

## TACITUS' OBITUARY OF TIBERIUS

*To the memory of Frank Goodyear*

casus prima ab infantia ancipites: nam proscriptum patrem exsul secutus, ubi domum Augusti priuignus introiit, multis aemulis conflictatus est dum Marcellus et Agrippa, mox Gaius Luciusque Caesares uiguer; etiam frater eius Drusus prosperiore ciuium amore erat. sed maxime in lubrico egit accepta in matrimonium Iulia, impudicitiam uxoris tolerans aut declinans. dein Rhodo regressus uacuos principis penates duodecim annis, mox rei Romanae arbitrium tribus ferme et uiginti obtinuit.

morum quoque tempora illi diuersa: egregium uita famaue quoad priuatus uel in imperiis sub Augusto fuit; occultum ac subdolum fingendis uirtutibus donec Germanicus ac Drusus superfuere; idem inter bona malaque mixtus incolumi matre; intestabilis saeuitia sed obiectis libidinibus dum Seianum dilexit timuitue; postremo in scelera simul ac dedecora prorupit postquam remoto pudore et metu suo tantum ingenio utebatur. (6.51.1–3)

### I

The standard interpretation of the obituary's final paragraph, where Tacitus divides the emperor's life into five *tempora diuersa*,<sup>1</sup> is that provided by F. R. D. Goodyear,<sup>2</sup> which may be summarised as follows. During the last period of his life Tiberius, now free from anyone who might act as a restraining influence, revealed his own true, real or innate character (*ingenium*) of unmitigated evil. During the earlier periods, when he was restrained by one individual or another, he had appeared to be less evil than this; but the difference is not to be explained by the emperor's character having changed for the worse, since Tacitus, like other ancient writers, believed that a man's character was fixed at birth and incapable of change thereafter. Hence the difference between the earlier and the last periods of Tiberius' life can only be explained by the hypocrisy which Tacitus constantly attributes to him: during his earlier life Tiberius was hiding his vices (*dissimulatio*) and feigning virtues.

Naturally Professor Goodyear knew the two occasions when Tacitus shows himself explicitly aware of the changeability of character. On the first Tacitus not only claims that the emperor Vespasian changed for the better, but expresses his claim in such a way as might well imply that all previous emperors (including, therefore, Tiberius) changed for the worse: *H.* 1.50.4 'solusque omnium ante se principum in melius mutatus est.' On the second occasion Tacitus makes L. Arruntius state that Tiberius did indeed change for the worse: 6.48.2 'post tantam rerum experientiam ui dominationis conuulsus et mutatus.' Given the proximity of this statement to the obituary at 6.51.3, E. Koestermann suggested that Tacitus intended to provide readers with alternative scenarios from which they could choose.<sup>3</sup> Such a technique would not only be typical of Tacitus, especially if he were to leave readers in no doubt that his own opinion was different from that of Arruntius, but would also increase the

For their comments on earlier drafts of this paper I am most grateful to Professors H. M. Hine, R. H. Martin, T. P. Wiseman and the *CQ* referee, not all of whom (as will become clear) have been persuaded by its theses. References are to Tacitus' *Annals* unless otherwise stated; scholarly works are cited in full on their first appearance, thereafter by author's name.

<sup>1</sup> The *tempora* are: (1) up to A.D. 14, (2) to early 23, (3) to early 29, (4) to late 31, (5) to March 37.

<sup>2</sup> *The Annals of Tacitus* (Cambridge, 1972), i.37–40.

<sup>3</sup> *Cornelius Tacitus: Annalen* (Heidelberg, 1963), i.38.

intrinsic significance of Arruntius' statement. Yet Goodyear dismissed both this and the former passage as 'intermittent insights', 'isolated' and 'of slight importance';<sup>4</sup> and the attractiveness of the traditional interpretation is shown by the fact that it has been endorsed more recently, either in whole or in part, by Ronald Martin and T. J. Luce.<sup>5</sup>

Two other scholars, however, have modified this traditional interpretation in two important respects. First, A. R. Hands pointed out that Tacitus' alleged belief in fixed characters does not explain why he continues to attribute *dissimulatio* to Tiberius during the last period of his life, when *ex hypothesi* all restraint had been removed and his truly evil nature had long since been revealed. See especially 6.50.1, when the emperor is on his death-bed: 'iam Tiberium corpus, iam uires, nondum dissimulatio deserebat.'<sup>6</sup> Second, C. Gill provided a great deal of evidence to show that the ancients were very familiar indeed with the concept of a changing character and hence that Tacitus' statements at *H.* 1.50.4 and 6.48.2 are by no means as 'intermittent' or 'isolated' as Goodyear believed but rather are illustrations of a common belief.<sup>7</sup> Yet despite the weight of his own evidence, Gill nevertheless maintained the traditional view of the Tacitean Tiberius: Tacitus' account 'is based firmly on the idea that Tiberius' character did not change, degenerate or "collapse" but was simply concealed until all external restraints were removed and he felt he could reveal it'.<sup>8</sup>

Nevertheless, the effect of Gill's evidence, when coupled with that of Hands, has been to modify our picture of Tacitus' Tiberius in such a way that it seems worth considering whether or not the modification can be carried further. The crux of the issue of course lies in the last four words of the obituary: *suo tantum ingenio utebatur*. 'The obituary', Luce has said, 'is based upon the premise that Tiberius' character, his *ingenium*, did not change: that seems inescapable.'<sup>9</sup> Yet the escape can be effected.

## II

In the traditional interpretation of Tacitus' obituary it is axiomatic that *suo ingenio* means Tiberius' 'true' (Koestermann, Martin), 'real' (Martin, Gill) or 'innate' (Goodyear) character.<sup>10</sup> But if *ingenium* is exclusive to Tiberius in this way, why does

<sup>4</sup> Goodyear 38, 40.

<sup>5</sup> R. Martin, *Tacitus* (London, 1981) 105, 139–43; T. J. Luce, 'Tacitus' conception of historical change', *Past Perspectives: Studies in Greek and Roman Historical Writing*, ed. I. S. Moxon, J. D. Smart and A. J. Woodman (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 152–7.

<sup>6</sup> 'Postremo suo tantum ingenio utebatur', *CQ* 24 (1974), 312ff., esp. 316–17. He explains *dissimulatio* as one of Tacitus' rhetorical devices for blackening Tiberius' character. It should be added that since Tacitus has chosen to present Tiberius in tyrannical terms, his characteristics will be the exact opposites of those of the good man or ideal ruler (Cic. *Off.* 2.44 'nullum obscurum potest nec dictum eius esse nec factum'; Plin. *Pan.* 83.1 'nihil tectum, nihil occultum patitur').

<sup>7</sup> 'The Question of Character-development: Plutarch and Tacitus', *CQ* 33 (1983), 469ff., esp. 481–7. Further bibliography on the whole question will be found in most of the works mentioned.

<sup>8</sup> Gill 482, cf. 484 'It seems clear that Tacitus' account is intended to show Tiberius' character did not change during his rule but was only more clearly revealed'.

<sup>9</sup> Luce 155, cf. 156 'I do not doubt, let me reaffirm, that he viewed the emperor's *ingenium* as perverse and unchanging'.

<sup>10</sup> Koestermann *ad loc.* ('indem er seiner wahren Natur freien Lauf liess'), Martin 105, Gill 485 ('The emphasis in *suo ingenio* is on *real* character', his italics), Goodyear 39. In the commentary of A. Draeger and W. Heraeus<sup>7</sup> (Leipzig–Berlin, 1914) we read 'seitdem er...nur den Eingebungen seines Naturells folgte', and in that of K. Nipperdey and G. Andresen<sup>11</sup>

Tacitus qualify *suo* by the word *tantum* ('only')? On this view the adverb seems redundant and without point.<sup>11</sup> In my view, the clear implication of the *whole* phrase *suo tantum ingenio utebatur* is that during earlier periods of his life Tiberius had used the *ingenium* of *other people as well as his own*. That his words are capable of such a meaning seems clear from what he says about Otho at *H.* 1.90.2: 'ut in consiliis militiae Suetonio Paulino et Mario Celso, ita in rebus urbanis *Galeri Trachali ingenio Othonem uti credebatur*'. Obviously this passage has nothing to do with 'true' or 'real' character: Otho is relying on Trachalus for help. But since its wording is so similar to that of Tiberius' obituary, it is worth considering whether the implications of the phrase *ingenio uti* are the same in both places.

A key feature of Tiberius' principate, as it is presented by Tacitus and other writers, is the emperor's desire to associate others in the running of the empire. At the beginning of the *Annals* Tacitus depicts the new emperor as reluctant to assume the full burden of office by himself (1.11.1 'non ad *unum* omnia deferrent'): while Augustus had had the capability to tackle the empire single-handed ('*solam* diui Augusti *mentem* tantae molis capacem'),<sup>12</sup> Tiberius himself would rather embark on a partnership with the senate ('plures facilius munia rei publicae *sociatis laboribus* exsecuturum'). But the bewildered senators respond with a mixture of adulation and scepticism (1.12.1–3), leaving Tiberius to rely on others for help. His two sons Germanicus and Drusus were given political honours *pari passu* during the early years of the reign and are both described by Strabo around A.D. 18 as 'assistants to their father' in the government (6.4.2).<sup>13</sup> Though Germanicus died in 19, Drusus' role as *adiutor imperii* is implied early in 21 (3.31.2 'ut amoto patre Drusus munia consulatus solus impleret') and forms the background to an episode early in Book 4 (7.1–2). By 23 Drusus too was dead; but we know that at some point between 20 and 22 Sejanus began to be described as Tiberius' *adiutor* or *socius laborum*, a role which he fulfilled until his death in 31 (4.2.3, 7.1; Vell. 127.3, 128.4; Dio 57.19.7, 58.4.3).<sup>14</sup> Now Germanicus, Drusus and Sejanus are three of the individuals whom Tacitus uses in the obituary to designate the periods of Tiberius' principate; but he also mentions Livia, who might be thought disqualified from any such formal role on account of her sex. Yet Dio presents a graphic picture of Livia as Tiberius' partner (57.12.2–6), and Tacitus himself acknowledges it in his narrative of 26 (4.57.3): 'dominationis *sociam* aspernabatur neque depellere poterat, cum dominationem ipsam donum eius

(Berlin, 1915) 'sich aller Selbstbeherrschung entledigte, sich vollständig gehen liess'. The Loeb editor, J. Jackson (London–Cambridge, MA, 1937), renders 'follow his own bent'; the Penguin translator, M. Grant (rev. repr., Harmondsworth, 1974) has 'he expressed only his own personality'; in the Budé editions we have 'il se laissa aller au penchant de sa nature' (H. Goelzer, Paris, 1938) and 'il ne suivait plus que le penchant de sa nature' (P. Willeumier, Paris, 1975). U. Knoche, 'Zur Beurteilung des Kaisers Tiberius durch Tacitus', *Gymn.* 70 (1963), 213 says 'gibt sich der Kaiser, wie der Historiker es darstellt, seiner wahren Natur...hin' (cf. 216); R. Häussler, *Tacitus und das historische Bewusstsein* (Heidelberg, 1965), p. 322 collects various examples of (*suo*) *ingenio uti/uiuere* and *τῇ φύσει χρῆσθαι*.

<sup>11</sup> Its omission by Gill 485 (above, n. 10) is particularly striking.

<sup>12</sup> This interpretation of Tacitus' words allows *solam* a role in articulating the argument of the passage; the usual interpretation is 'only Augustus had a/the mind capable of such a great burden', although words for 'only' are regularly omitted in Latin (see e.g. Kenney on *Lucr.* 3.144). My general thesis receives better support from the former rendering (see *OLD solus* 4) but is in no way embarrassed by the latter.

<sup>13</sup> See, e.g., B. Levick, *Tiberius the Politician* (London, 1976), p. 148.

<sup>14</sup> These partnerships have been fully discussed by E. Kornemann, *Doppelprinzipat und Reichsteilung im Imperium Romanum* (Leipzig–Berlin, 1930) and P. Grenade, *Essai sur les origines du principat* (Paris, 1961).

accepisset.<sup>15</sup> In other words Tiberius was compelled to use Livia as his *socia* despite himself, a situation which continued until a further watershed in the reign was marked by her death in 29 (5.3.1).

Thus from the very start Tiberius was a lonely and unwilling ruler whose various partnerships, successively described by Tacitus in the second paragraph of the obituary, were repeatedly thwarted by death and treachery until, during his seclusion on Capri, Sejanus too was dead and Tiberius 'had only himself to rely on' (*suo tantum ingenio utebatur*). The picture is that of a man who was increasingly isolated until he became, as he described himself when at last denouncing Sejanus by letter to the senate, 'senex et solus' (Suet. *Tib.* 65.1).<sup>16</sup>

This interpretation of the obituary, and particularly of its last four words, explains the selection of each of the individuals mentioned there (including the pairing of Germanicus and Drusus, which scholars have often found strange),<sup>17</sup> accounts for the presence of the word *tantum*, and is supported by the parallel phraseology at *H.* 1.90.2. But it means, of course, that *ingenium* not only has nothing to do with 'true', 'real' or 'innate' character but has nothing to do with character at all. In the final paragraph of the obituary Tacitus is simply talking about Tiberius' *behaviour*,<sup>18</sup> which was unexceptionable before A.D. 14 and deplorable between 29 and 31.

It follows that we cannot adopt Koestermann's otherwise attractive proposal (above, p. 197) that at 6.48.2 and 51.3 Tacitus is presenting readers with alternative scenarios in terms of change: on this new interpretation of 6.51.3 there is no immutability with which the change at 6.48.2 can be compared. Yet this does not mean that there are no grounds at all for comparing the two passages. At 6.48.2 Arruntius' opening words *post tantam rerum experientiam* must be given a concessive force: 'despite his vast experience of affairs before A.D. 14, Tiberius was nevertheless overwhelmed by power and changed'. In other words Arruntius has addressed the puzzle which in Martin's view Tacitus himself was seeking to solve in his final paragraph: namely, 'How was it that a man who till his mid-fifties had been "excellent in both achievement and reputation" became at the end a cruel tyrant and licentious recluse?'<sup>19</sup> Yet this is not the case. In Tacitus' view there was no puzzle at all; but this emerges from the first paragraph of the obituary rather than the second.

The two paragraphs of the obituary are consciously juxtaposed and structurally complementary. There are five *casus ancipites* in the first, parallel to the five *tempora diuersa* in the second;<sup>20</sup> and just as the fifth *casus* comprises all but the initial *tempora*,

<sup>15</sup> See further N. Purcell, 'Livia and the Womanhood of Rome', *PCPS* 32 (1986), 78–105.

<sup>16</sup> Tiberius' *solitudo*, hinted at in A.D. 21 (3.31.2 'longam et continuam absentiam paulatim meditans'), is a motif of Book 4, being urged on him by Sejanus at 41.3 and twice emphasised at 67.1–2 when he withdraws to Capri. Apart from some Greek intellectuals, Tacitus names only Cocceius Nerva and Curtius Atticus as the emperor's companions on his departure from Rome in 26 (4.58.1): the former starved himself to death in 33 (6.26.1–2), the latter had already been eliminated by Sejanus at some earlier point (6.10.2). For Sejanus himself see below, pp. 204–5 and n. 40.

<sup>17</sup> E.g. Luce 153 'a peculiar conflation: three years and a whole book intervene between these two [deaths]'. Knoche 214–15 seems to me not to come to terms with the problem at all. See further below, p. 201 and n. 24.

<sup>18</sup> So too Luce 156, but he sticks to the traditional view of Tiberius' *ingenium* (above, n. 9). Tacitus regularly uses *mores* = 'behaviour' rather than 'character', e.g. 1.54.2, 4.13.2, 13.2.1, *H.* 4.44.2.

<sup>19</sup> Martin 142.

<sup>20</sup> The five *casus* are: (1) *proscriptum...secutus*, (2) *ubi domum...amore erat*, (3) *sed maxime...declinans*, (4) *dein...annis*, (5) *mox...obtinuit*. For the five *tempora* see above, n. 1.

so the initial *tempus* comprises all but the final *casus*. Clearly Tacitus is inviting readers to see one paragraph in terms of the other, and the picture presented in the first is crucial for our understanding of the second. In the first we are reminded that Tiberius was exiled as a child, was sidelined by Augustus on several separate occasions in favour of others, was deserted by a notoriously unfaithful wife, and was recalled from Rhodes only when all other potential successors were dead. Thus what Arruntius saw in *active* terms as *tanta rerum experientia* is seen by Tacitus himself in *passive* terms as a series of *casus* consisting of isolations and rejections.<sup>21</sup> None of them would have mattered (except, of course, to the man himself), if Tiberius had remained out of public life (*priatus*) or responsible to a superior ('uel in imperiis *sub* Augusto fuit');<sup>22</sup> but once he found himself in the position to *exercise* sole power, as Tacitus saw it ('*rei Romanae arbitrium...obtinuit*'), or of being *subjected* to the responsibility of power, as Arruntius put it ('*ui dominationis*'),<sup>23</sup> the *casus* of Tiberius' earlier life explained the diffidence with which he succeeded Augustus and which led him quite naturally to seek partnerships with the individuals mentioned in the second paragraph of the obituary. Yet here too (and these were the final ironies) he was in turn let down by Germanicus, Drusus and Sejanus, either through death or treachery or both; and the one partner whom he did not seek was his mother Livia, whom '*aspernabatur neque depellere poterat*' (4.57.3).

### III

By accounting for each of the individuals mentioned in the second paragraph of the obituary, the above interpretation explains both Tacitus' dating of the five *tempora diuersa* and why some *tempora* discount other potential turning-points in Tiberius' life (such as his departure from Rome in 26). One difficulty which earlier scholars appear to have encountered is that they have (so to speak) read the paragraph backwards, and inferred from its last two sections, where Sejanus seems described as a restraining influence (*dum Seianum... remoto... metu*), that the earlier sections too are 'signalled by the removal of one more person's restraining influence'.<sup>24</sup> Yet this is not the case. Germanicus, Drusus and Livia are presented in exclusively temporal terms (*donec...superfuere, incolumi matre*), and their roles, as we have seen, must be viewed logically in the light of the *preceding* paragraph, with which the statement about Augustus (*quoad...sub Augusto fuit*) forms the link.

It will perhaps be said, however, that this interpretation is itself open to the converse objection, namely, that while there may be nothing to prevent our understanding Germanicus, Drusus and Livia in the way proposed, Sejanus is presented in words which suggest that the reference to him at least should be understood differently. Yet not only is it arguable that scholars have misinterpreted those words (see section IV below) but this objection is forestalled by the place which Sejanus occupies in the obituary.

Scholars have been greatly troubled by the relationship between the years 23–9 as

<sup>21</sup> That is, Tacitus has (as often) employed two different *colores*; for their relevance to historiography see T. P. Wiseman, *Clio's Cosmetics* (Leicester, 1979), pp. 7–8, 26.

<sup>22</sup> For this use of *sub* with a person see C. O. Brink, *Horace on Poetry: Epistles Book II* (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 426–7.

<sup>23</sup> These two are of course the converse of the *colores* just mentioned.

<sup>24</sup> Martin 105, cf. Goodyear 39, Gill 482. Martin's later statement (141 'There is no indication in Tacitus or anywhere else that Tiberius' behaviour was motivated by regard or fear of either Germanicus or Drusus') is a good illustration of this retrospective inference: Tiberius' alleged regard or fear of the two men is nowhere mentioned in the obituary.

described in the obituary, where Sejanus does not figure at all, and as heralded at the start of the narrative of 23 itself, where Sejanus is described as the principal influence upon Tiberius: 'saeuire ipse aut saeuientibus uires praebere. initium et causa penes Aelium Seianum' (4.1.1). Martin, for example, sees 'a real difficulty' in the obituary at this point: 'the implication that Sejanus only began to exercise decisive influence upon Tiberius after Livia's death [in 29] is contrary to the assertions of 4.1.'<sup>25</sup> But that difficulty immediately disappears once it is realised that in the obituary Tacitus' purpose is not to list individuals who influenced Tiberius but rather to date the progressive deterioration of the increasingly isolated emperor by the successive deaths of his various partners. Since it was the death of Livia as *dominationis socia* which marked the end of the period 23–9, Tacitus had no need to mention Sejanus' name at all in connection with those years. Thus the absence of Sejanus from the obituary's account of 23–9 actually confirms that the primary explanation of his presence there in 29–31 is that he is the last of Tiberius' *socii* to die.

#### IV

The apparent difficulty over the presentation of Sejanus arises from Tacitus' characteristic habit of projecting different aspects of the same individual at different places in his narrative. Sometimes these aspects appear so different that Goodyear questioned whether 'we are entitled to find a self-consistent picture', suggesting that we should perhaps be prepared to tolerate 'plain inconsistency' in Tacitus' portrayal of certain individuals.<sup>26</sup> It seems to me, however, that, especially in the case of Tiberius, we must at least start from the assumption that Tacitus has not presented an inconsistent portrait. This does not mean that we should attempt to harmonise at all costs; rather, when considering passages which scholars have thought discrepant, we should take into account Tacitus' extraordinary facility at manipulating language and his well-known ability to create impressions which are often misleading. On this basis, therefore, we may consider the question of whether Tiberius' deterioration, as described in the three central periods of the obituary, agrees with what Tacitus says at certain key points in the narrative of the reign.<sup>27</sup>

During the years 14–23 Tiberius is said to have been 'occultum ac subdolum fingendis uirtutibus', a negative appraisal which seems at odds with the positive summary of the same years at 4.6.2–4, where Tacitus presents a creditable account of the first half of the reign, apart from the issue of *maiestas*. Yet since the obituary evidently charts a *progressive* deterioration, and since Tiberius is described in the *following* period (23–9) as 'idem inter bona malaque mixtus', the clear inference is that during 14–23 *bona* must at least have counterbalanced *mala* and (in the light of the extra evidence provided by 4.6.2–4, where *maiestas* alone was criticised) significantly outweighed them.<sup>28</sup> It is true that this is inferential and that Tacitus does

<sup>25</sup> Martin 141, cf. Luce 154 (below, n. 36).

<sup>26</sup> Goodyear 1.240–1.

<sup>27</sup> For the problem see, e.g., Martin 140–2. Knoche expressed the view (a) that the breaks between Books 3/4, 4/5 and 5/6 correspond to the three central turning-points of the obituary at A.D. 23, 29 and 31; and (b) that these breaks represent the 'Fortfall bestimmter Hemmungen' (216). While (a) is not in dispute, as will be seen, (b) founders both on Tacitus' reference to Germanicus and Drusus (above, p. 201 and n. 24), which Knoche has been compelled to fudge (above, p. 200 and n. 17), and on the absence of Sejanus from Tacitus' summary of 23–9 (see Section III above).

<sup>28</sup> This interpretation, if accepted, meets the complaint of Luce 153 that there is no difference between the two periods: 'concealment and artful simulation of virtue remained the same...The

not actually say as much; but neither does he not say it. Both the *suppressio ueri* and the following adjustment are typical of him.<sup>29</sup>

Conversely the appraisal of Tiberius during 23–9 as 'idem inter bona malaque mixtus' seems relatively mild when compared with the dramatic introduction to those same years at 4.1.1: '...cum repente turbare fortuna coepit, saeuire ipse aut saeuientibus uires praebere. initium et causa penes Aelium Seianum'. Yet at first sight this latter statement itself seems to square ill with the narrative of those years, which occupies the whole of Book 4. In that narrative *saeuitia* is not attributed to Tiberius personally until mid-way through the period, at the moment of his departure from Rome in 26: 'saeuitiam ac libidinem, cum factis promeret, locis occultantem' (57.1). Previously to this, Tiberius' interventions in trials, which presumably constitute a reasonable guide to his behaviour, resulted in *clementia* (4.30.1, 31.4) or even outright acquittal (4.31.1, 36.1) more often than the reverse (4.31.3, 42.3) – and the first of the last two cases is admitted by Tacitus himself to have been justified.<sup>30</sup> It is in fact other people than the emperor who display *saeuitia* in the years 23–6 (e.g. the younger Vibius Serenus, 'saeuitiae exemplum atrox' at 4.28.1).

On the evidence of the narrative of the years 23–6, therefore, Tacitus' statement at 4.1.1 is misleading if it is interpreted to mean that Tiberius himself began to turn savage 'suddenly' (*repente*) in 23. It seems rather to be the case that *aut* in that same statement has a corrective function ('or rather', 'or at least'), whereby Tacitus, after the typically damning impression created by the initial *repente...saeuire ipse*, adjusts his generalisation to make it harmonise with the evidence of the subsequent narrative.<sup>31</sup> The effect of this is that *aut* distinguishes two separate periods of time:<sup>32</sup> namely, the years 23–6, during which any savagery was the property of the *saeuientes*,<sup>33</sup> and 26 onwards, during which Tiberius too was *saeuus*.<sup>34</sup> Hence the obituary's appraisal of the emperor in 23–9 as 'idem inter bona malaque mixtus' is not unreasonable for a man who, on the evidence of the main narrative, lacked personal *saeuitia* during the first half of the period and who, on the above interpretation of the opening of Book 4, only 'began' to reveal it in the second half (cf. 4.1.1 *coepit*).<sup>35</sup>

obituary says, in effect, that Tiberius was essentially the same under Germanicus, Drusus and Livia: that is, from the start of the *Annals* to the beginning of the fifth book.'

<sup>29</sup> For Tacitus' use of 'self-correction' (*reprehensio*) see Luce 154–5.

<sup>30</sup> Any assessment of the remaining cases during this period must take into account the fact that on five other occasions there were acquittals or the charges were dismissed (4.13.2, 29.1, 36.3) and that four of the convictions involved adulterous couples (4.42.3, 52.3). Even the savaging of a suicide's property is obliquely expressed (20.1 'saeuitum tamen in bona'), although it admittedly evokes from Tacitus the comment 'ea prima Tiberio erga pecuniam alienam diligentia fuit'.

<sup>31</sup> For this use of *aut* see OLD s.v. 6b; the corrective function of the word at 4.1.1 is in my view supported by the paronomasia *saeuire...saeuientibus*. The technique would be typical of Tacitus (above, n. 29).

<sup>32</sup> In his note on Tacitus' use of *aut* Goodyear rightly comments that 'the shade of meaning varies from passage to passage' (1.8.2n.).

<sup>33</sup> The *saeuientes* are primarily the *delatores* and/or Sejanus' henchmen. Whether they include Sejanus himself depends upon whether one thinks he is able simultaneously to be, as Tacitus says he is, their *initium et causa*.

<sup>34</sup> There is nothing unusual in the fact that these two periods correspond to the programmatic statement at 4.1.1 in reverse order. The Odyssean and Iliadic halves of the *Aeneid* similarly correspond to the first two words of the epic in reverse order (see, e.g., A. Bloch, 'Arma virumque als heroisches Leitmotiv', *MH* 27 (1970), 207); and analogous devices are employed by Thucydides at more than one point in his first book.

<sup>35</sup> It is worth noting that although Tacitus has often implied Tiberius' *saeuitia* before now (e.g.

In the years 29–31 Tiberius is described in the obituary as ‘*intestabilis saeuitia sed obiectis libidinibus dum Seianum dilexit timuit*’, which is interpreted by scholars to mean that Sejanus acted as ‘a restraining influence on the emperor’.<sup>36</sup> If that interpretation is correct, there is a striking conflict with the main narrative. On the one hand it is to be inferred from 4.1.1 and 57.1, as we have just seen, that Sejanus stimulated (rather than restrained) Tiberius’ incipient *saeuitia* from 26 onwards. On the other hand we are told at 5.3.1 that after Livia’s death in 29 there began ‘*praeupta iam et urgens dominatio*’ and that both Tiberius and Sejanus ‘*uelut frenis exsoluti proruperunt*’ and launched an attack on Agrippina and Nero; and since the latter had been Sejanus’ (rather than Tiberius’) intended victims since early in Book 4 (cf. 12.1–4, 15.3), it follows that at the start of Book 5 Sejanus’ stimulation of Tiberius’ *saeuitia* has now become even more effective.<sup>37</sup> Yet so striking a conflict with the obituary’s account of these years should perhaps make us question whether the traditional interpretation of Sejanus as a restraining influence is correct after all.

The interrelationship between the last two periods of Tiberius’ life, as described in the obituary (29–31 and 31–7), has long been recognised by scholars. In the penultimate period Tiberius was ‘*intestabilis saeuitia sed obiectis libidinibus*’, while in the final period he ‘*in scelera simul ac dedecora prorupit*’. In other words, although his criminal cruelty remained constant throughout both periods, the difference between them is that in the former period Tiberius concealed the sexual excesses which he revealed in the latter.<sup>38</sup> But Sejanus’ influence is not limited to his being responsible for this concealment. What Tacitus says is that in 29–31 Tiberius ‘*Seianum dilexit timuit*’, from which I infer that *dilexit* and *timuit* correspond to *saeuitia* and *libidinibus* in exactly the same way as do *scelera* and *dedecora*. In other words, Tiberius’ *affection* for Sejanus fostered his *saeuitia*, while his *fear* of him forced a cover-up of his *libidines*.<sup>39</sup> Hence in the obituary Sejanus, while a restraining

1.4.3–5, quoted on p. 205), his authorial imputations are restricted to very rare and specific occasions (e.g. 1.53.3).

<sup>36</sup> Martin 139, cf. Luce 154 ‘The role that Sejanus plays in the fourth stage of the obituary is also odd... This is the only place in the obituary in which Sejanus appears, and... his presence somehow prevented Tiberius’ loathsome character from its full emergence.’

<sup>37</sup> The context at 5.3.1 is as follows: ‘*nam incolumi Augusta erat adhuc perfugium, quia Tiberio inueteratum erga matrem obsequium neque Seianus audebat auctoritati parentis antire; tunc uelut frenis exsoluti proruperunt, missaeque in Agrippinam ac Neronem litterae quas pridem allatas et cohibitas ab Augusta credidit uulgas.*’ It is important to be clear (a) that this is the only certain passage in Tacitus’ main narrative where the idea of a restraining influence is expressed, (b) that the restraint is not exclusive to Tiberius (as scholars often seem to assume) but is applicable to Sejanus as well. In my view the second of these points detracts from the value of 5.3.1 as a support for the traditional view of the obituary. But, however that may be, it should be noted that the passage does not contradict my own earlier argument that the persons mentioned in the obituary, including Livia (cf. 4.57.3), had been collaborators of Tiberius and are presented as such in the obituary: 5.3.1 is typical of Tacitus (see above, p. 202) in that it simply reveals a different aspect of Livia from that portrayed in the obituary. The passage therefore resembles 4.1.1 on Sejanus as *initium et causa* and 4.6.2–4 on the general excellence of the years 14–23 (above, pp. 202–203: all three passages provide information which supplements but does not contradict statements made in the obituary).

<sup>38</sup> See, e.g., Koestermann *ad loc.* Similarly *obiectis* and *timuit* in the penultimate sentence are picked up by *pudore* and *metu* respectively in the final one.

<sup>39</sup> In the same way at 1.59.1 (‘*ut quibusque bellum inuitis aut cupientibus erat, spe uel dolore accipitur*’) *inuitis* and *cupientibus* correspond to *dolore* and *spe* respectively; or at *H.* 2.40.3 (‘*ut cuique audacia uel formido, in primam postremamue aciem prorumpabant aut relabebantur*’) *audacia* and *formido* correspond to *primam* and *postremam* etc. Martin 141 takes *dilexit* and *timuit* chronologically: ‘At what point Tiberius ceased to love Sejanus and began to fear him is not clear.’



influence on Tiberius' sexual habits during 29–31, is also a stimulating influence on his criminal cruelty during the same period.<sup>40</sup> On this interpretation there is no conflict with the main narrative at all.

It may be objected that all this is simply playing with words; but such an objection is hardly telling in the study of Tacitus' *Annals*, in which 'there are many occasions when we have to read him very closely indeed to perceive that he has in fact denied what one thought he had said'.<sup>41</sup> It will not be forgotten that in the obituary he also describes Tiberius' life before A.D. 14 as *egregium*, which is not at all the impression given of the same period at 1.4.3–5: 'multaque indicia saevitiae, quamquam premantur, erumpere'.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> It is clear that Sejanus could not have exercised such influence if he had not been Tiberius' *socius laborum*. This is particularly true of the period after Tiberius had settled on Capri in 26, since it was by virtue of his position that Sejanus then realised his ambition of controlling the access of others to the emperor while at the same time maintaining regular access himself (4.41.2, 67.3, 71.3, Dio 58.4.9). But the same is also true of the earlier years, during which he is described by Tacitus as a man who capitalised on his role as *socius laborum*, pretending to help the emperor while all the time furthering his own aims through a cruel series of trials and assassinations. This indeed is one of the principal themes of Book 4 as a whole, and the statement at 4.59.2 is as good a summary of the position as any: 'quamquam exitiosa suaderet, ut non sui anxius cum fide audiebatur.' Sejanus' manipulation of Tiberius was an intrinsic element of his role as *socius laborum*, a role which he had indeed manipulated Tiberius into bestowing in the first place. Thus it cannot be objected that Sejanus' presentation in the obituary conflicts with the explanation of his presence there as Tiberius' *socius* or *adiutor* (above, p. 202).

<sup>41</sup> Irving Kristol, *Encounter* 6 (May 1956), 86.

<sup>42</sup> Despite Goodyear on 1.4.1 there is no actual conflict between these two passages since 1.4.3–5 is in *oratio obliqua* (nor, perhaps surprisingly, is this one of those places in Tacitus where it is not immediately obvious whether he is speaking *in propria persona* or not).