

*SUFFUGIUM HIEMIS ...
RIGOREM FRIGORUM*

Tacitus (Germ. 16.3) and Seneca (De ira 1.11.3)

“Adeo autem Tacitus studio Senecae librorum sese dedit, ut non solum philosophiam, verum etiam sermonem suum ad illius speciem atque exemplar formaret.” In spite of Maximilianus Zimmermann’s assertive statement in his introduction to what is still the most comprehensive catalogue of (possibly) Senecan reminiscences in Tacitus,¹ the influence of Seneca and his œuvre on Tacitus’ writing has been a matter of controversy.² As for the *Germania*, to which I will limit myself, the debate about the relevance of Seneca is equally discordant, not the least among two of its most recent commentators. Allan Lund argues that Tacitus in his depiction of the *Germani* had not only a certain type of race in mind, but also a cer-

1) M. Zimmerman, *De Tacito Senecae philosophi imitatore*, Breslauer philologische Abhandlungen 5.1 (1889) 5.

2) A survey of the controversy can be found in K. Abel, *Die Taciteische Seneca-Rezeption*, in: ANRW 33.4 (Berlin / New York 1991) 3155–3181.

tain type of character, i. e. the *homo iracundus*.³ More specifically, he asserts: “Als literarische Muster der Schilderung der Germanen als Barbaren und Wilde kommen der Philosoph Seneca [...] – die Übereinstimmungen zwischen dessen Schrift *De ira* und Tacitus’ *Germania* sind ja auffallend – und vielleicht Curtius Rufus [...] in Betracht.”⁴ Long before Lund’s suggestion of the importance of Seneca’s dialogue as a source of literary motifs, Friedrich Leo had argued that the style of the *Germania* is “näher als der irgend einer erhaltenen Schrift mit dem Senecas verwandt.”⁵ And Sir Ronald Syme characterized the work in question as “Sallustian, with some influences from Seneca.”⁶ Gerhard Perl, on the other hand, sees both Tacitus and Seneca as simply having been influenced in terms of style and motifs by the same tradition: “Es handelt sich wohl um zeitbedingte allgemeine sprachliche Übereinstimmungen des modernen Stils und um philosophische Allgemeinplätze, nicht um Spezifika und direkte Einflüsse gerade Senecas.”⁷ Eduard Fraenkel anticipated this view, in speaking of Tacitus’ indebtedness to the “gegenklassische Formung des Prosa-Stils, deren mächtigster Träger Seneca ist.”⁸

The question of whether Tacitus relied on Seneca’s account or both authors independently depicted the *Germani* as irascible men within the same tradition, has been elusive not the least because – as far as I can see – no ‘hard’ linguistic parallel has been presented.⁹ The following linguistic observation, which seems to have escaped notice,¹⁰ might offer such a parallel and lend further support to the thesis of Tacitus’ intimate familiarity with Seneca’s famous treatise.¹¹

3) A. A. Lund, Cornelius Tacitus, *Germania*. Interpretiert, hrsg., übertragen, kommentiert und mit einer Bibliographie versehen (Heidelberg 1988) 25–7. A. Bäumer (Die Bestie Mensch. Senecas Aggressionstheorie, ihre philosophischen Vorstufen und ihre literarischen Auswirkungen [Frankfurt a. M. 1982] 182–200) traces elements of Seneca’s theory of aggression in Tacitus’ *Annales* and *Historiae*, but does not consider the *Germania*. Zimmermann (above, n. 1) 66, while offering a number of reminiscences of *De ira* in Tacitus’ work (e.g. Tac. Ann. 14.13.15: *aetate aut valetudine fessi*, and Sen. De ira 3.9.4: *valetudine aut aetate fessi*), gives none for the *Germania*.

4) Lund (above, n. 3) 53.

5) F. Leo, Anzeige von Taciti Dialogus de oratoribus, in: E. Fraenkel (ed.), *Ausgewählte kleine Schriften II* (Rome 1960) 277–298.

6) R. Syme, Tacitus (Oxford 1958) 340; see also 198 n. 6 for further scholarly opinions on the question of a Senecan presence in the *Germania*.

7) G. Perl, Tacitus’ *Germania* (Berlin 1990) 47. For Greek concepts of ὄργη and θυμός see Bäumer (above, n. 3) 17–70.

8) E. Fraenkel, *Kleine Beiträge zur klassischen Philologie II* (Rome 1964) 314 (cf. 330).

9) The Senecan reminiscences in Tacitus’ *Germania* that Zimmermann lists (above, n. 1) 54–5 do not derive from *De ira*; nor do they seem particularly convincing.

10) The following commentators were consulted (for the full bibliographical information see A. A. Lund, *Kritischer Forschungsbericht zur ‘Germania’ des Tacitus*, in: ANRW 33.3 [Berlin/New York 1991] 2341–4): Anderson (1938, 104–5); Bonghi & Giarratano (1951 [1960], 42); Forni & Galli (1964, 111); Lenchatin de Gubernatis (1949, 13); Lindauer (1967, ad loc.); Schweizer-Sidler and Schwyzer (1902, 42); Perl (1990, 148). As far as I can see, the only ones to mention the Senecan

After commenting on the *mira diversitas naturae* of the *Germani*,¹² Tacitus discusses (Germ. 16.3) their habitation, especially their underground pits:

Also they habitually dig subterranean pits and put plenty of manure on top of them; [they serve] as shelter from the winter weather and as storage for their harvest, since places of that sort temper the rigour of the cold (*Solent et subterraneos specus aperire eosque multo insuper fimo omerant, suffugium hiemi(s) et receptaculum frugibus, quia rigorem frigorum eius modi loci molliunt*).

Suffugium is not a common word in Latin literature.¹³ Yet it occurs six times in Tacitus' extant work, a surprisingly high frequency.¹⁴ This particular expression in the *Germania* has received meticulous attention, since all manuscripts contain the untenable reading *suffugium hiemi*: "in quibus verbis inest quo studiosi provocari videntur ut interpretandi machinas admoveant," as Reifferscheid wryly wrote.¹⁵ It seems as if the focus on the question of textual criticism blocked the view on other issues pertaining to Tacitus' statement.¹⁶

passage in question are A. Gudeman (P. Cornelii Taciti De Germania [Berlin 1916] 116) and Lund (above, n. 3) 157. Neither, however, comments on the parallel. (See also n. 16.)

11) T. Birt (Was hat Seneca mit seinen Tragödien gewollt?, NJB 27 [1911] 336–364) noticed (348) that Seneca's *De ira* must have caused some stir, as according to Suetonius (Claud. 38) Claudius released an edict in which he addressed his *iracundia*, using the differentiation Seneca had set out in *De ira* 2.18–22.

12) Tac. Germ. 15.1: *fortissimus quisque ac bellicosissimus nihil agens ... ipsi bebent, mira diversitate naturae cum idem homines sic ament inertiam et oderint quietem*. This characteristic can in itself be interpreted with the help of the concept of the *homo iracundus*; Seneca (*De ira* 1.10.1ff.), when discussing the peripatetic thesis that anger is needed as a motivational force, argues that reason would never use anger, since – as with other *impetus* – it can only contain them by confronting them with matching and similar impulses: *ut irae metum, inertiam irae, timori cupiditatem*.

13) With the help of PHI 5 I was able to find the following eight instances (in addition to the one in Seneca and the six in Tacitus): Apul. Met. 7.19; Curt. 8.4.7,9; Ov. Hal. 119; Plin. Epist. 9.39.9; Quint. Inst. or. 9.2.78; (Decl. Mai. 13.5); Sil. Pun. 5.508. In later Latin literature, however, the term is more common; see Brepolis-Library of Latin texts, s. v.

14) Later in the same work Tacitus writes (Germ. 46.4): *Nec aliud infantibus ferarum imbriumque suffugium quam ut in aliquo ramorum nexu contegantur*. The other instances all occur in the *Annales*: 3.74.2 (*ex quis Cornelius Scipio legatus praeftuit qua praedatio in Leptitanos et suffugia Garamantum*); 4.47.1 (*quos dux Romanus acie suggestus haud aegre pepulit sanguine barbarorum modico ob propinqua suffugia*); 4.66.2 (*restitit tamen senatus et opperendum imperatorem censuit, quod unum urgentium malorum suffugium in tempus erat*); 14.58.4 (*effugeret segnem mortem, dum suffugium (ess)et*).

15) A. Reifferscheid, *Coniectanea in Taciti Germaniam*, in: *Symbola philologorum Bonnensium in honorem Friderici Ritscheli collecta* (Lipsiae 1864–7) 623–628, quote on 626.

16) Considering his emphasis on the relevance of Seneca's *De ira*, it is surprising that Lund (above, n. 3) 157 lists Sen. *De ira* 1.11.3 merely as a syntactical

Rigor figures five times in Tacitus, but most frequently as an attribute of character, e. g. after the declaration of Piso as the successor to Galba, when Tacitus states (Hist. 1.18.3): *noctui antiquus rigor et nimia severitas*. It is similarly used in Hist. 1.83.3 (*rigor disciplinae*) and Ann. 6.50.1 (*idem animi rigor*). The one exception – in addition to the one in the *Germania* – appears in a passage in Ann. 2.23.3, where the southern wind is listed among the conditions that make the crossing of the sea more difficult, as it is particularly forceful *rigore vicini septentrionis*.¹⁷ To signify the frostiness of climate Tacitus uses this term only twice.¹⁸ The statement as a whole is therefore noteworthy because of the mere presence of *suffugium* and – within Tacitus – because of the meaning here of *rigor*.

Given the infrequent use of *suffugium* in the ancient Latin corpus, it comes as no surprise that it occurs only once in Seneca's work. More interesting, however, is the fact that it occurs in his brief excursus on the *Germani* (De ira 1.11.3):

What is better hardened for every form of endurance, unprovided as they are with clothing or shelter against the unabated rigour of their climate? (*Quid induratius ad omnem patientiam, ut quibus magna ex parte non tegimenta corporum provisa sint, non suffugia adversus perpetuum caeli rigorem?*).

Furthermore, as highlighted, this commonplace about the lifestyle of the *Germani*, which might have been inspired by Caesar,¹⁹ also contains *rigor* as a characteristic of the climate.²⁰ The two *loci*, in Seneca and Tacitus, are the only ones in which both words occur together.

The fact that two authors writing on the same topic use the same words with the same specific meaning each within the very same sentence seems to provide a philological argument that Tacitus was familiar not just with the concept of the *homo iracundus* in general, but specifically with Seneca's *De ira* and the discussion of the *Germani* therein. If we do not wish to allow for a mere coincidence (which, of course, can never be fully excluded), the historian must have used the philosopher.²¹

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parallel for this locus vexatus. For its most comprehensive discussion see: A. Önerfors, in Taciti ‚Germaniam‘ annotationes criticae, SO 34 (1958) 45–53.

17) F. R. D. Goodyear (The Annals of Tacitus II [Cambridge 1981] ad loc.) lists Tac. Germ. 16.3, Mela 3.36, and Sen. Dial. 3.11.3 as parallels.

18) Compare Tac. Agric. 12.3, where the climate and especially the cold is described rather differently (and without the paronomasia): *caelum crebris imbribus ac nebulis foedum; asperitas frigorum abest*.

19) See Caes. Bell. Gall. 6.21.5 (cf. also Bell. Gall. 4.1.10): *et pellibus aut parvis renonum tegimentis utuntur magna corporis parte nuda*.

20) There are 24 instances of *rigor* in Seneca's work.

21) I would like to thank Melissa Haynes and Nino Luraghi (both at Harvard University) for their comments on an earlier draft.