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A narratological reading of Tacitus' historical works

Summary

Three 20th-century literary approaches have had a marked influence on the reception of Tacitus' historical works. The historical and textual foci of the *geistesgeschichtliche* and New Critical approaches, respectively, have now been replaced by reader-response criticism which acknowledges the role of the reader in the process of interpretation. Narratology, which developed from structuralist roots, is generally regarded as a rigid approach to narrative texts. In this article some examples taken from a narratological analysis of Tacitus' *Historiae* I, 1-49 serve to illustrate how this method can lead to a reading which affords the reader a creative role. The following narratological aspects are discussed: textual ordering, duration, frequency, characters, space and focalisation.

'n Narratologiese lesing van Tacitus se historiese werke

Drie 20ste-eeuse literêre beskouinge het 'n besliste invloed gehad op die resepsie van Tacitus se historiese werke. Die historiese ingesteldheid van die *geistesgeschichtliche* benadering en die tekstuele fokus wat kenmerkend was van die *New Criticism*, word nou vervang deur kritiek waarin die rol van die leser in die proses van interpretasie erken word. Narratologie wat uit 'n strukturalistiese tradisie ontstaan het, word gewoonlik as 'n rigiede benadering tot 'n teks beskou. In hierdie artikel word aan die hand van enkele voorbeelde, gehaal uit Tacitus se *Historiae* I, 1-49 geïllustreer hoe hierdie metode wel kan lei tot 'n analise wat aan die leser 'n kreatiewe rol toeken. Die volgende narratologiese aspekte word behandel: tekstuele ordening, duur, frekwensie, karakters, ruimte en fokalisasie.

Cornelius Tacitus must have been born about AD 55. His public career began under Vespasian and was advanced by Titus and Domitian. He must therefore have been about fourteen in the grim "Year of the Four Emperors" and in his prime when he endured the tyranny of Domitian, an experience which doubtless accounts for the bitter tone of his writing. The *Historiae*, his first major historical work, appears to have been published in full by AD 109. This work covered the period from the death of Nero to the death of Domitian, ie AD 68-96, but only Books I-IV and part of V have survived. In the *Historiae* he is writing about his own times and must have used primary sources for most of the period. The first forty-nine chapters of the *Historiae*, which form the subject of the brief analysis undertaken in this study, cover the short reign and death of the emperor Galba. The approach and method used in this analysis, ie a reception-orientated narratological reading of the text, is not commonly used by traditional classicists and some explanatory and clarifying notes are thus in order.

Three approaches to literary works and their influence on Tacitean scholarship

Three basic approaches to literary works have been in vogue successively in European and American literary scholarship since the late 19th century. These literary 'fashions' have had a marked influence on the reception of Tacitus' historical works.

The first of these, the so-called *geistesgeschichtliche* approach, developed under the influence of realism and positivism during the 19th and early 20th centuries. The historical works of Tacitus were seen as historical documents and studied as a product of the author and his times. The researcher aimed at obtaining objective results and the meaning of the text was regarded as fixed and determined. These historical researchers were often disappointed in Tacitus' degree of reliability and failed to find a clearcut picture of the times he described.¹

1 Wellesley (1954: 31-2) compares the Lyon tablet with Tacitus' account of Claudius's speech and comes to the following unflattering conclusion: "He has turned a sound argument into an empty truism; he has sacrificed meaning to form. He is himself muddled and he muddles his reader." Cf also Reid (1921: 194-6), Jerome 1912 & 1923 (especially chapters 15 and 17), Marsh 1928 & 1931 and Baldwin 1974.

The American New Criticism, English Practical Criticism, Russian Formalism and German *werkimmanente Methode* which were in vogue from 1900 to 1950 went to the other extreme of a totally a-historical approach. They regarded the text as an autonomous entity, and the focus shifted to the text as a work of art. The influence on Tacitus research can be seen in studies which concentrate on the theme or atmosphere of a text, or where the accent falls on the artful combination of form and content. Researchers began to let the text 'speak for itself'. The effect of New Criticism can be seen in the careful avoidance of any reference to Tacitus' political, religious or philosophical background and the limiting of biographical details to the bare minimum. These writers, preferring to focus on dramatic, rhetorical or literary aspects of the text and thereby allowing for artistic quality in Tacitus' works, were kinder in their judgement than those with a purely historical outlook.

The most recent of literary influences, reception aesthetics, became prominent in Germany in the late sixties. Instead of viewing the text as a historical document to which the author and his views were regarded as central, or placing the accent on the text as the New Critics did, reception theory accords the reader of the text his or her proper place. Recent years have seen the publication of some articles on Tacitus which use this approach. Works such as Plass 1988, Segal 1973, Williams 1990(a) and 1990(b) and Henderson 1990 are all based on the important role which the reader plays in the interpretation of textual information.

According to reception theory, the text cannot be separated from its cultural context, thus not only the artistic code, but also the codes of the author, period and genre are researched. The reader's knowledge of these codes forms the basis of his expectations of the text and enables him to make sense of it. The reader plays an active part in the creation of the text and is invited to reconstruct the system of structures in the text.² This implies that his interpretation of the text is indefinite, creative and individual.³ Active involvement of the recipient in the interpretation of a

2 Cf Eco (1979: 10): "the text is nothing else but the semantic-pragmatic production of its own Model Reader."

3 "As he reacts to the play of stimuli and his own response to their patterning, the individual addressee is bound to supply his own existential credentials, the sense conditioning which is peculiarly his own, a defined culture, a set of tastes, personal inclinations, and prejudices. Thus his comprehension of the original artefact is always modified by his particular and individual perspective. In fact, the form of the

text is not an idea that was foreign in antiquity and this is borne out, for example, by opinions expressed in the work of Quintilian (*Inst Or* 9.2.65).

Narratology and reception aesthetics

The strong accent on communication which is now in vogue has also had an effect on structuralist and semiotic approaches. In literary methodology increasing attention is devoted to the recipient of the text. An illustration of this fact is the work of the semiotician, Umberto Eco, and his theory of the model reader and "open" and "closed" texts (cf Eco 1979). The short analysis which follows will illustrate how narratology, with its structuralist origin,⁴ can likewise be reconciled with the basic principles of reception theory. Narratology, which can be described as the theory, discourse or critique of narration, provides a descriptive model for narrative texts. After identifying and describing narrative elements and aspects, the results obtained from the analysis have to be interpreted. Interpretation entails the deduction of meaning and function from the data obtained from the description. The subjective element which is present in the interpretation process provides the link with reception. The aesthetic quality of the text lies in this receptive interpretation of the text.

In the analysis, data obtained from a narratological description of the first forty-nine chapters of Tacitus' *Historiae* will be interpreted. This interpretation will lead to an individual and therefore indefinite reading which demands active participation and creativity on the part of the

work of art gains its aesthetic validity precisely in proportion to the number of different resonances and echoes without impairing its original essence [...] A work of art, therefore, is a complete and closed form in its uniqueness as a balanced organic whole, while at the same time constituting an open product on account of its susceptibility to countless different interpretations which do not impinge on its unadulterable specificity" (Eco 1979: 49).

⁴ Structuralism had its origin in the discipline of linguistics, and more specifically the structuralist linguistics in the work of Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913). The concept of language as a system of signs was further expanded and developed into the discipline of semiotics with the American C S Peirce (1839-1914) as the founder. In literary critique semiotics has to do with the whole signifying system of a text and the conventions which we have to understand in order to be able to read and interpret the text. The first structuralistic analysis of a narrative was undertaken by Claude Levi-Strauss (1908-). Thus narratology, which can be described as the theory of narration, was born. Greimas and Genette refined the work of Levi-Strauss and made it more applicable and practical.

reader. Such a reading presupposes that the written text has another dimension to it which demands from the reader the construction of the 'unwritten' text.⁵ The effect of rhetoric on ancient historiography is attested so well that there can be little doubt that it was written with an eye to 'literary entertainment' rather than 'historical veracity'. It is now realised that Greek and Roman historians were allowed a latitude of imaginative resourcefulness and the hold which "a dull (pre-re-rhetorised) piety toward historical veracity" (Henderson 1990: 196 n 16) once had on Tacitean scholarship is slowly becoming weaker.

Tacitus' *Historiae* I, 1-49: some narrative aspects

Bal (1980: 16-7) distinguishes between elements and aspects of a text. The story consists of four elements, ie the events, actors, place and time. Through the process of narration the story is transformed into a text with individual characteristics. These individual characteristics are called aspects of the text and include order, duration, frequency, characters, space and focalisation. In the analysis which follows, an example of each of these aspects, taken from the text, will serve to illustrate the textual approach described above.

The 'story' of the first forty-nine chapters of the *Historiae* can be summarised as follows:

- June 9, 68: Nero is murdered. Galba accepts the title of Caesar and departs for Rome. Nymphidius incites the praetorians against Galba. His failure and death.
- October 68: Galba enters Rome. The death of Clodius Macer and Fonteius Capito follows.
- December 68: Vitellius is sent to succeed Capito in Lower Germany.
- January 1, 69: The legions of Upper Germany revolt.
- January 2: Vitellius is acknowledged in Lower Germany.
- January 3: Vitellius is acknowledged in Upper Germany.
- Some days later: news about the defection reaches Rome.

⁵ It is true that history is a narrative discourse with different rules from those that govern fiction, in as much as events are not realised in and through the text but find their origin in reality. History, however, is generally presented or represented in narrative form, which is the only prerequisite for a narratological analysis. Furthermore, it is now widely accepted that an uncoloured or so-called objective account of events is not attainable.

January 10: Galba announces the adoption of Piso.

January 15: Otho is saluted as emperor near the temple of Saturn. News of the defection reaches Galba and his associates. Piso addresses the palace guard. A rumour to the effect that Otho has been murdered is delivered to the palace. Galba decides to leave the palace. Otho delivers an inflammatory speech before the praetorians. The armoury is opened and the soldiers armed. Galba is thrown from his chair. Galba, Piso and Vinus are murdered.

Order

Textual ordering means that the events are presented in a specific order, in a new combination, which is not necessarily chronological or causal. Thus, the *Historiae* does not begin with the death of Nero, as the 'story' does, but on January 1 of the year 69.⁶ The reader has to ask himself what effect the change of order has on the narration. This starting point immediately establishes the work as one written in the great annalistic tradition of serious historiography in the form of annual reports. The immediate, sharp beginning also reminds one of the beginning of Sallust's greatest work. By choosing January 1 of 69 the element of drama is heightened. Within only fifteen days the emperor, Galba, is murdered, Otho is appointed as his successor, and Vitellius is proclaimed emperor by the troops. The obvious objection to this choice of starting point is that it necessitates too many references to the happenings of 68. Without such references and explanations the events of 69 seem unmotivated. This problem is overcome with great skill. Chapters 4 to 11 give an overview of conditions in the city and empire at the beginning of 69, providing an effective substitute for a boring chronological report of the happenings of 68. This compact summary is quite unique in Roman historiography (Syme 1958: 147). The words *Initium mihi operis Servius Galba iterum Titus Vinus consules erunt*⁷ (My work will begin with the consulship of Servius Galba (his second) and Titus Vinus) lead the reader to believe

that this is the point at which the narration will start. This expectation is only fulfilled eleven chapters later, but the attention is held throughout the introductory chapters until the narrative indeed commences with words which strongly recall those of chapter 1. Now that the true condition of every part of the empire has been sketched, the addition of an ominous prophecy of doom is well justified: *Hic fuit rerum Romanorum status, cum Servius Galba iterum Titus Vinus consules inchoavere annum sibi ultimum, rei publicae prope supremum* (I,11).⁸

Duration

Duration has to do with the relation between duration in the story (measured in minutes, hours and days) and the volume of text devoted to it (lines and pages). A comparison between story time and lines of text reveals that two events are afforded prominence. The adoption of Piso takes up seven chapters (12-19) while six chapters are devoted to the description of Otho's actions and plans to become the emperor (23-28). All other events follow in quick succession and are crammed into chapters 34 to 47. This obvious variation in tempo calls for interpretation.

Considerable attention is devoted to the adoption of the best qualified and most competent person as emperor and, through skilful narration, this principle is promoted as sound and just. The second important fact which is brought home to the reader is that the adoption of the most capable candidate is to no avail when an individual with the typical licentiousness and selfish motives of an Otho obtains the support of the venal soldiers. Political judgment now transpires from the text: the mercenary attitude of the military determines the outcome of events. This is the real reason for the failure of Galba's honourable and carefully contemplated plan. The flood of violence and murder which inevitably follows such a take-over is illustrated by the quick succession of events described in chapters 34 to 47.

6 For a discussion of the starting date of the *Historiae* cf Hainsworth 1964; Shotter 1967; Syme 1958:145; Heubner 1963: 10.

7 English translations are those of Clifford Moore in the *The Loeb Classical Library* (1952).

8 This was the condition of the Roman state when Servius Galba, chosen consul for the second time, and his colleague Titus Vinus entered upon the year that was to be for Galba his last and for the state almost the end.

Frequency

The term frequency denotes the relation between the number of times an event occurs in the story and the number of times it is narrated (or mentioned) in the text (Rimmon-Kenan 1983: 56). Galba's refusal to pay out the donative to the soldiers provides a good example. This fact is mentioned for the first time in chapter 5 to explain the city soldiers' dissatisfaction.⁹ When Galba announces the adoption of Piso (chapter 18), the soldiers' bad mood is once again ascribed to Galba's reluctance to pay out the donative. In chapter 25 Otho's associates exploit this sign of Galba's meanness when they incite the soldiers to riot. Otho takes advantage of Galba's mistake to justify the rebellion (chapter 37). One report of Galba's last moments (that of his enemies) reads that he pleaded for mercy so that he could have time to pay out the donative (chapter 40).

What can the reader infer from the frequency with which this incident is related? The event gains prominence and becomes a constant reminder of the danger inherent in a dissatisfied military corps. Further significance is added when the context in which this fact is mentioned is taken into consideration. Galba's refusal to pay out the money is always mentioned in connection with the most crucial moments of his regime: his accession to the throne, the adoption of Piso and Otho's rebellion. When these events offer alternative possibilities, the soldiers' discontent stemming from their avarice, turns the scale — to Galba's detriment. The reader has to conclude that Galba's failure to comply with the soldiers' wishes was the real reason for his downfall. This confirms previous conclusions that the true source of power lay in the camp of the soldiers who were motivated by a venal mentality.

Character

A character takes shape as the reader assembles all the indicators of character-traits distributed throughout the text (Rimmon-Kenan 1983: 59 ff). The different traits combine to form a character.

9 At this stage, before Galba's entrance into the city, the soldiers could not yet have known that he did not intend meeting their demands. The incident was taken from its chronological position and placed here as one of the reasons for the soldiers' hostility before Galba's arrival. The *order* has been changed and historical facts slightly distorted to add to the creation of an atmosphere of impending doom.

Two types of textual indicators can be distinguished: direct definition and indirect presentation. In the case of direct definition the character-trait is mentioned specifically by an adjective, an abstract noun or other noun. The following citations from the text can be categorised as providing direct definition of the character of the emperor Galba:

- Chapter 5: ... *nec deerant sermones senium atque avaritiam Galbae increpantium* (and there were plenty of men to comment unfavourably on Galba's age and greed)
severitas (strictness)
- Chapter 7: *mobilitate ingenii* (natural lack of decision)
invisio (hated)
- Chapter 12: *facilitas* (amiability which increased the cupidity of his friends)
infirmitas et credulum (infirm and confiding)
- Chapter 18: *parci senis* (stingy old man)
antiquus rigor (old-fashioned strictness)
nimia severitas (excessive severity)
- Chapter 35: *minantibus intrepidus* (before threats he was unterrified)
adversus blandientes incorruptus (incorruptible against flattery)
- Chapter 49: *medium ingenium* (of mediocre genius)
pecuniae alienae non adpetens, suae parcus, publicae avarus (he was not greedy for another's property; he was frugal with his own, stingy with the state's)
amicorum libertorumque, ubi in bonos incidisset, sine reprehensione patiens, si mali forent, usque ad culpam ignarus (kindly and complacent toward friends and freedmen, if he found them honest; if they were dishonest, he was blind even to a fault)
segnitia (indolence)

What image does the reader build up from these direct character indicators? Galba's character-traits are in stark contrast with one another. He is portrayed as both the strict, incorruptible, thrifty militarist of the old school and the fickle, weak emperor who is exploited by his freedmen.

This impression created by direct definition is strengthened by indirect presentation of Galba's character. Indirect presentation displays and illustrates a character-trait rather than naming it directly. A character's actions,

speech, external appearance and environment are all indications of his character traits.

Actions

Galba chose the strict, old-fashioned Piso as his successor. He orders that those who benefited under Nero's rule should be summoned and he dismisses corrupt officials (chapter 20). He takes great pains to care for the German troops which were sent to Alexandria by Nero and returned sick from the long voyage (chapter 31). He also earns a splendid reputation on the battlefield and manages his province with fairness and moderation (chapter 49). In spite of unfavourable omens he fearlessly goes to the camp to announce the adoption. These actions indicate integrity, incorruptibility, courage and compassion. In contrast, Galba's march to the city is marked by cruelty (chapter 6). Under his reign everything is for sale and he passively stands by as his freedmen and slaves take over (chapter 7). These actions show weakness and corruptibility. His indecision is revealed as he appoints and excuses, with *foeda inconstantia* (chapter 19), the legates to announce the adoption to the legions. Again, when a decision has to be made during the crisis after Otho's coup, Galba is quite undecided: *Galbam duae sententiae distinebant* (chapter 32). Eventually he becomes entirely passive: *consensu errantium victus* [...] *Galba* [...] *sella levaretur*.¹⁰ The passive verbs accentuate his helplessness.

Dialogue

Shortly after his accession to the throne Galba makes it known that he is wont to select and not buy his soldiers (chapter 5). The implication of this statement is explained to the reader by the narrator: *vox pro republica honesta, ipsi anceps*, [...] *nec enim ad hanc formam cetera erant*.¹¹ The reader is assured of Galba's honour, but the comment also brings to the attention the fact that he is out of touch with the mercenary mentality of the soldiers of the day.

10 overcome [...] by the common error Galba [...] was raised aloft in a chair (chapter 35).

11 An honourable utterance in the interests of the state, but dangerous to himself; for everything else was at variance with such a standard.

Galba's conversation with Piso (chapters 15 and 16) is the only utterance which is not accompanied by a guiding note. The contents of his speech illustrate clearly enough his honourable motives and his sincerity.

Addressing the military after the adoption, Galba speaks with brevity becoming an emperor (*imperatoria brevitatem*) and does not flatter them or make any mention of a gift (chapter 18). Once again the reader is guided in his inference of character-traits. *Constat potuisse conciliari animos quantulacumque parci senis liberalitate: nocuit antiquus rigor et nimia severitas, cui iam pares non sumus*.¹²

The image of the stern, incorruptible militarist is further strengthened in chapter 35 by Galba's remark when a soldier reports (falsely) that he has actually killed Otho: *Commilito, quis iussit*?¹³ Then follows the explanatory note: *insigni animo ad coercendam militarem licentiam, minantibus intrepidus, adversus blandientis incorruptus*.¹⁴

External appearance

One external feature of Galba's is mentioned repeatedly: he is old. There are no less than eleven references to his age. We do not think of age as a character-trait but Tacitus often mentions it in connection with traits that are associated with age and thus strengthens these impressions in a subtle way. In chapter 6 Galba is referred to as *invalidum senem* (weak old man), ruined by the bad reputations of Titus Vinius and Cornelius Laco. It is because he is a stingy old man (*parci senis*) that he forfeits the loyalty of the soldiers and he is ruined by his old-fashioned strictness (*antiquus rigor*).

Environment

The 'environment' of a character refers not only to his physical environment but also to his human environment, ie his relationship with other characters. Galba associates with the disreputable Laco, Vinius and Icelus.

12 There is no question that their loyalty could have been won by the slightest generosity on the part of this stingy old man. He was ruined by his old-fashioned strictness and excessive severity — qualities which we can no longer bear.

13 Who gave you orders, comrade?

14 For Galba showed a remarkable spirit in checking licence on the part of the soldiers; before threats he was unterrified, and incorruptible against flattery.

The reader is reminded of other emperors (such as Nero and Domitian) who had unhealthy relationships with freedmen and courtiers. Galba's environment portrays him as a weakling, heavily dependent on others for advice.

Reinforcement by analogy

Analogy reinforces a trait which has already been established. Galba's stinginess is contrasted with and thus highlighted by Otho's open-handedness and extravagance (chapters 21, 22, 23 & 24) and his strictness is accentuated when compared to Nero's *licentia* (chapter 20).

Indirect presentation confirms the reader's findings about the depiction of Galba's character: he is presented on the one hand as a stern militarist of a different era, with honourable motives. Thus his unswerving belief in old-fashioned discipline and the fact that he is out of touch with the priorities of the soldiers lead to his downfall. On the other hand he has the characteristics of the typical emperor of the time: weak, susceptible to influence — a mere puppet of courtiers. The reader is understandably confused. Was Tacitus inconsistent in his description of the emperor Galba? It is only in chapter 49, in the final observations about Galba, that the riddle is solved. Galba was *capax imperii, nisi imperasset*.¹⁵ He did indeed possess all the qualities required of a ruler but the very fact that he ruled turned him into a weak despicable character. It was the principate itself which changed the personality of a capable emperor so that he became a spineless puppet in the hands of opportunists.

Space

'Place' (in the story) is only transformed into space (in the text) when it becomes more than the physical location of events.

In chapter 17 the reader is alerted by the care with which the place to announce Piso's adoption is chosen: *Consulatum inde, pro rostris an in senatu an in castris adoptio nuncuparetur. Iri in castra placuit: Honorificum id militibus fore, quorum favorem [...] haud spernendum*.¹⁶ The first space, the rostra in the forum, would have acknowledged the role of the people, while the senate house

was the space where matters of importance to the state would have been announced and confirmed during the time of the Republic. These two spaces with their strong republican and democratic associations are discarded in favour of the camp of the soldiers. In an indirect and subtle way the dramatic shift in power is brought to the reader's attention. The army is now the important factor to be reckoned with and their support is vital to the success of any undertaking. This fact is underlined by the narrator's comment.

Focalisation

Bal (1980: 108 ff) describes focalisation as the relation between the presented elements and the perspective from which they are seen.¹⁷ Focalisation shifts continually in the first forty nine chapters of the *Historiae*. The speeches of Galba (chapters 15 & 16), Piso (chapter 30) and Otho (chapters 37 & 38) are examples of internal focalisation. The speeches, such a unique feature of ancient historiography, provide interesting variation but the dramatic tension is also heightened when the focus changes from the omniscient narrator to the limited internal focalisation of a character.

In chapter 21 a most unusual example of double focalisation is found: *Interea Othonem, cui compositis rebus nulla spes, omne in turbido consilium, multa simul exstimulabant, luxuria etiam principi onerosa, inopia vix privato toleranda, in Galbam ira, in Pisonem invidia; fingeat et metum quo magis concupisceret: praegravem se Neroni fuisse, nec Lusitaniam rursus et alterius exilii honorem expectandum. Suspectum semper invisumque dominantibus qui proximus destinaretur. Nocuisse id sibi apud senem principem, magis nociturum apud iuvenem ingenio trucem et longo exilio efferatum: occidi Othonem posse. Proinde agendum audendumque, dum Galbae auctoritas fluxa, Pisonis nondum coaluisset. Opportunos magnis conatibus transitus rerum, nec cunctatione opus, ubi perniciosior sit quies quam temeritas. Mortem omnibus ex natura aequalem oblivione apud posteros vel gloria distingui; ac si nocentem innocentemque idem exitus maneat, acrioris viri esse merito perire*.¹⁸

¹⁵ equal to the imperial office if he had never held it.

¹⁶ The question was then discussed whether his adoption should be proclaimed from the rostra or in the senate or in the praetorian camp. It was decided to go to the camp, for this act, they thought, would be a mark of honour toward the soldiers, whose support [...] was not to be despised.

¹⁷ See also Genette 1972: 206 and Rimmon-Kenan 1983: 71

¹⁸ In the meantime Otho, who had nothing to hope from a peaceful arrangement, and whose purpose depended wholly on disorder, was spurred on by many considerations. His extravagance was such as would have burdened an emperor, his poverty a private citizen could hardly have borne. He was angry toward Galba and jealous of Piso. He invented fears also to give his greed greater scope. He said that he

Otho's line of thought before the take-over is presented in a most innovative way. His own voice breaks through the indirect speech in which his emotions are described. The narrator-focaliser observes the focalised from within, because he penetrates his thoughts, but his language is coloured so that the reader is acutely aware of the fact that the perceptions are also those of Otho. What is the function of this indirect interior monologue? It is analogous to one of the principal themes of these chapters. The reader is not only introduced to Otho as seen through the perspective of the narrator; he is given a glimpse of how the mind of an ambitious would-be emperor works. The character gains credibility from the subtle shift of focus. This form of narration closely represents the so-called 'free indirect discourse' described by Rimmon-Kenan (1991: 115) as "at least characteristic enough of literature or fiction to have a fictional ring even when found in other types of discourse."

This strengthens the argument of Daitz (1960: 52 n 97) and Henderson (1990) mentioned above, ie that Tacitus' historical writings should be approached as texts showing more resemblance to modern historical novels than to historiography and that a creative interpretation, stimulated and directed by a structuralist analysis can be a rich and rewarding experience.

had been formidable to Nero, and that he could not look again for Lusitania and the honour of a second exile; that tyrants always suspected and hated the man who was marked out as their successor; this had already injured him with the aged emperor, and was going to injure him still more with the young one, who was cruel by nature and embittered by long exile. An Otho could be murdered; therefore he must be bold and act while Galba's authority was still weak and Piso's not yet established; this time of transition was opportune for great attempts, and a man must not delay when inactivity is more ruinous than rash action. Death nature ordains for all alike; but it differs as it brings either oblivion or glory in after ages; and if the same end awaits the guilty and the innocent, it is the duty of a man of superior vigour to deserve his death.

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