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# The Historian's Presence, or, There and Back Again

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# The Historian's Presence, or, There and Back Again

## **Abstract**

This chapter is an investigation of a Tacitean metaphor for historiography and its implications for the historian's role in history. The metaphor of the historian's physical proximity to his subject matter, which is found in the Annals 4 digression contrasting Tacitus's work with that of historians of earlier periods, is an offshoot of the enargeia that often enlivens a narrative. It is also one of the many connections between this digression and both Tacitus's account of the trial of the historian Cremutius Cordus (4.34-35) and what he suggests about his own work as historian.

## **Keywords**

Tacitus, Annals, digression, enargeia, Cremutius Cordus

## **Disciplines**

Arts and Humanities | Classics

## The Historian's Presence, or, There and Back Again

Cynthia Damon

### INTRODUCTION

In the sixth book of the *Annals* Tacitus presents a vignette that illustrates well the effect of vivid narrative. The scene is a meeting of the senate, the subject the death of Germanicus' second son, Drusus, who was starved to death as a prisoner in the imperial palace. Tiberius attempted to justify his cruelty by showing what Drusus had done to deserve it: he ordered the 'intelligence file', so to speak, on Drusus read out (6.24.1 *recitari . . . factorum dictorumque eius descripta per dies iussit*). Senators were shocked to learn that Drusus had been under surveillance for years, and could hardly believe their ears when Tiberius made the day-to-day reports public, reports that revealed, towards the end, the physical and mental abuse inflicted on Drusus by his jailers, and Drusus' dying curse on Tiberius (6.24.1–2). This openness was especially remarkable coming from Tiberius, past master of concealment, and the effect was as if Tiberius had removed the walls of Drusus' cell to show what was taking place within (6.24.3): *tamquam dimotis parietibus ostenderet nepotem sub uerbere centurionis, inter seruorum ictus, extrema uitae alimenta frustra orantem*. *Dimotis parietibus*, 'with the walls removed', the senators were in effect present at Drusus' agony, a terrifying experience (6.24.3 *penetrabat pauor*); their immediate response was to restore the façade (*species*): *obturbant quidem patres specie detestandi* (6.24.3).

The governing simile in this passage is one of physical presence, of being there in the room with the dying man and his torturers.<sup>1</sup> Tacitus ascribes this vividness-effect not to stylistic excellence—there is no historical narrative, just entries in the jailers' log—but rather to the credibility of the evidence provided (6.24.2 *uix fides, nisi quod Attii centurionis et Didymi liberti epistulae*

<sup>1</sup> As Martin (2001) notes ad loc., the simile, an unusual one, depends on the idea that 'house walls are spoken of as concealing crimes, misconduct, etc.'

*seruorum nomina praeferebant ut quis egredientem cubiculo Drusum pulsauerat, exterruerat, etc.*).<sup>2</sup> The 'author', insofar as one can speak of an author here, is Tiberius, who was acting from Capri. But physical separation did not prevent him from using evidence to make the past very present indeed, *tamquam dimotis parietibus*. In this paper, written in honour of a scholar who has done so much to remove the barriers to a proper understanding of Tacitean historiography, I look for other traces of this concept of historical vividness in Tacitus' works, and connect it with his demonstration of the historian's power over the future.

### I. PRAESENS PRAETERITO

*Enargeia* has been admired and analysed since antiquity, and its governing metaphors and the literary techniques that support them are well known. The essential idea is that an 'audience' (listeners or readers) should see what participants saw and feel what they felt. The dominant metaphors are drawn from the visual arts and from drama. But as a historian who distrusts *species* and despises all but the absolutely necessary forms of play-acting, and who regularly associates fondness for spectacle with civic irresponsibility and worse,<sup>3</sup> Tacitus needs a new metaphor. This is not to say that Tacitus shuns tried-and-true *enargeia* techniques. One can certainly find in his *Histories* and *Annals* the conventional syntactic features such as historical presents and infinitives, primary sequence tenses, *oratio recta*, generalizing second-person verbs (*spectares, discerneres, even putares*), and first-person references to participants (e.g., *nostri* for Roman soldiers), as well as familiar structural features such as *agones* and internal audiences. But he also develops a new metaphor that puts the emphasis not on the audience seeing or watching but on the historian being present.

Since the time of Herodotus, autopsy and, failing that, access to eyewitness evidence have been both important markers of authority and sources of authenticating detail.<sup>4</sup> In none of the surviving books of the *Histories* or *Annals* is actual autopsy explicitly claimed by Tacitus. He seems likely,

<sup>2</sup> For an equally grim visualization based on proximity cf. *Ann.* 6.39.2, where Tiberius is waiting in the vicinity of Rome for news of two deaths: *haec Tiberius non mari, ut olim, diuisus neque per longinquos nuntios accipiebat, sed urbem iuxta . . . quasi aspiciens undantem per domos sanguinem aut manus carnificum.*

<sup>3</sup> Well illustrated, of course, in Woodman (1993), an analysis of the extended theatrical metaphor used by Tacitus to display and explain the failure of the Pisonian conspiracy.

<sup>4</sup> For an overview in both Greek and Roman historians see Marincola (1997), 63–86.

however, to have claimed it at least once in the *Histories*' Domitianic books, in connexion with the Secular Games of AD 88, at which, as Tacitus tells us in his account of Claudius' games, he was present (*Ann.* 11.11.1 *iis... adfui*) and about which he wrote (*ibid.* *utriusque principis rationes praetermitto, satis narratas libris, quibus res imperatoris Domitiani composui*). He must have had many such opportunities in these books, which covered the period of his own political successes (*Hist.* 1.1.4 *dignitatem nostram... longius prouectam a Domitiano*). For the *Annals*, no autopsy, or practically none.<sup>5</sup> Eyewitness accounts are mentioned occasionally in both works and frequently inferred.<sup>6</sup> But the reader's sense of Tacitus' access to the events he narrates is due above all to literary techniques, including a set of metaphors for physical presence.<sup>7</sup>

Metaphors of movement through space, as applied to the historian's narrative, cover a spectrum from the possibly trivial to the certainly significant. Possibly trivial are the verbs of motion applied to the author's progress through his narrative. In Tacitus this metaphor, familiar from, among other things, didactic poetry, commonly appears in connexion with his digressions. Thus at *Ann.* 4.4.3 *quod mihi exsequendum reor* the notion of pursuit intrinsic to the verb (and still felt in its application to funerals) is vestigial at best: Woodman (2004) translates 'which I deem should be recounted by me', but the motion verb may resonate with the immediately preceding *percensuit cursim* used in reference to Tiberius' review of Rome's military dispositions, which is what prompts Tacitus' own account (it is the antecedent of *quod* in our sentence), and the expression *persequi incertum fuit* (4.5.4) which concludes the review. In this passage and at *Ann.* 3.65.1 *exsequi sententias*, however, the verbs' objects, by their nature, fight against the notion of movement. Similarly at *Ann.* 2.83.2 *haud facile quis numerum inierit*. More clearly relevant to the present category (but possibly still trivial) are expressions such as *Hist.* 2.38.2 *me... longius tulit, nunc ad rerum ordinem uenio*, or *Ann.* 4.33.4 *sed <ad> inceptum redeo*, or *Ann.* 6.22.4 *ne nunc incepto longius abierim*, by means of which Tacitus signals the end of a digression and the return to the narrative proper, or *Ann.* 16.16.2 *transire licet*, which refers to a historian's decision to 'pass over' some events in silence.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> On Tacitean autopsy see Devillers (2003), 71; Syme (1982), esp. 68–71.

<sup>6</sup> e.g., *Hist.* 3.65.2, 4.81.3, *Ann.* 4.53.2 As Syme (1958), 176 says apropos of the *Histories* in particular, 'there survived eyewitnesses in abundance'. On eyewitness sources, both oral and written, in the *Annals* see, in Devillers's inventory (2003), #2, 3, 5, 14, 20–8, 65, and his pp. 69–71.

<sup>7</sup> For an overview see Hommel (1936), esp. 120–9.

<sup>8</sup> In effect, with expressions like these Tacitus 'realizes' the metaphor built into the rhetorical terms (*digressio*, *digressus*) used for the sort of narrative detour (see *OLD*, s.vv.) in which Tacitus' narratives are rich; as is his wont, he avoids the technical terms.

Less banal, indeed quite original, is the use of *ant(e)ire* at *Ann.* 4.71.1 *auebat animus antire*, where ardent language, abstraction, and alliteration combine to produce a striking expression of Tacitus' eagerness to race ahead in his narrative to the deaths of the villains whose villainy he has just described; the *TLL* lists no parallels for this usage.<sup>9</sup> Sometimes events come to him instead of the other way around: thus at *Ann.* 6.7.5 *nobis pleraque digna cognitu obuenerunt*.<sup>10</sup>

The movement metaphor in the phrase *opus aggredior* at *Hist.* 1.2.1 is more complicated. At first it looks like an instantiation of the author qua 'voyager' idea familiar from poetry, picking up on *cessere* in the preceding paragraph, which referred to the post-Actium 'withdrawal' of great talents from the enterprise of writing history (1.1.1 *postquam bellatum apud Actium . . . magna illa ingenia cessere*). The initial modifier of *opus* (*opimum casibus*) suits the idea of *opus* as a literary work perfectly well.<sup>11</sup> But as the description continues the modifiers are increasingly odd for 'work' and appropriate, instead, for the period described: *atrox proeliis, discors seditionibus, ipsa etiam pace saeuom*. And the following sentence is wholly concerned with the events, not the work: *quattuor principes ferro interempti*, etc. It is as if Tacitus approached the task of writing his *Histories* and found himself amongst the events themselves.<sup>12</sup>

This movement/presence metaphor is most fully and originally developed in Tacitus' *Annals* 4 digression on historiography, where historians both republican and imperial take up metaphorical residence in their chosen periods.

Historians of the *ueteres populi Romani res*, Tacitus says, put their period on record *libero egressu* (*Ann.* 4.32.1). The force of this modal ablative is not immediately clear, for, as Martin-Woodman note, 'the precise metaphorical use of *egressus* is most unusual'. The translation they offer ad loc., 'with unrestricted elaboration', does not really capture the spatial component of *egressus*; Woodman's 2004 translation 'with freedom to explore' comes closer. The first (and largest) section of the word's *TLL* entry falls under the heading 'actio egrediendi'; the word usually denotes either a 'setting out', often of an

<sup>9</sup> Chris Kraus aptly compares Livy's *legentium plerisque . . . festinantibus ad haec noua* (*praef.* 4), where, however, the idea of motion through space is less prominent.

<sup>10</sup> For a passage that moves to this kind of 'encounter' with the past from a mental replay of the evidence see *Ann.* 3.18.4 *mihi, quanto plura recentium seu ueterum reuoluo, tanto magis ludibria rerum mortalium cunctis in negotiis obuersantur*.

<sup>11</sup> See my note ad loc. In a recent paper Baldwin (2005) compares the metaphorical *fetura* at *Plin. NH praef.* 1.

<sup>12</sup> With both *magna illa ingenia cessere* and *opus aggredior* it is perhaps useful to contrast *Ann.* 1.1.2 *temporibusque Augusti dicendis non defuere decora ingenia*, where historians are kept firmly in their own present both by *dicendis*, with its reference to the act of composition, and by the following temporal clause, *donec gliscente adulatione deterrentur*, in which the deterrent *adulatio* is contemporary with the desire to write, not a feature of the past.

important person for an important task (e.g., a governor's departure for his province) or 'emergence from one's house into the public sphere', again generally with reference to notables. The 'subjects' of *egressus* in Tacitus are an elite bunch—sought-after orators (*Dial.* 6.4), a governor and his lady (*Ann.* 3.33.4), the emperor's wife (11.12.3, 13.45.3), and the emperor himself (15.53.1, 16.10.4)—amongst whom it is no surprise to find historians, at least not in a digression on historiography. Since our passage concerns itself with choice of subject matter rather than freedom to publish, the first of these two basic meanings given above seems the more appropriate as the source of the metaphor here: as a modifier for *ingentia illi bella, expugnationes urbium, fusos captosque reges... memorabant, libero egressu* ought to mean something like 'having set forth [*sc.* onto their task] without hindrance'; Syme (1958), 320 appropriately evokes 'themes of... wide horizon'. There is a tension here between the verb *memorabant*, with its emphasis on (the creation or evocation of) memory, and its modifier *libero egressu*, with its emphasis on movement through space.<sup>13</sup>

Apropos of Tacitus' own work—*nobis in arto... labor* (4.32.2)—the picture is more harmonious, however painful the situation thus described may be for our author. With *in arto*, which stands in antithesis to *libero egressu*, we lose the 'wide horizon' but retain a consciousness of physical surroundings. Tacitus in fact adds a spatial dimension to its model here, Virgil's *in tenui labor* (*Geo.* 4.3), whence he also gets the *labor* that emphasizes the struggle involved in writing rather than the mode of production, thereby avoiding the tension produced by *memorabant*.

The notion of the author's physical proximity to his subject matter is reinforced by *introspicere* in the following sentence—*non tamen sine usu fuerit introspicere illa primo aspectu leuia*—where *leuia* is a shorthand reference to the material that sent Tacitus into this digression on historiography in the first place (cf. 4.32.1 *pleraque eorum quae rettuli quaeque referam parua forsitan et leuia memoratu uideri non nescius sum*). As Martin-Woodman note, '*introspicere* is commonly used of investigating behaviour, etc.'; it is a much more 'hands-on' metaphor for the historian's work than *memorabant*, and, more importantly, it is consistent with Tacitus' distrust of *species* and dislike of spectacle: *introspicere*, not *spectare*.<sup>14</sup> The exhilarating freedom of movement

<sup>13</sup> The same peculiar combination is found at *Ann.* 1.1.1 *temporibus... dicendis... cessere* (on which see n. 12 above), where a movement verb is coupled with a memory-producing task.

<sup>14</sup> Elsewhere Tacitus uses *introspicere* for important investigations (*Ann.* 1.7.7, on Tiberius' covert investigation of senatorial attitudes to his accession; 3.60.3, on the senate's investigation of asylum rights) and accurate insights (*Ann.* 1.10.7 and 5.4.1, on insight into Tiberius' character and plans; 6.21.2 and 11.38.1, on consciousness of impending events).

enjoyed by historians of the Republic thus finds a satisfying counterpart in in-depth scrutiny of the imperial period: useful, if not thrilling.

The physical presence metaphor crops up again in the next sentence, since, when Tacitus does 'investigate' these at first glance trivial matters, he comes face to face with a depressing sameness of material, *obuia . . . similitudine* (4.33.3), an expression that anticipates the idea encountered above in *pleraque . . . obuenerere* (6.7.5). And in Tacitus' view even readers will feel a spatial continuity with the past, worrying that the faults of others, *nimis ex propinquo*, are being imputed to themselves (4.33.4).

The metaphorical underpinnings of this famous passage on the historian's task are thus coherent both amongst themselves and with Tacitus' larger historiographical programme.<sup>15</sup> They also prepare the way for the equally famous, and adjacent, account of the trial of the historian Cremutius Cordus (*Ann.* 4.34–5), whose presence in the text takes the form of a long speech. Brought before a senatorial court, with Tiberius looking on, he offers a defence against what Tacitus calls a 'novel charge, heard then for the first time' (4.34.1 *nouo ac tunc primum audito crimine*): *quod editis annalibus laudatoque M. Bruto C. Cassium Romanorum ultimum dixisset*. The novelty lies in the fact that *uerba*, not *facta*, constitute the crime.<sup>16</sup> Thus Cordus' defence culminates in a question about *facta—num . . . populum . . . incendio?* (4.35.2)—that presses for the answer 'No': Cordus is not currently inciting the populace. He is, as he says, *factorum innocens* (4.34.2). Even on the more subtle reading of this passage offered by Woodman (see Martin–Woodman ad loc.), a 'no' is required in the trial context, where Cordus stresses his temporal distance from the tyrannicides (*illi quidem septuagesimum ante annum perempti*). As Woodman paraphrases: 'For surely it is not the case that, just because C. and B. hold the field in full armour at Philippi [*sc.* in my history], I am inflaming the people, etc.' Once again, Cordus is not currently inciting the populace, but on this reading the incitement, had there been incitement, would have been due to the *enargeia* of Cordus' account of Philippi: 'By omitting all reference to his role as an author, . . . Cordus represents as *actually* taking place that which in his history is merely described. He thus uses the same technique to refer to the immediacy (*enargeia*) of his historical narrative as Horace had used to praise that of Pollio's (*Odes* 2.1.17–19, with

<sup>15</sup> Another possible occurrence of this metaphor suffers from a corrupt text. At *Ann.* 3.24.3 M reads *in que tendi*, which Woodman–Martin emend to the well-paralleled *quae intendi* (see their note ad loc.), but which Ernesti emended to the less banal *in quae tetendi*, 'towards which I directed my course'.

<sup>16</sup> Or part of the novelty. The trial also expanded the purview of *maiestas* to cover victims outside the imperial family and to punish praise as well as libel.



Nisbet-Hubbard ad loc.)'.<sup>17</sup> On Woodman's reading, the historian in the text—the only historian who makes an appearance qua historian in Tacitus' works—attributes to the history he has written an effect similar to that of the various metaphors of presence we have seen in Tacitus' historical works.<sup>18</sup>

However, there is also a way to answer Cordus with a 'Yes'. As Martin-Woodman put it at the end of their long note on 4.35.2 *num... incendo*, 'It would not have been difficult to interpret Cordus' narrative as criticism of the principate and a call to arms'. Indeed this is surely how his accusers presented it. Such a reading reinstates the gap between event and historian: in narrating the past, particularly in narrating the past without truckling to authority, the historian produces an effect on his present; historiographical vividness is less relevant than authorial attitude. And this effect continues into the future, as is shown by the example of Cordus himself, whose prediction *nec derunt, si damnatio ingruit, qui... mei meminerint* (4.35.3) came true.<sup>19</sup>

## II. PRAESENS FUTURO

What of Tacitus? Does he ever say something comparable to Cordus' *num... incendo*? Not explicitly, no. That is, there are no passages where the metaphor of the historian's presence is used by Tacitus with reference to his own present or future. However, there *are* passages where one can see him relishing his effect, particularly his effect in the future.<sup>20</sup>

For example, one can see him deliberately frustrating what he deems to be Tiberius' *ambitio in posteris* (6.46.3), that is, deliberately challenging the emperor in the court of the future.

Tiberius' *ambitio* becomes the subject of discussion at a senate meeting about a proposal to erect a temple to Tiberius and his mother (*Ann.* 4.37–8), a passage located in significant proximity to the digression on historiography

<sup>17</sup> The actuality-effect in this reading comes from the combination of present participle *obtinentibus* and present tense *incendo*—the full version of Cordus' question is *num enim armatis Cassio et Bruto ac Philippenses campos obtinentibus belli ciuilis causa populum per contiones incendo*—the former referring to Cassius and Brutus, the latter to Cordus: the combination cancels the 70-year gap.

<sup>18</sup> Woodman himself notes (in the words elided in the quotation above) that Cordus is using here 'a device T. had adopted in his own person at 33.4 (n. *gloria*)', though the passage at 4.33.4 is not one I discuss in this paper.

<sup>19</sup> For Cordus' survival as an *exemplum* see e.g. *Sen. Cons. ad Marc.* 1.3–4, 22.4–7; *Dio* 57.24.2–3. On Cordus, see also Pelling in this volume, pp. 366–8, 376–7.

<sup>20</sup> The passages mentioned below are offered *exemplorum gratia*, not as an exhaustive list.

and the Cordus trial.<sup>21</sup> Tacitus gives his Tiberius a long *oratio recta* speech on that occasion, in which 'Tiberius' describes how he would like to be remembered by posterity (4.38.1): *qui (sc. posterī) satis superque memoriae meae tribuent, ut maioribus meis dignum, rerum uestrarum prouidum, constantem in periculis, offensionum pro utilitate publica non pauidum credant*. Tiberius also alludes to the 'court of the future' in making the point that temples are no better than tombs if one's memory is abhorrent (4.38.3): *quae saxo struuntur, si iudicium posterorum in odium uertit, pro sepulchris spernuntur*. Tacitus makes no immediate comment on the speech itself, though he does offer some fairly acid reactions to Tiberius' refusal of divine cult (4.38.4–5), but practical interventions elsewhere in the narrative show that he was alert to the possibilities suggested by Tiberius' *si iudicium posterorum in odium uertit*.

To see Tacitus frustrating Tiberius' aspirations with respect to posterity we can consider the execution of Sempronius Gracchus, who had spent fourteen years in exile on an island off the coast of Africa after his conviction for adultery with Julia (*Ann.* 1.53.3–6). Upon Julia's death in AD 14 soldiers were sent to kill Gracchus (*Ann.* 1.53.3 *militēs ad caedem missi*). After the *exitus*-scene Tacitus appends a remark on a variant in the historical tradition (1.53.6): *quidam non Roma eos milites, sed ab L. Asprenate pro consule Africae missos tradidere auctore Tiberio, qui famam caedis posse in Asprenatem uerti frustra sperauerat*. There are several things to note here. First, although Tacitus does not specify who dispatched the soldiers or whence, the whole episode is motivated by Tiberius' *saeuitia in Sempronium Gracchum* (1.53.3). Next, even the variant version makes Tiberius responsible, but it also implicates the governor of Africa. Third, the indicative *sperauerat* shows that Tacitus himself vouches for the discreditable explanation underlying the involvement of Asprenas; that is, even though he himself did not include Asprenas in his narrative, he explains why others did.<sup>22</sup> And finally, *frustra*. This is a little Tacitean victory celebration: by not mentioning Asprenas in his own narrative of events, he frustrated Tiberius' hopes, if such they were, about *fama*.<sup>23</sup> If Tiberius did in fact attempt this ruse (Tacitus offers no warrant), the *posterī* he aimed to dupe are protected by their historian as they read his narrative.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>21</sup> For some of the significance see Martin–Woodman (1989) introductory note ad loc.

<sup>22</sup> For discussion, and rejection, of Freinsheim's emendation *sperauerit*, see Goodyear's note (1972) ad loc.

<sup>23</sup> The same could be said about the death of Julia herself (*Ann.* 1.53.1–3), of which the narrative ends *obscuram fore necem longinquitate exilii ratus (sc. Tiberius)*. In Tacitus' *Annals*, at any rate, her death is not *obscura*. For another passage where Tacitus attributes a purpose to Tiberius and then himself frustrates it, see n. 26 below.

<sup>24</sup> For a passage where Tacitus makes sure that posterity is informed about something that Tiberius wanted erased consider *Ann.* 4.42.3, where Apidius Merula is removed from the

In another set of passages where Tacitus seems particularly conscious of his impact in the future his protection is extended beyond readers to society itself: he aims to do what statutory penalties had never been unable to accomplish, namely, to check *delatores*, described by Tacitus as a *genus hominum publico exitio repertum et <ne> poenis quidem umquam satis coercitum* (Ann. 4.30.3).

His narrative of the *maiestas* trial of Vibius Serenus père, for example, is meant to point a moral (Ann. 4.28.1): *miseriarum ac saevitiae exemplum atrox*. Given that Serenus' accuser was his own son (*reus pater accusator filius*), this trial offered a vivid demonstration of how delation destroyed the social fabric (particularly the elite social fabric), and it is narrated at length (4.28–30). To open, Tacitus brings in the defendant pitifully filthy and shackled: *inluvie . . . ac squalore obsitus et tum catena uinctus*. As Martin–Woodman note, this was 'standard practice for orators, if they wished to rouse the pity of their audience', but Serenus seems to have had no orator defending him—no *patronus* is mentioned, anyway—and the most important member of the audience in this trial was implacable (4.28.2 *non occultante Tiberio uetus odium aduersum exulem Serenum*). It is therefore in the *iudicium posterorum* that this instantiation of 'standard practice' will have its pity-arousing effect. And not only pity. To quote Martin–Woodman again, such details 'evoke the reader's indignation against the prosecutor'. With his narrative Tacitus ensures that Serenus *filis* earns considerable readerly indignation, in effect inflicting on him the punishment (or at least a punishment) for *calumnia* that ought to have ensued after his failure to prove his case (4.29.1 *quaestio aduersa accusatori fuit*, cf. 4.29.3 *tormenta peruicacia seruorum contra euenissent*).<sup>25</sup>

But Tacitus' case here against Tiberius is even more damning: he was responsible for a guilty verdict that ignored the (lack of) evidence, and his intervention in the trial's aftermath exacerbated the problem of delation.<sup>26</sup> Troubled by the fact that a senator, having been mentioned as an associate of Serenus père, and *quia periculum pro exitio habebatur*, committed suicide, the senate drafted legislation depriving *delatores* of their reward money if an

senatorial roll because he did not swear *in diui Augusti acta*, but Tacitus, by mentioning his removal, makes sure that posterity knows that Merula was once a senator.

<sup>25</sup> For two other passages where Tacitus attacks a *delator* in the court of the future see Ann. 4.69.3 (on accusers who hid in a coffered ceiling to gather evidence) *suumque ipsi dedecus narrare*, and, less viciously, Ann. 4.52.4 (on a talented but morally problematic speaker) *capessendis accusationibus aut reos tutando prosperiore eloquentiae quam morum fama fuit*. For more on *delatores* see Powell, Ch. 13 in this volume.

<sup>26</sup> Tacitus also takes the opportunity here to attribute to Tiberius a purpose (4.33.1 *quo molliret inuidiam*) that is frustrated by his invidious account of Tiberius' role in the trial. Foiled again, Tiberius!

accused killed himself before trial (4.30.2). Tiberius, however, argued publicly on behalf of *delatores* (*palam pro accusatoribus Caesar*), among other things calling them 'the laws' guardians' (*subuerterent potius iura quam custodes eorum amouerent*). Which Tacitus counters immediately with the description of *delatores* quoted above, *genus hominum publico exitio repertum et <ne> poenis quidem umquam satis coercitum* (*Ann.* 4.30.3), the language of which Martin-Woodman appropriately characterize as 'apocalyptic'. Such vehemence suits the accusation with which Tacitus concludes this long episode: on the evidence of the Vibius Serenus trial, he charges Tiberius not with failure to check *delatores*, but rather with encouraging them: *per praemia eliciebantur* (4.30.3).

Given that deterring, indeed punishing, *delatores* was official policy under Nerva and Trajan (see e.g. Dio 68.1.2, Plin. *Pan.* 34-5, 42, esp. 34 *uidimus delatorum iudicium, quasi grassatorum quasi latronum*), if not universally applied (see, e.g., Plin. *Ep.* 4.22.4-6), Tacitus, like his contemporary Juvenal at *Sat.* 1.33-6, may be beating something of a dead horse here (while of course creating an evil foil for the virtues of the present *princeps*). But a *delator*-friendly Tiberius or Domitian could be just around the corner, and Tacitus' narrative will be there as implicit threat and perhaps even deterrent (cf. *Ann.* 3.65.1 *ut... ex posteritate et infamia metus sit*) when he arrives.

## CONCLUSION

A model for the connexion between the contrafactual evocation of physical presence in the past (section I), and the insistence on the historian's impact in the future (section II), can perhaps be found in a peculiar little incident in *Annals* 4 that shows Tiberius once again doing work comparable to that of the historian. One of the cases referred to the senate in AD 24 concerned the death by defenestration of one Apronia, wife to the praetor Plautius Silvanus (4.22). Tacitus tells us right off that the husband did it (4.22.1 *coniugem in praeceps iecit*). He can do so because Tiberius investigated the matter personally after Silvanus asserted that his wife had killed herself (4.22.2): *non cunctanter Tiberius pergit in domum, uisit cubiculum, in quo reluctantis et impulsae uestigia cernebantur. refert ad senatum...* He goes, he looks, he perceives, he reports. As Martin-Woodman note ad loc., 'Tiberius' role as personal inquisitor seems odd'. However, his investigation does clarify who did it, if not why (*incertis causis... coniugem in praeceps iecit*); as Tacitus knows all too well, the why sometimes eludes even the best historian. Tiberius' investigation also resulted in a punishment, severe if somewhat indirect (Silvanus'

grandmother, Urgulania, Livia's friend, sent him a dagger with which he duly committed suicide, 4.22.2-3). As eagerly as Tiberius, even if only via a metaphor, Tacitus betakes himself to the historical scene of the crime, so to speak, and, again like Tiberius, he makes do with the prospect of extrajudicial punishment. Circumscribed his subject matter may have been, but in terms of temporal range his *labor* was anything but *in arto*.