments: “speciosa verbis, re inania aut subdola, quantoque maiore libertatis imagine tegebantur, tanto eruptura ad infensius servitium” (“things attractive in speech, but in fact meaningless or deceptive, and the more they were represented in the figure of freedom, the more they were preparing to break out into more dangerous subjection”). In a different context, Tacitus remarks (*Annales*, 122): “Sed Tiberius, vim principatus sibi firmans, imaginem antiquitatis senatui praebebat postulata provinciarum ad disquisitionem patrum mittendo.” (“But Tiberius, while establishing the power of the principate in himself, was keeping up the image of the old senate by sending the demands of the provinces to be dealt with by the senators.”)

23. For evidence and discussion see Syme, *Tacitus*, Vol. 1, 397-416.

24. Tacitus, *Annales*, 135-136. Note the turning point that occurs with the words “Tiberio mutati in deterius principatus initium ille annus attulit” (“that year brought for Tiberius the beginning of the principate’s change for the worse”) and “donec morte Drusi verterentur” (“until things changed with the death of Drusus”).

25. Tacitus, *Annales*, 177: “Ceterum ex eo praeupta iam et urgens dominatio” (“But from that point on there was precipitate and acute despotism”). For another statement of the gradual disclosure of Tiberius’s real character, see *Annales*, 211.

26. Tacitus, *Annales*, 3: “sed vetere atque insita Claudiae familiae superbia, multaue indicia saevitiae, quamquam premantur, erumpere. . . ; ne iis quidem annis quibus Rhodi specie secessus exul egerit aliud quam iram et simulationem et secretas libidines meditatam” (“but the old and innate arrogance of the Claudian family, together with many indications of cruelty, although repressed, burst forth. . . ; not even during the years he passed in exile on Rhodes under the cover of retirement was he meditating anything but anger and dissimulation and concealed lust”). Even Augustus acknowledged objectionable irregularities in Tiberius’s deport-

ment, dress, and habits; see *Annales*, 8: “Etenim Augustus paucis ante annis, cum Tiberio tribuniciam potestatem a patribus rursus postulare, quamquam honora oratione, quaedam de habitu cultuque et institutis eius ieceret quae velut excusando exprobraret.” (“Even Augustus a few years earlier, when he was once again requesting from the senators the tribunician power for Tiberius, although speaking approvingly, let fall certain indications about his attitude, dress, and manners of which he disapproved, even though he was excusing them.”)

27. Tacitus, *Annales*, 4: “Nihil de ea re Tiberius apud senatum disseruit: patris iussa simulabat.” (“Tiberius discussed nothing of this with the senate: he pretended it was the father’s command.”) Again, for the murder of Sempronius Gracchus in 14 Tiberius tried to shift blame from himself onto the proconsul of Africa. See *Annales*, 31: “Quidam non Roma eos milites, sed ab L. Asprenate pro consule Africae missos tradidere auctore Tiberio, qui famam caedis posse in Asprenatem verti frustra speraverat.” (“Some have said that these soldiers were not sent from Rome, but by L. Asprenas, proconsul of Africa, at the urging of Tiberius, who had hoped in vain that the blame for the murder could be pinned on Asprenas.”)

28. Tacitus, *Annales*, 5: “. . . tamquam vetere re publica et ambiguus imperandi: ne edictum quidem, quo patres in curiam vocabat, nisi tribuniciae potestatis praescriptione posuit sub Augusto acceptae. Verba edicti fuere pauca et sensu permodesto.”

29. Tacitus, *Annales*, 5: “nusquam cunctabundus nisi cum in senatu loqueretur” (“never hesitant except when he was speaking in the senate”).

30. Tacitus, *Annales*, 5: “Postea cognitum est ad introspiciendas etiam procerum voluntates inductam dubitationem: nam verba vultus in crimen detorquens recondebat.” (“Afterwards it was recognized that the hesitation was also put on in order to observe the intentions of the leaders: for, twisting a look, he would store up insults.”)

31. For example, Tacitus, *Annales*, 36 and 40-41.

32. Tacitus, *Annales*, 10.

33. Tacitus, *Annales*, 144, in relation to the slight of Lucius Calpurnius Piso, several years earlier: “Quae in praesens Tiberius civiliter habuit: sed in animo revolvente iras, etiam si impetus offensionis languerat, memoria valebat.” (“And at the time, Tiberius took these things courteously: but in his mind, which ruminated over resentments, the memory was intense, even if its initial force had dissipated.”)

34. Tacitus, *Annales*, 170.

35. Tacitus, *Annales*, 125.

36. Tacitus, *Annales*, 60: “Atque interim Libonem ornat praetura, convictibus adhibet, non vultu alienatus, non verbis commotior (adeo iram condiderat); cunctaque eius dicta factaque, cum prohibere posset, scire malebat.” (“And meanwhile he granted Libo the praetorship, invited him often to parties, neither unfriendly in his appearance nor excited in speech [so completely he had concealed his anger]; and Tiberius could have halted all his words and deeds, but he preferred to know them.”)

37. Tacitus, *Annales*, 60: “Mox libellos et auctores recitat Caesar ita moderans ne lenire neve asperare criminia videretur.” (“Next Caesar read out the complaints and the accusers, controlling himself so that he seemed neither to soften nor harshen the charges.”)

38. Tacitus, *Annales*, 112: “Solus et nullis voluptatibus avocatus maestam vigilantiam et malas curas exerceret.” (“Alone and withdrawn from all pleasures he was engaged in gloomy vigilance and wicked plans.”)

39. Tacitus, *Annales*, 165 and 170.

40. *Annales*, 173: “Nullam aequae Tiberius, ut rebatur, ex virtutibus suis quam dissimulationem diligebat: eo aegrius accepit recludi quae premeret.” (“Tiberius, so he thought, liked none of his virtues as much as dissimulation: all the more angrily, then, he took the disclosing of the things he concealed.”)

41. Tacitus, *Annales*, 44: “Renuit Tiberius, perinde divina humanaque obtegens.” (“Tiberius refused, thus keeping hidden both things divine and things human.”)

42. Tacitus, *Annales*, 181: “Tiberius tamen, ludibria seriis permiscere solitus.” (“Tiberius, however, customarily mixed jests with serious matters.”)

43. Tacitus, *Annales*, 143: “Proprium id Tiberio fuit scelera nuper reperta priscis verbis obtegere.” (“It was characteristic of Tiberius to cover over recently invented crimes with long venerated formulas.”)

44. Tacitus, *Annales*, 15: “Haec audita quamquam abstrusum et tristissima quaeque maxime occultantem Tiberium perpulere.” (“These things coming to his attention impressed him deeply, although he remained reserved and kept secret everything that was very sorrowful.”); see also *Annales*, 44, where Tiberius gets angry enough to break his customary taciturnity, and *Annales*, 128: “prudens moderandi, si propria ira non impelleretur” (“skilled at observing moderation, if his own anger was not incited”).

45. Tacitus, *Annales*, 208: “in patientia firmitudinem simulans” (“in suffering simulating good health”) and 210: “Iam Tiberium corpus, iam vires, nondum dissimulatio deserebat.” (Now his body was forsaking Tiberius, now his strength, but not yet the power of dissimulation.”)

46. Tacitus, *Annales*, 30: “magis in speciem verbis adornata quam ut penitus sentire crederetur” (“more embellished with words for show than so that he might be believed to feel it in his inmost heart”).

47. Tacitus, *Annales*, 9: “Plus in oratione tali dignitatis quam fidei erat; Tiberioque etiam in rebus quas non occuleret, seu natura sive adsuetudine, suspensa semper et obscura verba: tunc vero nitenti ut sensus suos penitus abderet, in incertum et ambiguum magis implicabantur.” (“There was more grandeur in this sort of speech than credibility; either by nature or by custom, halting and unintelligible language was Tiberius’s style even in things he was not trying to hide: but then, when he was striving to conceal his meaning entirely, it got even more wrapped up in uncertainty and obscurity.”)

48. Tacitus, *Annales*, 103: “Haud facile quis dispexerit illa in cognitione mentem principis: adeo vertit ac miscuit irae et clementiae signa.” (“It was not easy for anyone to discern the mind of the princeps at this trial: so much did he interchange and mingle the signs of anger and clemency.”) Also “Quod alii civile rebantur . . . quidam ad saevitiam trahebant.” (“What some thought considerate . . . others took for cruelty.”)

49. See note 30.

50. Tacitus, *Annales*, 78: “Tiberius cultu habituque eius lenibus verbis perstricto . . . increpuit.” (“Tiberius remonstrated a bit in mild terms about his bearing and attire.”)

51. Tacitus, *Annales*, 192. Although Tiberius believed Thrasyllus was a true oracle, Tacitus presents his real skill as that of reading Tiberius.

52. Tacitus, *Annales*, 132: “Mox Tiberium variis artibus devinxit adeo ut obscurum adversum alios sibi uni incautum intectumque efficeret.” (“Soon he subdued Tiberius by various means, so much so that he made him—so covert toward others—open and sincere with himself alone.”) Also, “palam compositus pudor, intus summa apiscendi libido” (“outwardly all propriety, inwardly the greatest lust for acquisition”).

53. Tacitus, *Annales*, 192: “Qualem diem Tiberius induisset, pari habitu, haud multum distantibus verbis.” (“Whatever humor Tiberius put on, his attitude was the same, and his speech not very different”). See also *Annales*, 207 for the observation that Gaius had learned dissimulation through contact with Tiberius.

54. Tacitus, *Annales*, 91: “Angusta et lubrica oratio sub principe qui libertatem metuebat adulationem oderat.”

55. Tacitus, *Annales*, 5: “Ruere in servitium consules, patres, eques. quanto quis inlustrior, tanto magis falsi ac festinantes, vultuque composito

ne laeti excessu principis neu tristiores primordio, lacrimas gaudium, questus adulationem miscebant.” For another example of false mourning, see the public response to the death of Tiberius’s son, Drusus, in the year 23, *Annales*, 138-139: “Senatus populusque habitum ac voces dolentum simulatione magis quam libens induebat, domumque Germanici revirescere occulti laetabantur.” (“The senate and the people put on the attitude and the tone of mourners insincerely rather than willingly, and they rejoiced secretly that the house of Germanicus was reviving.”)

56. Tacitus, *Annales*, 9-10.

57. Tacitus, *Annales*, 116: “Dolabella Cornelius dum antire ceteros parat absurdam in adulationem progressus.” (“Dolabella Cornelius, while trying to outdo the others, went forward with a ludicrous bit of flattery.”) Quintus Haterius gained infamy in 22 (*Annales*, 122) through a “most disgustingly servile” proposal that the senate’s resolution honoring Drusus should be recorded in gold letters. The same Haterius had narrowly escaped death in 14 (*Annales*, 10) when, shamefully groveling, he accidentally tackled Tiberius. In 34 (*Annales*, 195), the senate voted thanks to Tiberius for allowing Agrippina to die in exile instead of having her strangled.

58. Tacitus, *Annales*, 175.

59. Tacitus, *Annales*, 111.

60. Tacitus, *Annales*, 117-118.

61. Tacitus, *Annales*, 142: “[adulatio], quae moribus corruptis perinde anceps, si nulla et ubi nimia est” (“flattery, which, when mores have been ruined, is just as dangerous when there is none and when there is too much”).

62. Tacitus, *Annales*, 8: “Ea sola species adulandi supererat.”

63. Tacitus, *Annales*, 128-129.

64. Tacitus, *Annales*, 64. Tacitus presents Cnaeus Calpurnius Piso as standing up to Tiberius at *Annales*, 44, not so much because of republican sentiments as from a sense of his own worthiness to rule. That insubordination ran in the family; see *Annales*, 69. As for Gallus, Tacitus records another public disagreement with Tiberius that, perhaps inadvertently, penetrated to the very heart of rule (*Annales*, 64): “Eam sententiam altius penetrare et arcana imperii temptari.” (“This motion penetrated more deeply and made an attempt at the secrets of the imperium.”) Tiberius, however, managed to turn this to his own advantage.

65. Tacitus, *Annales*, 126: “Paulatim dehinc ab indecoris ad infesta transgrediebantur.” (“After this they gradually passed over from shameful

deeds to outrageous ones.”)

66. Tacitus, *Annales*, 60-61.

67. Tacitus, *Annales*, 62: “Quorum auctoritates adulationesque rettuli ut sciretur vetus id in re publica malum.” (“I have reported the motions and the flatteries of these men so that this old evil in the state might be recognized.”)

68. Tacitus, *Annales*, 171-173.

69. Tacitus, *Annales*, 147 and 149. See also *Annales*, 149, where it emerges that even the property of those who anticipate a guilty verdict by suicide is subject to confiscation and division among the accusers. Also at *Annales*, 170, there is an accusation within an extended family.

70. Tacitus, *Annales*, 184.

71. Tacitus, *Annales*, 138-139; see note 55 above, which comments on the hypocrisy of the many. The rest of this chapter discusses Sejanus’s effort to magnify Livia’s hatred. In another instance during the year 32, Tacitus records that a mother was condemned and executed for weeping for her executed son (*Annales*, 186).

72. Tacitus, *Annales*, 144.

73. Tacitus, *Annales*, 151-152.

74. Tacitus, *Annales*, 185-186.

75. Tacitus, *Annales*, 143-144: “Hunc ego Lepidum temporibus illis gravem et sapientem virum fuisse comperior: nam pleraque ab saevis adulationibus aliorum in melius flexit. neque tamen temperamenti egebat, cum aequabili auctoritate et gratia apud Tiberium vigerit. unde dubitare cogor fato et sorte nascendi, ut cetera, ita principium inclinatio in hos, offensio in illos, an sit aliquid in nostris consiliis liceatque inter abruptum contumaciam et deforme obsequium pergere iter ambitione ac periculis vacuum.” (“I am convinced that this Lepidus was a serious and wise man for those times: for he turned very many things arising from the cruel flatteries of others to better effect. Nor did he lack moderation, since he retained steady influence and esteem with Tiberius. Hence I am compelled to doubt whether, as with other things, the favor of leading men toward some and their disfavor toward others is from the fate and chance of birth, or whether it is something within our own purview, and one has the freedom to pursue a course between severe autonomy and base servility that is also free from dangers.”). His obituary in the year 34 (see *Annales*, 196), praises his moderation and wisdom, presenting him as a worthy member of a family rich in good citizens (“genus fecundum bonorum civium”).

76. Tacitus, *Annales*, 74: “Quod Camillo ob modestiam vitae impune fuit.” (“And this was safe for Camillus because of his unassuming conduct in life.”)

77. Tacitus, *Annales*, 167, mentions Marcus Asinius Agrippa, a man “claris maioribus quam vetustis vitaeque non degener” (“with distinguished rather than ancient ancestors, and not ignoble in his way of life”), who died in 27.

78. Tacitus, *Cornelii Taciti de vita Iulii Agricolae liber* (hereafter abbreviated as *De vita Agricolae*), ed. M. Winterbottom and R.M. Ogilvie, in *Cornelii Taciti Opera Minora* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975).

79. Tacitus, *De vita Agricolae*, 29: “Ceterum uti militare nomen, grave inter otiosos, aliis virtutibus temperaret, tranquillitatem atque otium penitus hausit, cultu modicus, sermone facilis, uno aut altero amicorum comitatus, adeo ut plerique, quibus magnos viros per ambitionem aestimare mos est, viso aspectoque Agricola quaerent famam, pauci interpretarentur.” (“Moreover, to moderate his military renown—which is imposing for civilians—with other virtues, he yielded completely to tranquillity and leisure, dressing simply, conversing affably, accompanied by just one or two friends, so much so that most people, whose custom is to judge great men by their ostentation, having seen Agricola and scrutinized him, would wonder about his good repute, but few could comprehend it.”)

80. Tacitus, *De vita Agricolae*, 30: “Domitiani vero natura praecipis in iram, et quo obscurior, eo inrevocabilior, moderatione tamen prudentiae Agricolae leniebatur, quia non contumacia neque inani iactatione libertatis famam fatumque provocabat.” (“Now Domitian’s nature was inclined to anger—and the more disguised, the more implacable—nevertheless it was mollified by the guidance and judgment of Agricola, because he did not provoke public opinion or fate by arrogance and empty displays of personal liberty.”)

81. Tacitus, *De vita Agricolae*, 30: “Sciant, quibus moris est illicita mirari, posse etiam sub malis principibus magnos viros esse, obsequiumque ac modestiam, si industria ac vigor adsint, eo laudis excedere, quo plerique per abrupta, sed in nullum rei publicae usum ambitiosa morte inclaruerunt.”

82. Tacitus, *De vita Agricolae*, 31: “Et ipse quidem, quamquam medio in spatio integrae aetatis ereptus, quantum ad gloriam, longissimum aevum peregit. Quippe et vera bona, quae in virtutibus sita sunt, impleverat, et consulari ac triumphalibus ornamentis praedito quid aliud adstruere fortuna poterat?” (“And he indeed, although snatched away at the midpoint of a complete life, he completed the longest possible course of life in re-

gard to honor. Since, in fact, he had acquired the real goods which depend on virtues, what else could fortune add to someone who had received the distinctions of the consulship and several military triumphs?")

83. Tacitus, *Annales*, 185.

84. Tacitus, *Annales*, 149-150.

85. Tacitus, *Annales*, 126.

86. Tacitus, *Annales*, 152: "Quo magis socordiam eorum inridere libet qui praesenti potentia credunt extingui posse etiam sequentis aevi memoriam. nam contra punitis ingeniis gliscit auctoritas, neque aliud externi reges aut qui eadem saevitia usi sunt nisi dedecus sibi atque illis gloriam peperere." ("One is disposed to laugh all the more at the folly of those who believe that, using their present power, they can extinguish the memory of the following generation. For on the contrary, when natural superiority is penalized, its influence flares up, and foreign kings or those who have acted with the same sort of cruelty have generated nothing but dishonor for themselves and renown for the others.")

87. Tacitus, *Annales*, 150: "illa primo aspectu levia ex quis magnarum saepe rerum motus oriuntur."

88. Tacitus, *Annales*, 150.

89. Syme, *Tacitus*, Vol. 2, 573.

90. Tacitus, *Annales*, 126: "homines ad servitutem paratos."