

PARENTHESIS IN TACITUS

The object of this article is twofold: to argue briefly that Tacitus employed parenthesis more frequently than has hitherto been allowed and to show how a knowledge of Tacitus' parenthetical practice can help explain two disputed passages.

Firstly, I would like to refer to a few typical passages in Tacitus where parenthesis clearly occurs.

Ann. 1.53.3-4¹): nec is libidini finis: traditam Tiberio pervicax adulter contumacia et odiis in maritum accendebat; litteraeque, quas Iulia patri Augusto cum insectatione Tiberii scripsit, a Graccho compositae credebantur. igitur amotus Cercinam, Africi maris insulam, quattuordecim annis exilium toleravit.

Here *igitur* refers not to what directly precedes it, viz. *litteraeque ... credebantur*, which hardly gives the reason for Gracchus' *deportatio in insulam*, but back to *traditam ... accendebat. litteraeque ... credebantur* is in fact a parenthesis.

Ann. 1.70.2 ff.: Vitellius primum iter sicca humo aut modice adlabente aestu quietum habuit; mox impulsu aquilonis, simul sidere aequinoctii, quo maxime tumescit Oceanus, rapi agique agmen. et opplebantur terrae: eadem freto litori campis facies, neque discerni poterant incerta ab solidis, brevia a profundis. sternuntur fluctibus, hauriuntur gurgitibus; iumenta, sarcinae, corpora exanima interfluunt occursant. permiscentur inter se manipuli, modo pectore, modo ore tenus extantes, aliquando subtracto solo disiecti aut obruti.

The narrative is moving forward in asyndeton. *et ... profundis* disturbs the progression by a movement sideways to describe the scene, and so is another parenthesis. The *et* introduces what is linguistically an addition.

Similar parentheses occur frequently, for instance:

Ann. 1.5.1 ff. *quippe ... fuisset* is a parenthesis, and the narrative is resumed with *ut cumque se ea res habuit*.

Ann. 1.6.1 ff. *multa ... festinavisse* is a parenthesis containing the author's own speculations which interrupts the run of the narrative from *explevisset* to *nuntianti*.

¹) All references are to Professor Koestermann's Teubner text.

Ann. 1.13.1 ff. *etiam Q. Haterius ... perstrinxere* picks up *L. Arruntius ... offendit. quippe ... circumventi sunt* is a parenthetical anecdote about Augustus' discussion of the *capaces imperii*.

Ann. 1.33.1 ff. *accendebant muliebres offensiones* refers back to *anxius occultis ... odiis. quippe ... obscuris* is a parenthesis.

Ann. 1.74.1 ff. *nam ... invenere* is a parenthetical description of the *delator*. The narrative of events is resumed with *sed*.

Ann. 3.6.3. *quia ... suberat* is again the author's parenthetical comment.

I would now like to suggest that parenthesis should be invoked to explain a passage to which Professor Syme²⁾ has taken exception.

causam abscessus quamquam secutus plurimos auctorum ad Seiani artes rettuli, quia tamen caede eius patrata sex postea annos pari secreto coniunxit, plerumque permoveor, num ad ipsum referri verius sit, saevitiam ac libidinem, cum factis praeferret, locis occultantem. erant qui crederent in senectute corporis quoque habitum pudori fuisse: quippe illi praegracilis et incurva proceritas, nudus capillo vertex, ulcerosa facies ac plerumque medicaminibus interstincta; et Rhodi secreto vitare coetus, recondere voluptates insuerat.

Ann. 4.57.1-2.

Tacitus is here commenting in his own person. Professor Syme is indeed right in pointing out that the reference to pleasures on Rhodes ought, in strict logic, to follow immediately upon the mention of *saevitia* and *libido*.

But his contention that the reference to Tiberius' retirement to Rhodes is a later annotation, imperfectly accommodated to its context, is unnecessary, as is Mr. Balsdon's³⁾ view that the manuscript order has become dislocated. The intervening remarks, *erant ... interstincta*, form a parenthesis similar to the ones illustrated above. The sequence of thought, from *locis occultantem* to *et Rhodi*, affords no problems. Traces of Tiberius' later behaviour were already to be seen at Rhodes, where he had been accustomed to avoid company and take his pleasures in secret. The statement about Rhodes is circumstantial evidence adduced in support of Tacitus' interpretation of the Emperor's retirement, while *erant ... interstincta* is a parenthesis in which

2) R. Syme, *Tacitus*, Oxford, 1958, Vol. II, pp. 695-6.

3) *CR* 61 (1947) 44f.

Tacitus offers possible additional evidence. Thus Professor Syme's apparent rupture of sequence was created⁴).

But failure to see parenthesis has given rise to a far more serious misunderstanding of a passage in the *Agricola*.

finis vitae eius nobis luctuosus, amicis tristis, extraneis etiam ignotisque non sine cura fuit. vulgus quoque et hic aliud agens populus et ventitavere ad domum et per fora et circulos locuti sunt; nec quisquam audita morte Agricolae aut laetatus est aut statim oblitus. et augebat miserationem constans rumor veneno interceptum: nobis nihil comperti adfirmare ausim. ceterum per omnem valetudinem eius crebrius quam ex more principatus per nuntios visentis et libertorum primi et medicorum intimi venire, sive cura illud sive inquisitio erat. supremo quidem die momenta ipsa deficientis per dispositos cursores nuntiata constabat, nullo credente sic accelerari quae tristis audiret. speciem tamen doloris animi ore vultuque prae se tulit, securus iam odii et qui facilius dissimularet gaudium quam metum. satis constabat lecto testamento Agricolae, quo coheredem optima uxori et piissimae filiae Domitianum scripsit, laetatum eum velut honore iudicioque. tam caeca et corrupta mens assiduis adulationibus erat, ut nesciret a bono patre non scribi heredem nisi malum principem.

Agricola 43.

It has normally been assumed⁵) that with *ceterum* Tacitus passes on to known facts alleged to give some support to the

4) It is of course true that Professor Syme's arguments here are part of a wider discussion in which he suggests that the importance of the Rhodian episode was for Tacitus only an afterthought, and concludes that both this reference to Rhodes, and the one at Ann. 1. 4. 3 ff., are later additions. But, in the latter passage, the sequence of thought is, as Professor Goodyear (*The Annals of Tacitus*, Cambridge, 1972, Vol. I, ad loc.) has seen, perfectly logical and chronological.

It is also the case that Tiberius' behaviour on Rhodes is not alluded to in his obituary at Ann. 6. 51, but this is not surprising or inconsistent. The essentially negative quality of the Rhodian interlude is quite irrelevant to any over-all appraisal of the events of Tiberius' life, *casus ... incipientes*, and his character, *morum ... tempora*. Artistic considerations may also have been influential. Within the section *morum ... tempora* Tacitus traces a progressive decline in Tiberius from *egregium vita famaue* to *in scelera simul ac dedecora prorupit*. The historian posits a series of checks and balances in the Emperor's nature, each one weaker than the last, until finally *suo tantum ingenio utebatur*. Mention of Rhodes would disrupt this sequence.

5) E.g. R.M. Ogilvie and I. Richmond (edd.), *De Vita Agricolae*, Oxford, 1967, ad loc.

rumour that Domitian poisoned Agricola, and the citation of the rumour has often been used as evidence of Tacitus' irresponsibility in this area⁶). This seems to me both unlikely and unfair. The sentence, *et augebat ... ausim*, is a parenthesis and *ceterum* means 'however that may be', as often⁷). On this interpretation, Tacitus' reference to the rumour is historically justifiable in that it reveals the emotion and uncertainty that surrounded Agricola's death, and the qualified and parenthetical manner of its presentation indicates admirable restraint on the part of a devoted and affectionate son-in-law. Of course, the details that Tacitus reports are perfectly consistent with the theory that Domitian had poisoned Agricola. However, *ceterum ... metum* is intended not to adduce evidence in support of the poisoning theory but to illustrate Domitian's maudlin curiosity in Agricola's last hours, and his hypocritical behaviour at his death: *sive cura illud sive inquisitio erat*. It is the depth of his hatred and the extent of his envy which is at issue: *securus iam odii et qui facilius dissimularet gaudium quam metum*. In Tacitus' eyes, whether or not Domitian poisoned Agricola is irrelevant to his guilt. He had certainly wished him dead, and so is morally culpable. The rumour is mentioned merely as evidence for the attitude of contemporary witnesses⁸).

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6) E.g. F.R.D. Goodyear, *Tacitus* (Greece and Rome New Surveys in the Classics No. 4), Oxford, 1970, p. 6.

7) Cf. A. Gerber and A. Greef, *Lexicon Taciteum*, s.v. *ceterum* II. A.a.

8) It would be neat to accept, with Professor Koestermann in his Teubner text, Wex's emendation *et* (derived from the *est* of the manuscripts) to introduce the parenthesis, a common usage, cf. Ann. 1. 70. 2ff., and *Oxford Latin Dictionary* s.v. *et* 2. b. But the argument in no way depends upon this.

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