INTRODUCTION

1. TACITUS

Tacitus (henceforth T.) lived in interesting times.[1] Born between 56 and 58 during Nero's principate, he was perhaps the son of Cornelius Tacitus, the equestrian procurator of Gallia Belgica, mentioned by Pliny the Elder as the father of a mentally impaired and short-lived dwarf child (*HN* 7.76).[2] T.'s family came from Gallia Narbonensis or (less likely) Transpadane Italy.[3] Rome inevitably exerted a centripetal pull on ambitious families, and by 75 T. was living in the city, learning rhetoric, sitting in on court cases, and shadowing prominent orators (*D.* 2.1).[4] He owed his career (and its advancement) to the Flavians: 'That my career was initiated by Vespasian, advanced by Titus, and carried further by Domitian, I do not deny' (*H.* 1.1.3). After Vespasian granted him the *latus clauus* (the broad purple stripe on his tunic indicating his right to stand for senatorial office) and T. married the daughter of Agricola (then a prominent military man who was suffect consul)[5] in 77 (*Agr.* 9.6), his career looked promising. Presumably he reached the quaestorship in *c.*81 (thus allowing him membership of the senate), but in 88 he was certainly praetor and a priest, one of the *quindecimuiri sacris faciundis* (*OCD*[3]; 'one of the four major colleges of the Roman priesthood') responsible for organising Domitian's secular games (*A.* 11.11.1).[6] After that, he probably went abroad on military service (the usual step after the praetorship), since he was out of Italy when Agricola died in 93 (*Agr.* 45.5), but he was back in Rome soon afterwards to witness the tense atmosphere culminating in Domitian's assassination (96). His prominence is suggested by his selection as suffect consul in the last two months of 97 during the short principate of Nerva (96–98), under whom he delivered the funeral oration for Verginius Rufus (Pliny *Ep.* 2.1.6).[7] The summit of his successful career was being awarded

[1] Helpful accounts include Syme 1958: 59–74; Martin 1981: 26–35; Birley 2000. See too Alföldy 1995 on *CIL* VI 1574.

[2] All dates are AD unless otherwise stated or ambiguity requires clarification. See Syme 1958: 613–14 and Beagon 2005: 259–60 on T.'s family.

[3] Syme 1958: 618–24, 806–7.

[4] Mayer 2001: 93; van den Berg 2014: 72–3 discusses the orator's apprenticeship (*tirocinium fori*).

[5] 'Under the empire *consules suffecti* or "replacement consuls" regularly took over from the *consules ordinarii* who had begun the year. The "ordinary consuls" gave their name to the year . . . enjoyed more prestige than the suffects and remained in office for a month or two before being replaced; there could be several pairs of suffect consuls in any one year' (WK 6, n. 22).

[6] Woodman 2009b: 38–9; Malloch 2013: 179–81, 186.

[7] Whitton 2013: 74–5.

the prestigious proconsulship of Asia in 112/13. He died at some point after 115/16, but we do not know when.

In the Roman world, prominent men were expected to be able to make constructive use of their leisure time as well as their professional life. At least that was the idealised view of Cato the Elder (234–149 BC), whose now fragmentary *Origines* offered in Latin an account of Roman history from Rome's foundation to his own times.[8] One commendable way to use *otium* was in writing literary works. T.'s own literary trajectory is intriguing. His debut, the *Agricola* (a biography of his father-in-law), was published soon after Trajan's accession in 98.[9] That was quickly followed (98) by the *Germania*, an ethnographical monograph on the tribes of Germany, and then after a few years by the *Dialogus*, a neo-Ciceronian dialogue about the state of contemporary oratory, published perhaps in 102, but set in 75 or 76.[10] After T. had made his mark by these three works in less ambitious genres, he turned to writing history, a heavy-weight genre whose practitioners generally enhanced their credibility if they themselves had had a prominent public career. In the *Histories* (published *c.*109), T. first covered the civil wars of 69 and the Flavian dynasty (70–96: Vespasian, Titus, Domitian), before finally turning his attention in the *Annals* to the Julio-Claudian dynasty (14–68), although only dealing with Augustus in flashback. The dates of composition and publication remain elusive.[11]

2. THE SOURCES, HISTORIOGRAPHY, AND NERO

T. could turn to various sources, both written and oral, in constructing his narrative of Nero's principate. Although he reveals a wider range of

[8] *clarorum uirorum atque magnorum non minus otii quam negotii rationem exstare oportere*, 'an account should be given of great and illustrious men's leisure no less than their public business' (M. Porcius Cato, *FRHist* no. 5, F2).

[9] 'Internal evidence indicates that he was writing the preface to the *Agricola* between October 97 and late January 98 and that he was finishing the work after Trajan had become emperor (3.1, 44.5)' (Woodman 2009b: 31).

[10] Mayer 2001: 22–7 and van den Berg 2014: 31–5 discuss the date of composition. Goldberg 2009: 74 outlines the date of the dialogue's dramatic setting. However, as van den Berg 2014: 31 cautions, 'neither the date of composition nor the dramatic setting is known with certainty'.

[11] Potter 1991: 287–90 surveys three possible dates of composition: (i) written between 108 and 116; (ii) written over more than a decade but postdating the death of Trajan; (iii) written between 112 and some time after 117. He concludes (290): 'Tacitus was plainly a slow and painstaking author, and it is therefore likely that the *Annales* as we have them were not completed before the death of Trajan in 117.' Woodman 2009b: 42 speculates that Trajan's so-called 'restored coinage' (depictions of earlier *principes* whose principates were considered worthy of admiration) in 112 may have prompted Tacitus to write the *Annals* (as an eloquent contrast to the 'serial canonisation' of these emperors by Trajan).

sources in the *A.* than the *H.*, his practice (standard in ancient historians) often (but not always) meant citing names only when he found conflicting versions (*A.* 13.20.2).[12] Even so, T. sometimes notes a divergence without revealing names (e.g. his uncertainty whether the fire in Rome was an accident or Nero's arson: *A.* 15.38.1, *utrumque auctores prodidere*; cf. *ut alii tradidere*, 15.53.2). In addition, T. could allude to sources to impress upon readers his diligent research (e.g. Agrippina the Younger's *commentarii, A.* 4.53.2)[13] or to distance himself from material discordant with the dignity of historiography (e.g. the divergent reports of Cluvius Rufus and Fabius Rusticus about the incestuous relationship between Nero and his mother, *A.* 14.2). Clearly more was at stake for historians in appealing to sources than just indicating the provenance of historical details. Historiography was a well-populated genre (cf. Livy noting that it attracts *noui semper scriptores, Preface* 2), and T. needed to secure his own work's longevity by making it stand out as superior to his rivals' efforts. This sometimes involves an agonistic relationship with sources. What is also characteristic of T.'s narrative technique (and perhaps part of that agonism through not directing readers too overtly to alternative histories) is how often he actively masks his sources, either by relaying information in the passive voice (*adnotatum est*, 15.23.4; *ferebatur*, 15.45.3, 15.50.4; *uulgabantur*, 15.65) or by indicating intermediary sources but without names (*ferunt*, 15.10.4, 15.23.4; *constitit*, 15.16.1; *numerent*, 15.41.2; *plerique . . . crediderunt*, 15.52.3). This is all a far cry from modern historical writing, with its meticulous footnotes and rigorous techniques of citation.

T.'s credentials as a historian had already been established by his first foray into historiography, the *Histories*, some of the sources for which are also drawn upon in the *A.*: for example, he had already consulted Pliny the Elder's (53.3n.) continuation of Aufidius Bassus' history (*H.* 3.28: Pliny blamed Antonius Primus for the sack of Cremona), but Pliny's work also covered some or all of Nero's principate.[14] Two other sources may have offered T. material for the early books of the *H.*, but were probably much more central to his research for the Julio-Claudian principate. Seneca's friend Fabius Rusticus (61.3n.) was one: all surviving fragments of this historian concern Nero, though the scope of his history is unclear. Another is Cluvius Rufus (*FRHist* no. 84; cited at *A.* 13.20.2, 14.2.1), a prominent senior senator and *uir facundus et pacis artibus, bellis inexpertus* (*H.* 1.8.1). Under Vespasian, Cluvius wrote a history which perhaps began with Caligula, certainly covered Nero, and may have tackled the civil wars

[12] Woodman 2009a: 7–10. More generally, see Marincola 1997: 66–79, 95–112.
[13] 'Presumably written during her enforced retirement between 55 and 59' (Champlin 2003: 39).
[14] The finishing-point of Aufidius Bassus' (*FRHist* no. 78) history of his own times is uncertain.

too (Plut. *Otho* 3.2).[15] Cluvius, who served as herald at the Neronia at Rome in 65 (Suet. *N.* 21.1–2) and accompanied Nero on his tour of Greece (Dio 63.14.3), perhaps treated the emperor more generously than some historians did. For example, he suggests that Agrippina initiated the incest with Nero, whereas Fabius Rusticus claimed that Nero started it (*A.* 14.2.1; *FRHist* no. 84, F3). Nonetheless Cluvius still covered the (intrinsically discreditable) story of incest in his narrative. Moreover, the emperor Galba trusted Cluvius sufficiently to entrust him with the important province of Hispania Tarraconensis (*H.* 1.8.1). That would have been an unlikely appointment if Cluvius had been fiercely pro-Neronian. These three named sources were probably only part of a much wider pre-existing textual landscape which T. (and others) traversed: Syme, noting the concordances between T.'s *H.* and Plutarch's *Galba* and *Otho*, identified an unknown common source (dubbed the *ignotus*), who may also lurk in the *A.*'s shadows.[16]

There were other types of written records available beyond formal historical accounts. Corbulo's memoirs (16.1n. *prodidit Corbulo*), reflecting the well-established tradition of generals writing about their campaigns, must have been invaluable as an eyewitness account of events in the east, but they were certainly partisan.[17] T. used these memoirs but is careful to include alternative viewpoints to counteract pro-Corbulan material (6.1n. *Haec plures*). It is also clear from various verbal echoes that T. consulted the writings of the younger Seneca.[18] For events in Rome, T. scrutinised the *acta senatus*, although scholars disagree about how extensively he did so and whether this was at first hand.[19] In *A.* 15 T. only selectively covers matters discussed in the senate (15.18–22, 73–4), and there are other sections of the narrative where the *acta senatus* were probably a more central source (e.g. Piso's trial in the senate in the year 20, *A.* 3.7–19).[20]

[15] Syme 1958: 675 remains cautious, stressing uncertainty that Cluvius covered the events of 69. On Cluvius see further Wardle 1992; Champlin 2003: 42–4; Devillers 2003: 24–7.

[16] Syme 1958: 674–6; Murison 1999: 12–17; Damon 2003: 22–30. Syme 1958: 675 points to Plutarch's back reference (*G.* 2.1) to his lost life of Nero as suggesting that his source (the *ignotus*) also covered Nero's principate. Even if the *ignotus* formally began his history with Galba, some element of summary or flashback to the previous principate seems plausible (cf. *H.* 1.4–11, the overview of the empire at Galba's accession; *A.* 1.9–10 on Augustus).

[17] Similarly T. consulted the memoirs of another general, Vipstanus Messalla, cited at *H.* 3.25.2, 28. The republican general Sulla's memoirs (*FRHist* no. 22; Flower 2015) are perhaps the best-known example, though they are no longer extant.

[18] 59.3n. *dum . . . approbaret*; 61.1n. *idque . . . Neroni*; Turpin 2008: 393. Woodman 2012: 361–4 discusses the Senecan *color* which pervades the suicide narrative.

[19] See 74.3n. *commentariis senatus* on T.'s consultation of the *acta*.

[20] See WM 114–16 on the relationship between T.'s narrative and the bronze inscription of the senatorial decree (*senatus consultum de Pisone patre*) issued after

T. generally projects the debasement of senatorial debate, suggesting that the *acta senatus* on their own were increasingly less useful, particularly in a world where real power lay in the imperial *domus* (cf. Dio 53.19) and beyond: in T.'s memorable formulation, emperors could be created 'elsewhere than in Rome' (*alibi quam Romae, H.* 1.4.2). T. also consulted the *acta diurna*, a daily gazette about events in Rome (3.3.2, 13.31.1, 16.22.3) probably first published in 59 BC, although it may well have preserved uncontextualised nuggets of information and its scope probably evolved and fluctuated over time.[21] One other 'family' of source-texts was *exitus* literature, relaying death-scenes of prominent people. Pliny the Younger, whose letter collection is peppered with such descriptions, says that Titinius Capito wrote about 'the deaths of famous men' (*Epistle* 8.12.4) and Gaius Fannius covered 'the deaths of those killed or exiled by Nero' (*Epistle* 5.5.3). Given the clustering of deaths in *A.* 15 after the Pisonian conspiracy, T. must have drawn on such accounts.[22]

The other substantial repository of information for T. involved collective memory conveyed through unspecified oral sources.[23] At different points T. appeals to such sources to endorse his own account (or to shift responsibility for a particular detail away from himself; e.g. *A.* 11.27). So he introduces 'older men' (41.1n. *seniores*) and their memories of Rome before its destruction by the fire in 64 to express indirect criticism of Nero.[24] T. (born between 56 and 58, and researching the *A.* from *c.*109 onwards) could have spoken directly to such people (even before becoming a historian), but he also quotes *seniores* who told him a detail about Piso's trial in 20 (*A.* 3.16.1), which in that instance relies on a more distant oral tradition. The other important category involves rumours. This is an excellent way for historians to include information without endorsing its accuracy, whether to deliver indirect criticism or to capture the atmosphere of the times. Indeed, a rumour's accuracy often matters much less than people's belief that it is true – and its capacity to drive events. In *A.* 15, T. introduces varied rumours about the humiliation of Paetus' troops in the east (15.15.2), a potentially collapsible bridge (15.15.3), Nero's lyre-performance during the fire at Rome (15.39.3), a freedman preparing poison for Seneca at Nero's behest (15.45.3), a gladiatorial outbreak generating a new Spartacus (15.46.1), and Seneca's imperial ambitions (15.65). Each rumour must be considered in its own context and on its

Piso's trial: 'It is likely that the *acta senatus* would contain considerable detail of the most famous political trial of the first half of Tiberius' reign.'

[21] WM 93; Baldwin 1979; Lintott 1986.

[22] Ash 1999: 87; 2003; Champlin 2003: 39–40; Turpin 2008: 368–9.

[23] See Alston 2008: 155–7 on the 'memory of history' and the essays in Galinsky 2014. Woodman 1988: 15–22 and WK 25–6 consider the problems of oral sources.

[24] WM 168–70; Malloch 2013: 410–11.

own merits, but even in this one book, T. makes full use of rumours to enrich his narrative.[25]

One dominant characteristic of much historiography written under the Flavians is its stridently anti-Neronian outlook. Although Vespasian, the eventual victor in the civil wars, did not challenge Nero directly, nonetheless it served his new regime's interests if Nero was cast in an extremely negative light.[26] Vespasian would thus seem by contrast an enlightened and benign ruler who had 'saved' Rome.[27] Indeed, the eventual fate of Nero's Golden House, whose site was reappropriated by the Flavians and given back to the public as the Flavian amphitheatre and Titus' baths, shows how the new regime sought to mark itself out as Nero's polar opposite.[28] The senate was prepared to declare Nero a *hostis* even before his death (Suet. *N.* 49.2; cf. *damnatus princeps*, *H.* 1.16.2), and the anti-Neronian backlash in the literary tradition soon set in, particularly after a new imperial dynasty emerged.[29] Pliny the Elder (writing in the 70s), for example, comments on how rivers ominously flowed backwards at the end of Nero's principate and indicates a fuller discussion in his historical narrative (*HN* 2.232): 'throughout the *Natural History* Nero's follies and extravagances are exposed, as he is repeatedly castigated for his crimes and his madness, and portrayed as the enemy of mankind'.[30] In the pseudo-Senecan tragedy *Octavia* (whenever it was published), 'the tradition associated with Nero's atrocities has already taken its final form'.[31] In the post-Flavian era, critical portraits of Nero had become so familiar that any positive notes stand out: for example, 'by redeeming Nero's writing, Suetonius therefore paradoxically reinforces his point about the emperor's ultimately evil character by chiaroscuro'.[32]

[25] See further Shatzman 1974; Laurence 1994; Gibson 1998; Feldherr 2009.

[26] Martin 1981: 207–13; Griffin 1984: 207; Kragelund 2000: 512–15; Champlin 2003: 36–52; Fulkerson 2013: 149.

[27] Cf. *Vespasianus Augustus fessis rebus subueniens* (Pliny *HN* 2.18).

[28] Coleman 2006: 14–36 on Martial, *Liber spectaculorum* 2; Sailor 2008: 235. Nonetheless T. makes considerable efforts while narrating Vespasian's imperial challenge in the *H.* to demonstrate that he is no tame Flavian puppet (Ash 2007: 32–4).

[29] Hedrick 2000: 89–130; Flower 2006: 197–233.

[30] Champlin 2003: 41.

[31] Ferri 2003: 10; and 27 (tentatively favouring publication in the 90s). Nero was also the subject of Plutarch's biography (*Galba* 2.1), no longer extant, but part of a series covering the emperors from Augustus to Vitellius (perhaps written under the Flavians). Nero's liberation of the province Achaea from direct Roman rule and taxation in 67 was the one bright spot for Greek authors: 'Even Greek writers like Plutarch and Philostratus, whose Roman connections and sympathies lead them to view Nero's artistic performances with contempt, celebrate his liberation of Greece with warm feeling' (Griffin 1984: 211).

[32] Power 2014a: 216. Suetonius' *Nero* is generally thought to postdate T.'s *A.*

T. faced a difficult task. His sources overwhelmingly presented Nero in exaggerated terms, drawing on motifs associating the emperor with the stereotypical tyrant (and worse). Accounts of his principate were published under a new imperial dynasty when there was no incentive for writers to salvage anything of Nero's reputation (quite the opposite). While it was not T.'s intention to rehabilitate Nero, nonetheless he did not want simply to parrot uncritically negative details from his source material.[33] In this, he succeeded. Even if reading *A.* 13–16 today undoubtedly leaves us with a negative impression of Nero, T.'s portrait is more nuanced and complex than the parallel narratives in Suetonius (*c.*70–*c.*130) and what survives of Dio (*c.*164–after 229).[34] These three writers probably consulted some of the same sources, but relied on each other (hardly or) not at all.[35] Moreover, T.'s historical interests extend far beyond Nero as an individual *princeps* to engage with other related spheres such as the nature of power and Roman identity, issues surrounding freedom of speech, the increasing problem of senatorial subservience, and the vulnerability of emperors at the centre to military power on the imperial margins. Suetonius may preserve many vivid and intriguing details (e.g. Nero's menacing dream after the matricide about being covered in a swarm of winged ants, *N.* 46.1),[36] but often they are uncontextualised and unanchored (reflecting his organisation of material by rubrics, or 'not in chronological order [*tempora*] but by classes [*species*]', *Aug.* 9.1).[37] T.'s concern is with how the institution of the principate evolves over time, not

[33] E.g. T. rejects the idea that Nero poisoned his wife Poppaea although some authors endorsed it, *odio magis quam ex fide* (*A.* 16.6.1; Hutchinson 1993: 55–6).

[34] Dio's annalistic *Roman History* was originally eighty books in length, with books 61–3 covering Nero. Substantial fragments of these Neronian books have been preserved by (i) the monk Johannes Xiphilinus (eleventh century) whose *Epitome* of Dio was commissioned by the Byzantine emperor Michael VII Doukas (ruled 1071–8) and condenses Dio's Books 36–80 from Pompey to Severus Alexander (Swan 2004: 36) and (ii) Joannes Zonaras (twelfth century), a Byzantine writer from Constantinople whose wide-ranging *Epitome historiarum* (running from the creation to 1118 and written after his withdrawal from public life to a monastery) drew on various writers including Dio for the section on Roman history (Swan 2004: 37). Hence the original structure of Dio's Neronian narrative is only partially clear.

[35] Syme 1958: 688–92 (including: 'Suetonius would not fail to read the work of the consular historian – if it was available ... How far he put it to use is another matter. Not much, it seems, if at all,' 'At the best, Tacitus was only a subsidiary source for Dio,' 'There is no sign of Dio's having used Suetonius'); Champlin 2003: 38. Power 2014a argues that Suetonius had not read the *A.* but that the two writers used a common source.

[36] Fulkerson 2013: 152–4.

[37] Wardle 2014: 116–17. Suetonius' aims and agenda were very different from T.'s. Scholars are now taking these seriously and constructively 'decoupling' his project from T.'s: Power 2014a: 206; 2014b.

just with individual emperors: the annalistic format is ideal for diachronic exploration of such big questions.

Yet T.'s Nero is still an extraordinary creation. Death dominates his principate from the start, as Junius Silanus is killed by poison, although startlingly Nero himself knows nothing about Agrippina's machinations to remove this potential rival (*ignaro Nerone*, 13.1.1). So far, the young Nero's vices are present but temporarily hidden from view (*abditis adhuc uitiis*, 13.1.3). This is certainly no narrative of innocence corrupted (cf. Sallust's Jugurtha). Instead, T. plots the trajectory of Nero's restraining influences (Agrippina, Burrus, Seneca) being progressively removed as he is gradually transformed from marginalised imperial figurehead to a larger than life play-acting *princeps* occupying the centre-stage and turning Rome into his playground – without anyone to restrain him.[38] T. accentuates the crucial turning-points: after Agrippina's murder in 59 'he released himself into every kind of lust' (*seque in omnes libidines effudit*, 14.13.2), and after Burrus' suspicious death in 62 (which also broke Seneca's influence, 14.52.1), 'he inclined towards baser men' (*ad deteriores inclinabat*, 14.52.1).

From the start T. pinpoints Nero's central character traits economically but revealingly. In his early years he has a lively mind (*uiuidus animus*, 13.3.3) with strong interests in carving, painting, singing, horses, and composing poetry, which showed that he possessed the 'rudiments of culture' (*elementa doctrinae*, 13.3.3). This seems harmless enough, but after embarking on a love-affair with the freedwoman Acte and acquiring some dubious new friends, Marcus Otho and Claudius Senecio (13.12), Nero becomes more confident. In AD 55 he performs his own 'debut' murder by poisoning his adoptive brother Britannicus at the dinner-table (13.13–17). As Nero watches, he calmly dismisses the first signs of impending death as an epileptic fit. 'Resembling someone who did not know' (*nescio similis*, 13.16.3), Nero's chillingly calm reaction to this violent death suggests that he possesses considerable skills as an actor.

Whether we ever see anything of substance beneath Nero's 'mask' is an interesting question. Suetonius at one point observes that, when Nero performed tragedies on stage, he habitually and solipsistically wore masks fashioned in the likeness of his own face (*N.* 21.3). This prompts Edwards to comment: 'The mask represented the face behind it. The emperor acted himself'.[39] What is distinctive about T.'s portrait is that this dynamic consistently dominates Nero's conduct in every sphere outside the theatre.[40]

[38] This reading of Nero has something in common with T.'s obituary of Tiberius at *A.* 6.51, though this is a complex passage (Woodman 2017: 290–3).

[39] Edwards 1993: 135. See further Cowan 2009.

[40] Theatricality as a defining aspect of Nero's principate has naturally attracted much scholarly attention: e.g. Manning 1975; Bartsch 1994; Edwards 1994; Shumate 1997.

Essentially T. shapes Nero as a kind of reactive vessel or conduit, empty of substance, but constantly filling with emotions triggered by his immediate experiences. Passively and instinctively he takes on feelings of love (*ui amoris subactus* for Acte, 13.13.1; *acri iam principis amore* for Poppaea, 13.46.2; similarly 14.1.1, 16.6.1), hate (*filii odia* for Agrippina, 14.1.3; *odium* for Vestinus, 15.52.3, 68.3; Rufrius Crispinus *Neroni inuisus*, 15.71.4; Publius Anteius *inuisus Neroni*, 16.14.1), excessive lust for luxury (*nimia luxus cupido*, 14.22.4) and ever-growing lust to appear on the public stage (*acriore in dies cupidine . . . promiscas scaenas frequentandi*, 15.33.1), greed for money (*opibus eius inhians*, 16.17.4), joy (*ultra mortale gaudium*, 15.23.1), anger (*iracundia* towards Poppaea, 16.6.1), sadness (*maeroris immodicus*, 15.23.3), and above all fear (his central trait).[41] T.'s Nero is something of a chameleon in his acute responsiveness to his immediate environment, although unlike a chameleon, the extremity and oddness of his reactions tend to draw attention towards him instead of camouflaging him. T. rarely allows us into Nero's head and only gives him one extended speech (14.55–6, itself a response to Seneca's request for permission to withdraw from public life). The emotions which T.'s Nero feels are generally intense and excessive, but also mercurial and often short-lived. There is an emptiness and spontaneity about him which sees him constantly living in the present moment as he reacts to events around him. In this sense, he lacks the malice aforethought and brooding vindictiveness often associated with stereotypical tyrants, and indeed with the other depictions of Nero in Suetonius, Dio, and elsewhere.[42] The real tragedy of T.'s Nero is that circumstances ever unfolded so as to allow such a man to become *princeps* in the first place.

3. *ANNALS* 15: STRUCTURE AND ARTISTRY

Annalistic structure, deploying the building-blocks of individual years dated by consuls, is a versatile and expressive form of historical writing. Authors can speed up or slow down their narrative and thereby emphasise some years as particularly important. Moreover, the traditional structure (domestic material [*res internae*] at the year's start and end surrounding a central panel covering foreign campaigns [*res externae*]) can be creatively manipulated, whether to allow suggestive juxtaposition of significant material within the year or to 'backload' a year with information

[41] *exterret* [sc. *Neronem*], 13.20.1; *Nero trepidus*, 13.20.3; *metu principis*, 13.21.1; *metuentior*, 13.25.3; *pauore*, 14.10.1; *metu* and *terrores*, 14.59.3; *terruit* [sc. *Neronem*], 14.62.1; *per artus tremens*, 15.36.2; *magis magisque pauido Nerone*, 15.58.1; *metuit*, 15.68.3; *metum*, 13.47.1, 15.73.1, 16.15.1; *pauidum* and *exterritum*, 16.15.1; *extimuit*, 16.24.2.

[42] E.g. Dio casts the fire of Rome as being something which Nero had always desired (62.16.1; similarly [Sen.] *Oct.* 831).

foreshadowing future events.[43] The narrative of *A.* 15 exploits such possibilities to the full.[44] The book encompasses four years (AD 62–5). Two massive annalistic units (14.48–15.22, forty chapters for 62; 15.48–16.13, forty chapters for 65) – the two longest years of Nero's principate in terms of narrative coverage – spill over the book's beginning and end and sandwich two much more compact years (15.23–32, ten chapters for 63; 15.33–47, fifteen chapters for 64).[45] For Syme, the importance for T. of the 'long year' 62 lies in the fact that 'Seneca's power snapped', allowing the new joint praetorian prefect Tigellinus (37.1n.) to rise to prominence as a second Sejanus.[46] The significance of the other 'long year', 65, must lie in the carnage unleashed (including Seneca's death) after the failure of the Pisonian conspiracy, which saw Nero reaching beyond the murder of family members to wider circles of victims from the aristocracy and beyond. Various possible imperial contenders were eliminated from 65 onwards, ultimately leaving the way clear for Vespasian's challenge and the new Flavian dynasty.[47]

At the book's start, the claustrophobic *res internae* which have dominated the narrative of 62 so far (14.48–50, treason cases; 14.51–6, Burrus' death and Seneca's abortive retirement; 14.57–65, deaths of Sulla Felix, Rubellius Plautus, Octavia) dip below the horizon. By a dramatic geographical shift we are transported from Rome to the east (15.1–17). Yet the conflict with Parthia is hardly an escape from the oppressive atmosphere of Rome. Indeed, the 'showman' Corbulo engages in shadow-boxing rather than real warfare, and the premature celebration in Rome of so-called 'victory' in the east (15.18.1) suggests that this is just one more shallow performance so typical of Nero's principate.[48] The closing section of *res internae* (15.18–22), assembling some grubby material about the senate's confronting corrupt distribution of political posts and arrogant provincials, is an anticlimactic end to 62. Yet *A.* 15 is a book whose dramatic and emotional highpoint dominates its final phase, not the beginning.[49]

[43] E.g. *A.* 4.74, the marriage of the younger Agrippina and Domitius Ahenobarbus whose son will be Nero (MW 262). See generally Ginsburg 1981; Alston 2008: 150.
[44] Wille 1983: 563–83 analyses *A.* 15's structure.
[45] The book-divisions reflect T.'s original structure rather than being imposed later (1.1n. *Interea*). The 'overspill' marking the start and end of *A.* 15 contrasts with the structure of the first hexad, where each book begins with a fresh year so that 'a closed compartment segregates the events of each year' (Syme 1958: 266).
[46] Syme 1958: 263, quoting *mors Burri infregit Senecae potentiam* (14.52.1).
[47] Corbulo's death directly promoted Vespasian's advancement. [48] Ash 2015a.
[49] Hutchinson 1993: 157–9 stresses (158) that 'the Neronian books were meant also to possess a terrible and climactic extremity'.