

FOEDUM SPECTACULUM AND RELATED MOTIFS IN TACITUS *HISTORIES* II–III*)

The motif of the *foedum spectaculum* has been observed in the third book of Tacitus' *Histories*, but never adequately explored. Borzsák has touched on this theme as a feature of 'tragic history' in Livy and Tacitus and concluded that Tacitus used the *spectaculum* motif to give his narrative of the year of the four emperors a "moving artistic unity"¹⁾. Despite several perceptive observations, however, Borzsák did not explore the connection between this and other motifs or their function in the work. Here I shall argue that Tacitus used the *foedum spectaculum* and imagery allied with it for multiple purposes: to link various facets of his portrait of Vitellius the tyrant; to symbolize both the emperor's degradation of his troops and their devotion to him; and to associate his values with those of the *volgus* at Rome. Comparison of the *Histories* with the accounts of Suetonius and Dio suggests that in some instances Tacitus may well have crafted these parallels and contrasts himself.

The *foedum spectaculum* first occurs in Tacitus' description of the new emperor's visit to the battlefield at Bedriacum (2.70.1–2): *foedum atque atrox spectaculum, intra quadragenarium pugnae diem lacera corpora, trunci artus, putres virorum equorumque formae, infecta tabo humus, protritit arboribus ac frugibus dira vastitas. nec minus inhumana pars viae, quam Cremonenses lauru rosaque constraverant, exstructis altaribus caesisque victimis regium in morem; quae laeta in praesens mox perniciem ipsis fecere*. At the close of the chapter, the historian contrasts Vitellius' reaction to this scene with that of his men

*) A shorter version of this paper was delivered at the annual meeting of the Classical Association of the Atlantic States, Columbia University, in September 1986. Since its acceptance in August 1988, there has appeared C. A. Perkins, Vitellius the Spectaculum: A note on *Histories* 2.84.5, CB 66 (1990) 47–49, which reaches some of the same conclusions. – The text of the *Histories* is Heubner's Teubner (Stuttgart 1978). Suetonius is quoted from Ihm's Teubner (Stuttgart 1978). Dio is quoted from Cary's Loeb (Cambridge, MA 1925).

1) I. Borzsák, *Spectaculum, ein Motiv der 'tragischen Geschichtschreibung' bei Livius und Tacitus*, ACD 9 (1973) 66.

(2.70.3–4): *et erant quos varia sors rerum lacrimaeque et misericordia subiret. at non Vitellius flexit oculos nec tot milia insepultorum civium exhorruit: laetus ultro et tam propinquae sortis ignarus instaurabat sacrum dis loci*. Tacitus does not diverge from the opinion of at least one of his sources when he depicts Vitellius here and elsewhere as a stock tyrant²). But the divergences between Tacitus' account of the scene at Bedriacum and those of Suetonius and Dio clarify the function of the *spectaculum* motif. According to Suetonius (Vit. 10.3): *utque campos, in quibus pugnatum est, adit, abhorrentis quosdam cadaverum tabem detestabili voce confirmare ausus est, optime olere occisum hostem et melius civem*. This earthy remark has the ring of authenticity and conveys strikingly Vitellius' callous cruelty. Tacitus and Suetonius are generally believed to be following the same source here, and Suetonius' version contains the same contrast, though less elaborated, between the humanity of the soldiers and the cruelty of their emperor. Yet Tacitus omits the cruel *mot* and dwells instead on the gruesome sight the battlefield presented and Vitellius' pleasure in looking at it³). To be sure, pleasure in the sight of the dead enemy is part of the tyrant's *saevitia*⁴). But Tacitus' intent is revealed by Dio's version (65.1.3):

2) We are concerned here not with the historical accuracy of Tacitus' portrait of Vitellius, but with the ways in which he makes his view persuasive. R. Engel, *Das Charakterbild des Kaisers A. Vitellius bei Tacitus und sein historischer Kern*, *Athenaeum* 55 (1977) 345–368, tries to reconstruct the historical Vitellius who is visible behind Tacitus' tendentious presentation. His analysis of the *Histories* shows that the historian often presents facts which do not support his thesis, a situation familiar to readers of the *Annals*. Cf. B. Walker, *The Annals of Tacitus, A Study in the Writing of History* (2nd ed. Manchester 1960) 82–137. The best analysis of the techniques of persuasion Tacitus uses in such cases is still I. S. Ryberg, *Tacitus' Art of Innuendo*, *TAPA* 73 (1942) 383–404. For the Tacitean Vitellius as a stock tyrant drawn from Flavian propaganda, see D. Flach, *Tacitus in der Tradition der antiken Geschichtsschreibung* (*Hypomnemata* 39, Göttingen 1973) 95–96. See also J. R. Dunkle, *The Rhetorical Tyrant in Roman Historiography*: Sallust, Livy and Tacitus, *CW* 65 (1971) 18.

3) The debate over whether Tacitus followed a single source for the early books of the *Histories* continues. For a summary of the scholarship on the problem, see S. Borzsák *RE Suppl.* XI 449–453. The most recent exponent of Mommsen's view that Tacitus did faithfully follow a single source is Flach. He argues (97–98) that Tacitus by omitting Vitellius' alleged remark at Bedriacum at 2.70 is more critical of the Flavian point of view than Suetonius. Earlier, Ph. Fabia, *Les Sources de Tacite* (Paris 1893) 157, and E. Courbaud, *Les procédés d'art de Tacite dans les Histoires* (Paris 1918) 80, suggested that the common source used by Tacitus and Suetonius contained Vitellius' remark which Tacitus has omitted.

4) Vitellius also wants to feast his eyes on the head of his victim Blaesus (3.39.1): *quin et audita est saevissima Vitellii vox, qua se (ipsa enim verba referam) pavisse oculos spectata inimici morte iactavit*. Cf. Otho's joy in gazing at the head of

Ὅτι ὁ Οὐιτέλλιος εἶδεν ἐν Λουγδούνῳ μονομάχων ἀγῶνας καὶ ἐν Κρημῶνι, ὥσπερ οὐκ ἀρκοῦντος τοῦ πλήθους τῶν ἐν ταῖς μάχαις ἀπολωλότων καὶ τότε καὶ ἔτι ἀτάφων ἐρριμμένων, ὡς καὶ αὐτὸς ἐθεάσατο . . .

Tacitus prefers to let the reader make the easy connection himself between Vitellius' cruelty and detachment and his love of gladiatorial games⁵). In the narrative surrounding the scene at Bedriacum there are three references to gladiatorial shows given by Caecina and Valens in Vitellius' honor en route to Rome (2.67.2; 70.1; 71.1)⁶). Of one such show Tacitus writes: *numquam ita ad curas intento Vitellio, ut voluptatum oblivisceretur* (2.67.2). Tacitus sums up his initial portrait of Vitellius as tyrant when he describes Vitellius' reaction to the news that the East has recognized him as emperor: *tum ipse exercitusque, ut nullo aemulo, saevitia libidine raptu in externos mores proruperant* (2.73).

Vitellius' entry into Rome again suggests the tyrant who makes war on his own state as if against a foreign foe. He is barely dissuaded from entering the city itself, *ut captam urbem*, dressed as a general. The next day he delivers a boastful speech as if to the senate and people of a foreign state (2.90.1)⁷). The *foedum spectaculum* image appears in this section, this time applied to Vitellius' unruly German troops, frightful because of their dress and weapons, who flock to the *lacus Curtius* to see where Galba died. They quickly resort to violence in their confusion in the strange city (2.88.3): *nec minus saevum spectaculum erant ipsi, tergis ferarum et ingentibus telis horrentes, cum turbam populi per inscientiam parum vitarent aut, ubi lubrico viae vel occursu alicuius procidissent, ad iurgium, mox ad manus et ferrum transirent. quin et*

Piso (1.44.1). For other examples of this *topos* in Tacitus and bibliographical references, see Borzsák RE Suppl. XI 460. On Vitellius' cruelty, see also H. 2.63.1; 73; 77.3.

5) Elsewhere Dio states plainly what Tacitus implies. Cf. Dio 61.12.2 with Tacitus Annals 14.3.3 (the theatrical overtones of the attempted murder of Agrippina on the collapsible boat). See also Dio 60.31.5, the appropriateness of Messalina's dying in the gardens of Asiaticus, the cause of her demise.

6) Borzsák 65 notes as significant the collocation of gladiatorial games at 2.67.2; 70.1 and 71.1 with the scene at Bedriacum.

7) In contrast to Tacitus, Suetonius (Vit. 11) states that Vitellius actually entered the city dressed in general's garb. Note, too, that the historian describes the Vitellian army ravaging Italy as if it were foreign soil (2.87.2). For the association of the *urbs capta* motif with tyrannical behavior in Tacitus, see E. Keitel, Principate and Civil War in the Annals of Tacitus, AJP 105 (1984) 306–325. For a critique of Tacitus' tendentiousness in the account of the Vitellians' march to Rome, see K. Wellesley, *Suggestio Falsi* in Tacitus, RhM 103 (1960) 286–288.

tribuni praefectique cum terrore et armatorum catervis volitabant. The *spectaculum* motif here connects several ideas: again, the tyrant's army almost invades its own capitol city. There is also a suggestion of continuity between the death of Galba at the *lacus Curtius* and the fate that awaits the Vitellian troops in Rome. The use of *spectaculum* presages the way in which those soldiers will perish while the disinterested Romans look on⁸).

The theme of the whole chapter (2.88), however, is the indiscipline of the Vitellian troops. Earlier Tacitus described a brawl which broke out near Rome between the civilians and soldiers when Vitellius halts to feed his men. Here Vitellius issues rations: *ut gladiatoriam saginam dividebat . . .* (2.88.1). The Vitellian soldiers no longer fight in their proper sphere but brawl with civilians, and Vitellius fosters this indiscipline. They seem degraded by him, as suggested by their comparison to gladiators.

The historian has already stated that soldiers copy the example of their leader and that Vitellius set a disastrous one (2.68.1): *legati tribunisque ex moribus imperatorum severitatem aemulantur vel tempestivis conviviis gaudent; proinde miles intentus aut licenter agit. apud Vitellium omnia indisposita temulentia, pervigiliis ac bacchanalibus quam disciplinae et castris propiora.* Mucianus, in his speech urging Vespasian to seek the throne for himself, reiterates the connection between Vitellius' dissoluteness and the demoralization of his troops (2.76.4): *si quid ardoris ac ferociae miles habuit, popinis et comissationibus et principis imitatione deteritur . . .*

Before the army sets out from Germany, Tacitus notes the remarkable contrast between Vitellius and his troops (1.62.1–2): *mira inter exercitum imperatoremque diversitas: instare miles, arma poscere, dum Galliae trepident, dum Hispaniae cunctentur: non obstare hiemem neque ignavae pacis moras: invadendam Italiam, occupandam urbem; nihil in discordiis (ci)vilibus festinatione tutius, ubi factio magis quam consulto opus esset. torpebat Vitellius et fortunam principatus inertis luxu ac prodigiis epulis*

8) On the role of the *lacus Curtius* in the work, see R. T. Scott, Religion and Philosophy in the Histories of Tacitus (American Academy in Rome, Papers and Monographs 22, Rome 1968) 57–62. For the Romans looking on as spectators at Galba's death, see 1.32.1 (quoted below, n. 19) and 1.40.1. A. Briessmann, Tacitus und das Flavische Geschichtsbild (Hermes Einzelschr. 10, Wiesbaden 1955) 18–19, tries to prove that Tacitus developed the *spectaculum* motif at 2.88.3 from indications in the pro-Flavian source as seen at Josephus B.J. 4.586–587, but he does not grasp the full implications of this motif.

*praesumebat, medio diei temulentus et sagina gravis, cum tamen ardor et vis militum ultro ducis munia implebat, ut si adesset imperator et strenuis vel ignavis spem metumve adderet*⁹).

The historian uses the word *sagina* just three times, all three instances occurring in the *Histories*, all three applied to Vitellius or his men. The third appears right after the visit to Bedriacum, when Tacitus labels the emperor the “slave and hireling of pleasure and gluttony” (*luxu et saginae mancipatus emptusque*, 2.71.1). By applying the same diction to Vitellius and his troops, along with the allusion to gladiators, Tacitus underlines their degradation at his hands.

Tacitus repeatedly ascribes the same kinds of self-indulgence to Vitellius and his men in this section to produce a damaging picture of their relationship even when not stating explicitly a direct correlation between the two. Both the emperor and his men indulge their *luxus* and *libidines* in this portion of the narrative. Tacitus concludes his account of changes Vitellius made in the army with another generality (2.69.2): *et vires luxu corrumpentur, contra veterem disciplinam et instituta maiorum, apud quos virtute quam pecunia res Romana melius stetit*. Two chapters later, the historian castigates Vitellius as a slave of *luxus* and *sagina* because he voluntarily attended Nero’s recitals (2.71.1). When the emperor boasts to the Senate of his *industria* and *temperantia*, all Italy knows the truth (2.90.1): *consciis flagitiorum ipsis qui aderant omnique Italia, per quam somno et luxu pudendus incesserat*. Finally, the Vitellians dissipate their energy and discipline in self-indulgence at Rome (2.93.1): *non principia noscere, non servare vigilias neque labore firmari: per inlecebras urbis et inhonesta dictu corpus otio, animum libidinibus imminuebant*¹⁰). We learn two chapters later that the road to power in Vitellius’ court lies in pandering to the same self-indulgence (2.95.2): *nemo in illa aula probitate aut industria certavit: unum ad potentiam iter, prodigis epulis et sumptu ganeaque satiare inexplebiles Vitellii libidines*.

The motifs of the gladiator and the spectacle take on added

9) R. Syme, Tacitus (Oxford 1958) 196 n.2 notes that Tacitus gives no speeches to Vitellius, “a passive character”. Note, too, how Tacitus emphasizes Vitellius’ passivity by having others exhort him: Valens urges him to aim at supreme power (1.52.3–4); the troops exhort him to get moving (1.62.1) and his supporters urge him to fight on at Rome (3.66, discussed below, p. 349).

10) As Borzsák 65 points out, there is an obvious contrast between their appearance marching in, an army worthy of someone better than Vitellius (2.89.1), and their enfeebled departure (2.99.1).

meaning during the climactic battle for Rome. The historian places the praetorians' brave, if futile defense of their barracks between stunning accounts of the populace's callous detachment from the fighting and the emperor's sordid and degrading end. The Vitellians, *quamquam numero fatoque dispares, inquietare victoriam, morari pacem, domos arasque cruore foedare suprema victis solacia amplectebantur. multi semianimes super turrets et propugnacula moenium exspiravere; convolsis portis reliquus globus obtulit se victoribus, et cecidere omnes contrariis vulneribus, versi in hostem: ea cura etiam morientibus decori exitus fuit* (3.84.2–3).

In the chapter before, the Roman people watch the fighting with appalling detachment (3.83.1): *aderat pugnantis spectator populus utque in ludicro certamine, hos, rursus illos clamore et plausu fovebat. quotiens pars altera inclinasset, abditos in tabernis aut si quam in domum perfugerant, erui iugularique expostulantes parte maiore praedae potiebantur: nam milite ad sanguinem et caedes obverso spolia in vulgus cedebant.*

No less cruelty had been displayed in Rome during the onslaughts by Sulla and Cinna, but “now there was a brutish indifference (*nunc inhumana securitas*), and not even a momentary interruption in the pursuit of pleasure” (3.83.3): *velut festis diebus id quoque gaudium accederet, exsultabant fruebantur nulla partium cura, malis publicis laeti*. Chapter 3.83 suggests that the soldiers of Vitellius fight as gladiators for the entertainment of a callous public. Suetonius and Dio have nothing of this.

The gladiator had been an ambiguous figure in Roman culture since the late Republic, a man of the lowest social status, often a condemned criminal; yet he could attain nobility in embracing bravely his fate. Cicero in the *Pro Milone* (34.92) expresses this paradox well: *... in gladiatoris pugnis et in infimi generis hominum condicione atque fortuna timidos et supplices et ut vivere liceat obsecrantis etiam odisse solemus, fortis et animosos et se acriter ipsos morti offerentis servari cupimus ...*¹¹).

In the *Third Philippic*, Cicero urges the senators to meet

11) For admiration of the courage of the gladiator, see also Cicero, *Tusc.* 2.17.41: *gladiatores, aut perditii homines aut barbari, quas plagas perferunt! quo modo illi, qui bene instituti sunt, accipere plagam malunt quam turpiter vitare!*; Tacitus on the combatants at the spectacle staged by Claudius on the Fucine lake (A. 12.56.3): *pugnatum quamquam inter sotes fortium virorum animo ...*; Pliny, *Paneg.* 33. On the ambivalent role played by the gladiator, cf. Tertullian, *De spectaculis* 22: *... viri animas, feminae autem illis etiam corpora sua substernunt ... ex eadem arte, qua magnificiunt, deponunt et diminuunt ...*

death bravely and willingly like gladiators rather than live as slaves (Phil. 3.14.35): *Quod si iam – quod di omen avertant! – fatum extremum rei publicae venit, quod gladiatores nobiles faciunt ut honeste decumbant, faciamus nos, principes orbis terrarum gentiumque omnium, ut cum dignitate potius cadamus quam cum ignominia serviamus.*

Seneca (De ira 1.2.4) states that the people are angered when a gladiator does not gladly perish and judge themselves despised; they in turn change from spectators to adversaries¹²). The gladiator, like the *miles*, has taken a unilateral oath in which he promises to give himself willingly while demanding nothing in return¹³). There is honor in fulfilling one's duty, however ignominious.

By applying the image of the gladiator and the *spectaculum* to Vitellius' troops (at 2.88.1; 2.88.3; associated with it at 3.83.1), Tacitus underlines the paradox of Vitellius' rule which he has stated earlier: that Vitellius is unworthy of his troops whom he degrades and demoralizes (though, to be sure, they have collaborated in this degradation), yet they fight well for him, if only out of sheer desperation, loyalty, and a sense of pride. It may be difficult for the reader to understand why such brave troops would have remained loyal so long to a commander as dissolute and worthless as the Tacitean Vitellius¹⁴).

The historian has repeatedly reminded us of the contrast between the *princeps* and his army. Tacitus calls the Vitellian army marching into Rome *decora facies et non Vitellio principe dignus* (2.89.2; cf. 1.62, quoted above, p. 345f.). According to Tacitus, Vitellius as *princeps* was unequal to serious business (2.59.1: *impar curis gravioribus*), as his dilatory and unrealistic behavior after Cremona shows (3.54–56)¹⁵). By failing to cross the Apennines and deal a quick, decisive blow to the Flavian forces, he consigns

12) Cf. Seneca's disgust at the noonday games, which are executions (*mera homicidia*) not true contests (Ep. 7.3–4).

13) Cf. C. Barton, *The scandal of the Arena, Representations* 27 (1989) 3. For the oath of the gladiator, cf. Petronius, Sat. 117; Seneca, Ep. 37.

14) Vitellius has indulged every whim of his troops to keep them loyal and quiet (2.94.1): *ceterum non ita ducibus indulsit Vitellius, ut non plus militi liceret*. (Cf. 2.87.1, the *licentia* of the troops on the march to Rome). He allows the troops to pick their branch of the service. He agrees to punish some Gallic leaders at the behest of the troops (2.94.2): *nec coarcebat eius modi voces Vitellius: super insitam [mortem] animo ignaviam conscius sibi instare donativom et deesse pecuniam omnia alia militi largiebatur*. His easygoing and generous manner had endeared him to the troops in the first place (1.52.2; cf. his obituary, 3.86.2).

15) Cf. 3.36.1: *... curis luxum obtendebat: non parare arma, non adloquio exercitioque militem firmare, non in ore volgi agere, sed umbraculis hortorum*

his faithful troops to destruction (3.56.3): *dum dispergit vires, acerrimum militem et usque in extrema obstinatum trucidandum capiendumque tradidit*... A few chapters later, Vitellius is exhorted by his followers to make a brave end (3.66.4): *perstare militem, superesse studia populi; denique nihil atrocius eventurum, quam in quod sponte ruant. moriendum victis, moriendum deditis: id solum referre, novissimum spiritum per ludibrium et contumelias effundant an per virtutem*. But the *princeps* neither dies bravely nor prevents the carnage in the city by persuading his followers to withdraw (3.66.1)¹⁶. By associating the Vitellians with gladiators and making them a spectacle for the diversion of the Roman people, Tacitus can have it both ways. Although the soldiers have been degraded by their association with Vitellius, yet they should be remembered for making a brave and honorable, if futile, death.

In these last chapters of Book Three, Tacitus applies the *spec-taculum* motif to Vitellius himself. His indecision and sordid hiding-place in the Palace contrast with the brave end chosen by his own soldiers in the chapter before (3.84.5): *vincitae pone tergum manus; laniata veste, foedum spectaculum, ducebatur, multis increpantibus, nullo inlacrimante: deformitas exitus misericordiam abstulerat*¹⁷.

Only Tacitus refers to this squalid scene as a *spectaculum*, though Suetonius and Dio repeat many of the same details¹⁸. And while Suetonius notes that Vitellius was abused as if he were a common criminal (Vit. 17.1), Tacitus prefers to embody that *peripeteia* in an image which has wider implications. Vitellius is linked once again with the *volgus* whose low tastes he shared and pandered to with lavish gladiatorial games and wild beast shows, squandering public money as if his purse were limitless (2.94.3).

abditus, ut ignava animalia, quibus si cibum suggeras, iacent torpentque, praeterita instantia futura pari oblivione dimiserat. See also 3.63.2: *tanta torpedio invaserat animum, ut, si principem eum fuisse ceteri non meminissent, ipse oblivisceretur*.

16) K. Wellesley, Cornelius Tacitus, The Histories, Book III (Sidney 1972) 164 notes the verbal parallels between 3.66.4 (*ludibrium* and *contumelias*) and Vitellius' death scene (*ludibrio*, 3.84.5 and *contumeliis*, 3.85.1). For the stubborn courage of the Vitellians, see also 3.73.1; 77.4 and 82.3.

17) *Ibid.* 164.

18) For a comparison of the ancient accounts of Vitellius' death (Suetonius, Vit. 17, Josephus, B.J. 4.652 and Dio 65.20–21) which apparently stem from a common source, see Briessmann 80–82, Fabia 270 and Courbaud 81 and 157–161. F. R. D. Goodyear, Tacitus (G&R, New Surveys in the Classics 4, Oxford 1970) 27–28 argues that Tacitus here follows the common source less closely than does Suetonius.

Like them, he lives to indulge his *libidines* and *voluptates* (3.83.2–3). He shares with them, too, a callous detachment from the suffering of his fellow Romans. It is fitting indeed that he become a *spectaculum* for them¹⁹).

To enhance this reversal, the narrative of 3.83–85 deliberately recalls the scene at Bedriacum. Both are *foeda spectacula*; in both the crowd rejoices in the sufferings of others (*laetus* is applied both to Vitellius and to the celebrations by the Cremonese at Bedriacum [2.70.2 and 4] and to the degraded common people at Rome [3.83.3, *malis publicis laeti*])²⁰). Furthermore, Tacitus uses the word *inhumanus* only twice in all his works, in these scenes, of the sight of the altars set up by the Cremonese at Bedriacum (2.70.2) and of the *securitas* felt by the populace during the fighting at Rome (3.83.3). Finally, neither Vitellius nor the Roman populace feel *miser cordia* at the scene they witness (2.70.3; 3.84.5).

A final point of comparison between the two scenes is Tacitus' emphasis on Vitellius' *looking*. We have pointed out above how the historian stressed Vitellius' cruel voyeurism at Bedriacum. A similar shift of emphasis is apparent when one compares 3.85 with the account of Suetonius. The biographer states that Vitellius was forced at swordpoint to hold his head up so that he could be seen (Vit. 17). Tacitus reports the detail of the swordpoint but focusses instead on what Vitellius was forced to see (3.85.1): *Vitellium infestis mucronibus coactum modo erigere os et offerre contumeliis, nunc cadentes statuas suas, plerumque rostra aut Galbae occisi locum contueri, postremo ad Gemonias, ubi corpus Flavii Sabini iacuerat, propulere*. This slight change underscores powerfully Vitellius' *peripeteia* and one of its causes.

19) Wellesley, The Histories Book III 184 objects to 3.83 as "rhetorical rather than historical" because Tacitus had earlier depicted considerable popular enthusiasm for Vitellius in Rome. He cites no examples, but probably has in mind the two scenes where Vitellius addresses the people (3.58.1 and 68.1). Yet even though, as Briessmann has pointed out, Tacitus is kinder to Vitellius at this point than the other ancient accounts, he still carefully prepares the reader for the shift in attitude to follow. When the people demand arms to defend the city, the historian calls them *volgus ignavum et nihil ultra verba ausurum* (3.58.1), a criticism absent from Suetonius (Vit. 15.3). Before the *princeps* begins his speech of abdication, Tacitus describes the crowd's behavior (3.67.2): *voces populi blandae et intempestivae, miles minaci silentio*. This too is not in Suetonius. Tacitus consistently portrays the Roman *volgus* of A. D. 69 as uninvolved in public life, mere spectators who slavishly flatter the current *princeps* whoever he may be. Cf. 1.32.1; 45.1; 90.3; 2.90.2; 3.64.2 and 85.

20) Borzsák 65 saw the connection between these scenes but did not analyze the verbal cross-references that bind them.

While one may read the *spectaculum* motif with Borzsák as a tool for tragic coloring, and indeed it does epitomize the apogee and fall of Vitellius the cruel and impious tyrant, I hope I have demonstrated that it connotes even more. The historian employs this motif to highlight and link together Vitellius' degradation of his troops, his callous detachment from the suffering of his fellow citizens, his heedless love of pleasure and his kinship therein with the selfish and detached *volgus* at Rome. In this way, Tacitus expands and deepens the portrait of Vitellius as tyrant, which the common source must have contained, by relating the *princeps*' malaise to the society which produced him²¹). Like the classical tyrant, Vitellius is a slave to his own vices and desires and enslaves others to satisfy them²²). But Tacitus goes beyond these stereotypes. The *spectaculum* motif is but one of the means by which the historian paints a distasteful picture of a whole society only too ready to be enslaved²³).

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21) S. Burkart, *Die Darstellungstechnik des Tacitus in den Historien* (Diss. Erlangen 1945) 24–35 points out that Tacitus condemns the behavior of *all* groups at Rome during the civil war. She failed to develop fully this excellent observation, confining her analysis to the Galban narrative. Tacitus in fact continues to link the low motives of all involved throughout Books I–III. Not only does the historian tar Vitellius' troops and the *volgus* at Rome with the vices of their *imperator*, but he also shows a kinship of motive and behavior between the *princeps* and the Senate, of which he was of course a member. *Princeps*, Senate and people all behave with shocking servility. Vitellius conceals his hatred of Junius Blaesus with *vernilibus blanditiis* (2.59.2), only to destroy him later (3.38–39). He had fawned over Nero, accompanying him on his singing tours *non necessitate, qua honestissimus quisque, sed luxu et saginae mancipatus emptusque* (2.71.1). (Cf. also his excessive *adulatio* as a senator at A. 14.49.1.) In the very next sentence, the Senate thanks Vitellius for making unjust changes in the allocations of consulships (2.71.2): *actaeque insuper Vitellio gratiae consuetudine servitii*. (Cf. the *adulatio* of many senators who go out to meet Vitellius as he approaches Rome [2.87.2].) The collocation of 2.72 with what precedes is a bitter comment by the historian on Vitellius' reign. There he recounts a case of imposture by a runaway slave who pretends to be a member of the noble Crassus family. He surrounds himself with the dregs in order to perpetrate this fraud (2.72.2): *igitur deterrimo quoque in argumentum fabulae adsumpto*. The theatrical simile and the reference to his low followers echoes what Tacitus has just told the reader about Vitellius' tastes and his *clientela* on the march to Rome which included actors (2.71.1; 87.2) and others *e plebe flagitiosa* (2.87.2).

22) For the *topoi* of the tyrant, see J. R. Dunkle, *The Greek Tyrant and Roman Political Invective of the Late Republic*, TAPA 98 (1967) 151–171.

23) Cf. the atmosphere in Rome after the Flavian victory (4.2.2): *civitas pavida et servitio parata*.