

Maecenas and then taken over by Augustus when the time was right," p. 273). Though the circumstances of Maecenas' retirement differ, the outcome is exactly the same: from 18 B.C. on, Augustus deals directly with the poets and vice-versa.

In fact, there is no more sign of Maecenas' planned withdrawal than of his ouster:

(1) As proof of Augustus' new activism after 18, Williams instances his selection of Horace to compose the *Carmen Saeculare*, his request for odes in honor of his stepsons Drusus and Tiberius, and his insistence that one of Horace's poetic epistles be directed to himself. But what about Augustus' earlier interventions? He is said to have forced Vergil to revise Gallus out of the fourth book of the *Georgics* in 27 or 26 B.C. (Servius on *Ecl.* 10. 1, *G.* 4. 1); he corresponded with Vergil about the scope and progress of the *Aeneid* between 27 and 24 (Don. *Vita Verg.* 31 Hardie, Macrobian *Sat.* 1. 24. 10-11); he arranged the command performance in 22 at which Vergil read his eulogy of Marcellus (Don. *Vita Verg.* 32 Hardie, Servius on *Aen.* 6. 861); and in 19 he insisted that Varius and Tucca publish Vergil's unfinished manuscript of the *Aeneid* contrary to the poet's wishes (Pliny *HN* 7. 114, Don. *Vita Verg.* 41 Hardie). All these incidents certainly predate Williams' turning point, and in no case is there any hint that Augustus was acting through Maecenas or anyone else.

(2) Maecenas for his part continued to be active in Roman literary society in 18 and after. He lent his patronage to performances of show oratory put on by rhetors (Sen. *Cont.* 2. 4. 12-13, 10 *pr.* 8) and he vigorously promoted Vergil's posthumous reputation (Sen. *Suas.* 1. 12, 2. 20, 3. 5).

(3) Part of Williams' case is that a shift of literary policy is signaled by a change of focus in late poems by both Horace and Propertius. Under Maecenas' management, the poets practiced a "rhetoric of indirection," addressing themselves to Maecenas rather than to Augustus and focusing on the political program of the regime rather than on the personality of the leader (pp. 267-68). But once Augustus took control in 18, the poets began to address him directly and to celebrate his personal achievements. While this distinction may serve for Horace, it hardly seems to fit Propertius. In the fourth book Propertius never addresses himself directly to Augustus, and if one had to define the focus of that book as being either Augustus' political program or his personality, it would not be the latter.

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AN HEIR OF TRAGEDY: TACITUS *HISTORIES* 2. 59. 3

One of the main problems in the Year of the Four Emperors was the difficulty each contender for the purple faced in establishing a dynasty. The theme bulks large in Tacitus' *Histories*, not surprisingly, since the work is much taken up with the breakdown of legitimacy, stability, and continuity in that terrible year. This accounts, in large measure, for the prominence given to Galba's inept speech on the glories of adoption (1. 15-16), and for the strong emphasis placed by Mucianus

on Vespasian's having sons to succeed him (2. 76–77). My concern in this note is with another brief passage that picks up on this theme: here the effects at which Tacitus is aiming appear not to have been appreciated fully, while the *sententia* with which he concludes has perplexed more than one commentator. Tacitus is describing the “theatrical scene in Lugdunum,”¹ at which Vitellius' forces were paraded before his young son, so far as we can tell, in the latter half of April 69:

praesto fuere Lugduni victricium victarumque partium duces. Valentem et Caecinam pro contione laudatos curuli suae circumposuit. mox universum exercitum occurrere infanti filio iubet, perlatumque et paludamento opertum sinu retinens Germanicum appellavit cinxitque cunctis fortunae principalis insignibus. nimius honos inter secunda rebus adversis in solacium cessit.

To establish the tone of the passage, it will be best to begin with Tacitus' applying the term *infans* to the emperor's son. According to Zonaras' abridgement of Dio, the boy was six years old at the time, and since *infans* in classical usage covers any age through seven, this use of the term is not per se remarkable.² Hence the readiness of translators to render *infanti filio* as “infant son,” and of commentators to repeat Zonaras' observation. But this misses what is remarkable, that the word *infans* is found only here in all that remains of the *Histories*. So, when Tacitus reports Vitellius' unsuccessful attempt to abdicate on December 18, he describes the boy as *parvulus filius*, carried in a litter *velut in funebrem pompam* (3. 67. 2), and he credits the emperor with an impassioned plea to his audience on that occasion to show compassion for his brother, his wife, and the *innoxiam liberorum aetatem* (3. 68. 2).³ In this scene, of course, the historian is intent on documenting the pathetic effects with which Vitellius strove to arouse the onlookers' *miserericordia*, not himself to show pity for the boy.⁴ For when it comes time to report the child's execution by Mucianus, there is only a brief, businesslike statement, focused rather on the Flavian than on his victim: “isdem diebus Mucianus Vitellii filium interfici iubet, mansuram discordiam obtendens, ni semina belli restinxisset” (4. 80. 1). And for all the other references to the boy and his sister as a concern to Vitellius himself (1. 75. 2; 3. 67. 1), or to his brother Lucius (3. 38. 2–3), or to Otho (2. 47. 2), or to the Flavians (3. 63. 2), there is nothing to compare with, say, Germanicus' anxiety as, on his deathbed, he wonders *quid infantibus liberis eventurum*,⁵ or with Claudius' musings over the

1. H. Heubner, *P. Cornelius Tacitus: Die “Historien,”* vol. 2: *Zweites Buch* (Heidelberg, 1968), p. 215. For the text of Tacitus I have used the Teubner edited by Heubner (Stuttgart, 1978).

2. Dio 65. 1. 2a = Zonaras 11. 16; see *TLL* 7 (1951): 1347. Tacitus' other references, discussed below, are collected by A. Gerber and A. Greef, *Lexicon Taciteum* (Leipzig, 1903), p. 629.

3. Vitellius had also a daughter, whose age we cannot establish. We know only that she was betrothed to D. Valerius Asiaticus early in 69 (1. 59. 2); that there were rumors to the effect that Vitellius offered her to Antonius Primus late in the year (3. 78. 1); and that Vespasian later gave her a dowry and married her off to a person unknown (Suet. *Vesp.* 14. 1).

4. K. Wellesley, *Tacitus: The “Histories,” Book 3* (Sydney, 1972), p. 164, assumes that Tacitus pitied the boy. Though other reasons for doubting this assessment will be offered below, the overall tone of 3. 67–68 suggests rather a scene staged by Vitellius; says Tacitus at 3. 68. 2, the emperor made a speech containing “*pauca et praesenti maestitiae congruentia*.”

5. *Ann.* 2. 70. 2. I see no justification for the editors' insistence that this refers exclusively to the children with him (Caligula and the infant Julia); here, too, the context suggests that Tacitus' aim is to bring out a penchant for melodrama.

infantia of his children as he contemplates Messallina's adulteries (*Ann.* 11. 34. 1). Given, then, that *infans* appears only in this one passage of the *Histories*, it is legitimate to hold that the word has been chosen with due care.

We may safely rule out the idea, adopted by Heraeus, that Tacitus is playing on the literal meaning of *infans*, "unable to speak," alluding to the story preserved by Suetonius, that the boy stammered so badly as to be all but mute.⁶ Although this section of the *Histories* has been seen as a deliberate and malicious attempt to distort Vitellius' every action,⁷ such wordplay—in any case inappropriate to the dignity of the work (cf. 2. 50. 2)—is unparalleled elsewhere in Tacitus. He uses the terms *infans* and *infantia* with but three connotations. First, there is the purely chronological sense.⁸ Next, there is the idea of impressionability, and thus the possibility of molding a child in some way before it knows any better.⁹ Finally, and closely related to this, there is the notion of helplessness, the child so described being too small and too weak to fend for itself.¹⁰ Of these three options it is the last that best fits our passage, not so much because the effect is reinforced by *sinu retinens* as because it is thrown into high relief by *paludamento opertum*.

That Vitellius' action in wrapping his son in his cloak was designed both to win the goodwill of the troops and to pay tribute to them for making him emperor is too obvious to need comment. But we ought to bear in mind also that the *paludamentum* was recognized by now to be the garb exclusively of the emperor.¹¹ Nor was Tacitus unaware of this. In view of his well-known aversion to technical terms, it is significant that he uses the word only one more time, in his account of the *naumachia* Claudius gave at the Fucine Lake in 52: "ipse insigni paludamento neque procul Agrippina chlamyde aurata praesedere" (*Ann.* 12. 56. 5). This is phraseology chosen deliberately to reject the alternative version, recorded by the Elder Pliny, that Agrippina too wore the *paludamentum* at the festivities.¹² Again, there was no precedent for dressing a six year old child in such attire. Caligula's wearing a soldier suit, a common soldier's suit, was an entirely different matter,¹³ and when in 51 Nero appeared at the circus games *triumphali veste*, he had already assumed the toga of manhood and been given a grant of power.¹⁴ So Vitellius' placing the *paludamentum* on his son was a unilateral act of investi-

6. Suet. *Vit.* 6; W. Heraeus, *Taciti "Historiarum" Libri I-II* (Leipzig, 1929), p. 106, in the note on I. 75. 2.

7. K. Wellesley, "Suggestio falsi in Tacitus," *RhM* 103 (1960): 272-88, esp. pp. 286-88.

8. There is some overlap, of course, but the passages that appear to be predominantly chronological are, for *infans*, *Dial.* 29. 1 (first instance), *Ann.* 4. 13. 4, 15. 23. 4, 16. 6. 3; for *infantia*, see *Ann.* 13. 16. 5.

9. For *infans*, see *Dial.* 29. 1 (second instance), *Germ.* 32. 3, *Ann.* 4. 13. 4; for *infantia*, *Ann.* 1. 4. 4 (quoted below, and slightly exaggerated, if Tiberius moved into Augustus' house only after the death of his own father, when he himself was *novem natus annos*; Suet. *Tib.* 6. 4), 2. 56. 2.

10. For *infans*, see *Germ.* 7. 3, 46. 4, *Ann.* 1. 41. 3, 2. 70. 2 (quoted above); for *infantia*, see *Ann.* 3. 38. 4, 6. 51. 2 (possibly chronological), 11. 11. 6, 11. 34. 1, 13. 58.

11. On the *paludamentum*, see T. Mommsen, *Römisches Staatsrecht*³, vol. I (Leipzig, 1887), pp. 431-33; Hertha Sauer, "Paludamentum," *RE* 18 (1949): 281-82. The fullest discussion is by A. Alföldi, "Insignien und Tracht der römischen Kaiser," *Röm. Mitt.* 50 (1935): 1-171, esp. pp. 49-51. Among the editors the word's significance seems to have been recognized only by L. Valmagg, *P. Cornelio Tacito: Il libro secondo delle "Storie"* (Turin, 1897), p. 112.

12. *HN* 33. 63; cf. Mommsen, *Staatsrecht*³, I:432, n. 5. Tacitus uses the adjective *paludatus* only once, of Vitellius again (*Hist.* 2. 89. 1; Gerber and Greef, *Lexicon*, p. 1050), and again to very telling effect.

13. So, rightly, Alföldi, "Insignien," p. 48, n. 3. On Caligula's garb, see Tac. *Ann.* 1. 41. 3 and 69. 4, with the commentaries on those passages.

14. Tac. *Ann.* 12. 41. 4 (clothing) and 1. 2 (toga and powers).

ture,¹⁵ and was understood as such at the time. Tacitus brings this out by using the technical term and referring besides to *cunctis fortunae principalis insignibus*; Dio states more directly that the emperor gave his son the titles "Germanicus" and "imperator."¹⁶

Yet it is the effect of all this that is important. To us a child in adult's clothing may not appear too incongruous, but we make far less of a boy's coming of age than did the Romans. To them, once they thought about it, a helpless child wrapped in the cloak of the emperor could only seem presumptuous. Tacitus condenses this thought into the expression *nimius honos* (a collocation he uses nowhere else), and says no more for now—deliberately, we may be sure—because Mucianus will make the point, more forcefully and more fitly, a few chapters later, urging Vespasian to seize power on the grounds that "tua domui triumphale nomen, duo iuvenes, capax iam imperii alter" (2. 77. 1). Whatever else Vitellius' son may have been, he was not *capax iam imperii*, and the honor paid to him at Lugdunum was excessive.

The concluding sentence of our passage, however, has given commentators no little trouble. Even if we ignore gratuitous attempts to emend the Latin,¹⁷ opinions have varied considerably. Thus G. E. F. Chilver asserts that Tacitus "has not made it clear who was consoled . . . and the sentence is not one of his best efforts."¹⁸ A. L. Irvine dismisses the entire sentence as "a rhetorical commonplace," neither helpfully nor accurately.¹⁹ W. A. Spooner averred that consolation was provided "not to the lad, for he himself was put to death. . . . [T]he thought of the honours showered on him was a kind of solace to those who pitied his misfortunes."²⁰ And Valmagg, following Doederlein, took the *sententia* as an ironic comment, referring to the boy, to his father, and to the audience at the parade.²¹ Yet, ever ready though Tacitus is to attribute to others thoughts they may or may not have entertained, he is concerned here exclusively with the boy.²²

Let us note, first, that the solace Tacitus mentions is indeed recompense for the boy's execution. The *res adversae* refer unquestionably to that, since the following sentence begins "tum interfecti centuriones promptissimi Othonianorum" (2. 60. 1), an illustration of the way in which Tacitus links one chapter to the next through association of word or thought, in this case the thought of the boy's death and the death of the centurions.²³ It may be emphasized next that Tacitus was not

15. So, rightly, Alföldi, "Insignien," p. 50; cf. H. Dessau, *Geschichte der römischen Kaiserzeit*, vol. 2.1 (Berlin, 1926), p. 335; R. Hanslik, "Vitellius (7b)," *RE Suppl.* 9 (1962): 1718; Heubner, *Die "Historien,"* 2:215 and 226.

16. Dio 65. 1. 2a = Zonaras 11. 16. In the larger context, Tacitus' employment of *principalis* may also be more forceful than it appears, this being the third reference to Vitellius' new position in only twelve Teubner lines.

17. See, e.g., the apparatus criticus printed by C. D. Fisher in the Oxford text (Oxford, 1911) or, slightly fuller, that of Valmagg, *P. Cornelio Tacito*, p. 200.

18. *A Historical Commentary on Tacitus' "Histories" I and II* (Oxford, 1979), p. 222.

19. Tacitus: "Histories," *Books I and II* (London, 1952), p. 168.

20. *Cornelii Taciti "Historiarum" Libri* (London, 1891), p. 242.

21. Valmagg, *P. Cornelio Tacito*, pp. 112-13; cf. also H. Goelzer, *Oeuvres de Tacite: "Histoires," Livres I-II* (Paris, 1920), p. 265.

22. Heubner, *Die "Historien,"* 2:227, without discussion; so also A. D. Godley, *The "Histories" of Tacitus, Books I and II* (London, 1887), p. 230.

23. Tacitus' use of *coniunctio* has been much discussed in connection with the *Germania*; see esp. A. Gunz, *Die deklamatorische Rhetorik in der "Germania" des Tacitus* (Ph.D. Diss., Lausanne, 1934),

aiming to arouse compassion for the boy. Though one would expect solace to be needed and sympathy to be felt by the living over the loss of the dead, the boy was still the son of Vitellius. The latter, attempting to abdicate, would claim that his children were harmless, innocent even (3. 68. 2 *innoxiam liberorum aetatem*), but few Romans could have subscribed to this view, and not merely because the son's very existence constituted *semina belli*. There was also his heredity: whether or not the boy had lived and—to adapt the expression Tacitus applies to Tiberius—had been “prima ab infantia eductus in domo regnatrice” (*Ann.* 1. 4. 4), no Roman could reasonably have supposed that he would be any improvement on his father,²⁴ and in the emperor Tacitus found few redeeming qualities (1. 50. 3, 3. 86. 2). Resorting, therefore, to a trope he employs only twice elsewhere in his writings, Tacitus says simply that the excessive honors paid to Vitellius' son at Lugdunum, at the height of his father's success, turned out to be (*cessit*) a consolation to him at the time of his own execution.²⁵ And this ought to mean, finally, that the point of the remark, and indeed of the episode as a whole, is to document Vitellius' ineptitude, the *inscitia* with which Mucianus will shortly tax him (2. 77. 3; cf. 57. 1).

Whether Vitellius intended merely to distance himself from or, rather, to make a clean break with the Julio-Claudians,²⁶ he undoubtedly meant to found a dynasty. For this his children were vital, and both were advertised on his coinage.²⁷ Through them, his son especially, he could assert a continuity and promise a stability such as Nero, Galba, and Otho had been unable to achieve—provided that he was not challenged immediately. At Lugdunum, so Tacitus would have us believe, he neither foresaw nor even suspected danger, and he acted accordingly. But the historian has already made it clear that this will not be the dynasty to rule Rome (2. 1. 1). To labor the point apropos of the boy's investiture, however, would take away from the force of the speech in which Mucianus dwells on Vitellius' weaknesses in order to inspire Vespasian (2. 76–77). Consequently, Tacitus contents himself with underlining the helplessness of the heir designate

pp. 62–67; E. Kraggerud, “Verknüpfung in Tacitus' *Germania*,” *SO* 47 (1972): 7–35. The technique is regularly employed in his other works, too.

24. One of the clearest expressions of the Roman idea that children mirrored their parents appears in Dio's version of the speech Augustus delivered in defense of the *lex Papia Poppaea* (56. 3. 4–5), and Tacitus shows something of this—interestingly enough, only a few chapters after his own report of a later debate on the law (*Ann.* 3. 25–28)—when he says, of Valerius Messallinus: “cui parens Messalla ineratque imago paternae facundiae” (*Ann.* 3. 34. 2). Also, of course, Tacitus is perfectly willing to exploit the argument from heredity when it suits his purpose, as in the case of Tiberius, purportedly endowed “vetere atque insita Claudiaee familiae superbia” (*Ann.* 1. 4. 2). In turn, this probably helps to explain why Tacitus refers only once more to “innocent children” (*innoxios pueros*), likewise in a highly rhetorical context, the speech of Curtius Montanus (*Hist.* 4. 42. 4).

25. For this use of *cedere*, compare *Germ.* 36. 2 and *Ann.* 14. 54. 3, according to Gerber and Greef, *Lexicon*, p. 159, the only other examples in Tacitus. For the trope, see *Agr.* 44. 5 and *Ann.* 14. 63. 2, the latter passage stressed by Doederlein: see Valmaggì, *P. Cornelio Tacito*, p. 113.

26. For discussion, see e.g., D. Timpe, *Untersuchungen zur Kontinuität des frühen Prinzipats* (Wiesbaden, 1962), pp. 118–19; B. Grenzheuser, *Kaiser und Senat in der Zeit von Nero bis Nerva* (Ph.D. Diss., Münster, 1964), pp. 65–66. Much depends, it seems to me, on whether Tacitus was indeed “writing in hindsight” (so A. J. Coale, “*Dies Alliensis*,” *TAPA* 102 [1971]: 52, n. 12) when he reported that Vitellius “praemisit in urbem edictum quo vocabulum Augusti differret” (2. 62. 2).

27. C. H. V. Sutherland and R. A. G. Carson, *The Roman Imperial Coinage*, vol. 1² (London, 1984), pp. 268–73, nos. 8, 57, 78–79, and 100–103.

(*infanti filio*), remarking on the excessive honor paid to him (*nimius honos*), and foreshadowing his execution (*rebus adversis in solacium cessit*).

And yet, to ensure that the reader sees the investiture for the disaster it is, Tacitus encloses the episode within two other examples of imperial misjudgment. Beforehand, Vitellius pays conspicuous honor to Caecina and Valens, placing them on either side of his curule chair and parading his belief that they are his trusty lieutenants. The reader already knows that Valens is interested primarily in feathering his own nest (1. 66. 2–3, 2. 56. 2). And if Caecina's treachery has not been mentioned so far, the basis for it—his rivalry with and hatred of Valens—most certainly has (2. 24. 1, 30. 3, 56. 2). Immediately afterward comes the execution of Otho's most devoted centurions, and from that, as the historian is careful to observe, sprang the “*praecipua in Vitellium alienatio per Illy(ri)cos exercitus; simul ceterae legiones contactu et adversus Germanicos milites invidia bellum meditabantur*” (2. 60. 1). Since that event hastened Vespasian's bid for the throne and prompted Antonius Primus' invasion of Italy, Vitellius in effect destroyed himself and his dynasty. At the height of his good fortune, amid the ceremonies at Lugdunum, the emperor made one dire mistake after another: he put his faith in unreliable commanders, he invested a helpless boy with the purple, and he alienated troops ideally placed to overthrow him. In the circumstances, his son could be heir only to tragedy.²⁸

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