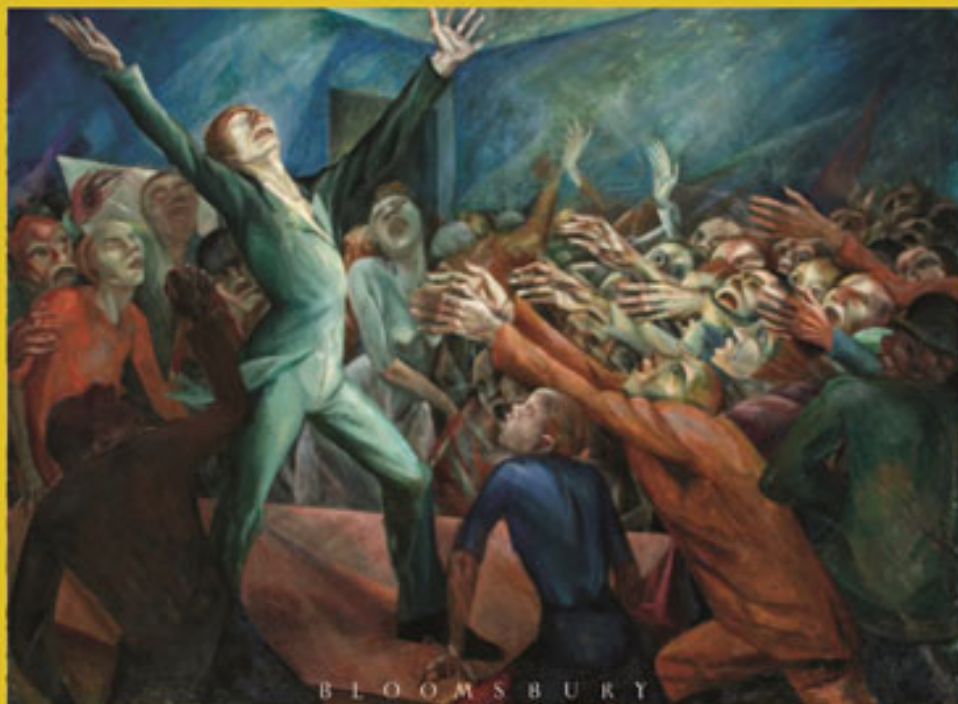


Ellen O'Gorman

# TACITUS' HISTORY OF POLITICALLY EFFECTIVE SPEECH

TRUTH TO POWER



# Tacitus' History of Politically Effective Speech

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# Tacitus' History of Politically Effective Speech

*Truth to Power*

Ellen O'Gorman

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*For Synnøva*



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## Preface

The research for this book was supported by a University Research Fellowship from the Institute of Advanced Studies at the University of Bristol, and by a Margo Tytus Fellowship from the Faculty of Classics at the University of Cincinnati. I am immensely grateful to both funding bodies for this support, without which I would not have completed the book, and also to the Faculty of Arts Research Fund at Bristol, for covering the costs of the book cover. My heartfelt thanks also to our indispensable subject librarians, Damien McManus and Tim Riley, for all their help over the years. My colleagues in the Department of Classics and Ancient History have offered intellectual challenges and collegiality for longer than I care to admit: Emma Cole, Lyndsay Coe, Will Guast, Kurt Lampe, Bella Sandwell, and Edwin Shaw. In particular, the friendship of Bob Fowler, Pantelis Michelakis, and Vanda Zajko have kept me going in darkest times. The last stage of writing was enhanced immeasurably by the presence of Aske Damtoft Poulsen, who shared with me many discussions of Tacitus and generously read several draft chapters: his insights have sharpened many of my thoughts in this book. My graduate students have taught me more about writing than anyone, and I am lucky to have supervised them: Hannah-Marie Chidwick, Richard Cole, Corbin Golding, and Dana Lungu. Four generations of undergraduates studying ‘Roman Emperors: A Survival Guide’ have helped me to clarify my thoughts about the experience of imperial subjects: I thank them for their energy and engagement.

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# Introduction

## 1 Imperial regimes of truth

In the tenth year of Tiberius' reign (AD 24), the eminent consular Marcus Lepidus successfully argued to reduce the severity of a sentence upon Sosia Galla, charged along with her husband with treason. The episode prompts Tacitus to reflect on the principles underlying a successful senatorial career under an emperor.

*unde dubitare cogor, fato et sorte nascendi, ut cetera, ita principum inclinatio in hos, offensio in illos, an sit aliquid in nostris consiliis liceatque inter abruptam contumaciam et deforme obsequium pergere iter ambitione ac periculis vacuum.*

*Ann.* 4.20.3

Hence I am compelled to wonder whether it is through fate or the chance of birth (as other things are) that the favour of rulers is bestowed on some men and their dislike upon others, or whether there is something in our conscious behaviour which enables us to steer ourselves between brusque defiance and shameful compliance and to pursue a path clear of ambition and dangers.<sup>1</sup>

Tacitus has not arrived at this question unexpectedly, for it shapes his thinking from *Agricola* to *Annals*: what is the relationship between what senators can control (their avoidance of ambition) and what they cannot or can only partially control (the dangers of a ruler's disfavour)? Does control over their own behaviour as senators enable them to avoid or limit the dangers of imperial disfavour and its potential to destroy their careers and the future of their families? Can senators consciously adopt a mode of behaviour through which their political career can flourish, without damage to their honour and integrity? Tacitus and his readers devote much energy to identifying what mode of behaviour might achieve this. In this book I want to address the question from a slightly different angle, which

I will articulate by looking more closely at the passage just quoted. For the desired career (*iter*) of the successful senator here is described as an absence of negative qualities – *iter ambitione ac periculis vacuum* – and characterizes senatorial activity in terms of reaction and avoidance. Yet if we look at Tacitus' narrative, we see senators busily engaged in activity, often taking initiatives, making proposals and counter-proposals. Throughout their activities, to be sure, imperial senators are keeping in balance their desired outcomes and the possibility of serving or crossing more powerful political actors (just as their Republican predecessors kept such factors in mind). In this episode, for instance, Lepidus reviews, along with other senators, a *maiestas* charge where the offence felt by the emperor is made very clear (*Ann.* 4.19.3). Lepidus steers his path away from pointless opposition by upholding the condemnation and the sentence of exile. But he also avoids shameful capitulation by using legal precedent to secure Sosia Galla's property for her heirs.<sup>2</sup> Thus his actions conform to Tacitus' description of the senator's ideal career, to steer a middle way between defiance and complicity. But they also highlight how limited that description is, for it says nothing about the concrete achievements of Lepidus, or what those achievements might mean for Sosia and her descendants. The empty path of success, clear of ambitions and dangers, is actually filled with smaller, incremental gains for the social and political culture of the imperial senators.

My central argument in this book is that, by looking at senatorial activity as it is narrated in Tacitus' works, we can recover a representation of what was politically effective in the imperial senate and can explore its productivity for good or ill. My contention is that Tacitus saw and presented in his works the possibility for a senator to engage in effective political action, and that such a possibility becomes visible to us when we consider a senator's action as having multiple aims and outcomes. Again, while Tacitus' reflection on the principles of senatorial success in *Ann.* 4.20 are oriented entirely around a subject's relationship with the ruler, the narratives of senators' actions show that effective political action is not always along that single axis. Lepidus' proposal may be prompted by commitment to the law, rivalry (or even alliance) with the proposer of the original sentence, or by friendship with the condemned, as much as by his relationship with Tiberius.

Hence the title of my work – *Truth to Power* – might seem initially misleading. The phrase 'Speaking Truth to Power' usually conjures up a scene

of exchange between a dissident speaker and a powerful addressee, and demonstrates both the danger and necessity of maintaining integrity in the face of coercion.<sup>3</sup> The ‘truth’ in this formulation is imagined initially as external to power relations between speaker and ruler: it is the truth that the ruler does not want to acknowledge. The dissident speaker shows her commitment to that truth and by maintaining truth she transforms the power relation. In my analysis, many speakers are far from dissident, and their scenes of speaking involve multiple addressees. ‘Truth’ is the product of their speech, and the ‘truth’ that they produce is a political vision in which the conceptual positions of ruler and subject, as well as their ideal relations, emerge as by-products of the speeches’ ostensible aims. Lepidus, for instance, speaks in order to preserve the status of a fellow senator’s children and in the process expresses a sense of how senators should engage with each other and with the ruler. Political visions of this sort draw on established networks of associations which concretize citizenship, senatorial status, and authority through metaphors of physical protection or abuse, fertility or sterility, propriety or transgression. Crucially, these networks provide avenues for senatorial activity – or close them off. For instance, the speech of flatterers, which we will examine in chapter one, makes it nearly impossible for the senator to act as an impartial advisor to the princeps and thereby forecloses on ruler–subject relationships of this kind. The political vision projected by flattery generates a new kind of truth-regime within which certain modes of speech, such as deliberation or advice, lose their validity.

In using the phrase ‘truth-regime’, I draw on the insights of Michel Foucault, who outlined ways in which systems of knowledge were profoundly implicated in the power-systems of any particular era. Focussing on knowledge systems often considered ‘non-political’, such as science or medicine, Foucault investigated what effects of power emerged from their ‘disciplinary constraints’ – the specific procedures which ensured verifiability within these systems. He thus showed how empirical knowledge determined the limits of the sayable and thinkable, effectively structuring human experience, and how the development of such disciplines both drew from and contributed to the ordering of human subjects within the state. Following Foucault, Andrew Wallace-Hadrill has examined how knowledge systems of religious tradition, calendars, civic space, and ancestry were transformed in the Augustan cultural revolution so as to shift social control away from the senatorial and into the

imperial domain.<sup>4</sup> In section 1 of this introduction I will show how Foucault's understanding of 'non-political' knowledge systems can be extended also to explicitly and traditionally political knowledge systems such as rhetoric and historiography. Tacitus' recording of senatorial speech in his historiography thus participates in the creation of the Principate's truth regimes, as we will see in a moment. The second part of my argument is that Tacitus' historical narratives perform the double task of participating in and simultaneously critiquing truth regimes. Foucault encourages readers to uncover a society's regime of truth by paying attention to 'the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true.'<sup>5</sup> Tacitus produces a discourse which can be analysed in this way, but his writing also produces its own analysis along Foucauldian lines. He achieves this most often by his notorious ambiguity or irony, which denies objective authority to the 'sanctioning' of truth in his account of imperial politics.<sup>6</sup>

We can observe how this works by examining a 'truth universally acknowledged' in the Roman Principate: that autocratic rule was necessary to ensure peace in the state. Tacitus expresses this truth at the start of *Histories*:

*postquam bellatum apud Actium atque omnem potentiam ad unum conferri pacis interfuit.*

*Hist. 1.1.1*

After fighting concluded at Actium and it was in the interest of peace that all power be conferred on one man.

Tacitus combines two statements at the same level of objectivity: the Battle of Actium and the expediency of the Principate. The latter is clearly a truth which structures relations between ruler and subjects, not least by setting up the emperor as the protector of citizens. But this is a truth which is not self-evident so much as *produced* by various discourses which concretize peace as security, prosperity, and victory,<sup>7</sup> and thereby organize the experiences of Roman subjects so as to attest to the truth. The production of this truth becomes more visible when we consider how it universalizes particular concepts of security, prosperity, and victory, which are necessarily only experienced by some subjects. The overall

effect of this statement is one of constraint: truth and power just *happen*, and all subjects can do is recognize them as the conditions of their existence. This illustrates how Tacitus' narrative participates in the Augustan truth-regime, but as his preface unfolds, we see him explicitly considering the consequences of this new truth for traditional knowledge systems. The change wrought in the state after Actium is associated with the loss of great historical writing which exemplified both skill and commitment to its own criteria of truth.

*multi auctores . . . res populi Romani memorabantur, pari eloquentia ac libertate: post bellatum apud Actium atque omnem potentiam ad unum conferri pacis interfuit, magna illa ingenia cessere.*

*Hist. 1.1.1*

Many writers . . . recorded the activities of the Roman people, with eloquence matching their independence: after fighting concluded at Actium and it was in the interest of peace that all power be conferred on one man, those great historical talents dwindled out.

Tacitus thus implicates changes in power with a transformation in discourses of knowledge, so that a new truth-regime is produced. Initially he seems to represent this as a one-way process, with imperial power acting upon knowledge. But as the preface unfolds, we see Tacitus using historical distance to represent the imperial truth-regime as relative rather than absolute. As part of this relativizing, he reserves the word 'truth' for the practice of history before it degenerated in the Principate. He thereby implies confidence in historical perspective and its potential to uncover – or even dismantle – regimes of truth. We will follow the implications of this below. But Tacitus also resists a top-down model of regime change when he recounts how the transformation of historical discourse affects the imperial truth-regime itself. He thus not only shows knowledge acting upon power, but also observes how this knowledge is supported by senatorial agency: in Tacitus' account, the senators' understanding of the Principate affects historical writing, which propagates the truth of power. We see this in Tacitus' elaboration of his claim that history has degenerated, in the same passage.

*magna illa ingenia cessere; simul veritas pluribus modis infracta, primum inscitia rei publicae ut alienae, mox libidine adsentandi aut rursus odio adversus dominantes.*

*Hist. 1.1.1*



those great historical talents dwindled out; at the same time truth was fractured in various ways, first because of ignorance of the commonwealth, as (if it were) the property of another, then because of passion for compliance or alternatively because of hatred against those holding supremacy.

The discourses of the Principate 'fracture' the truth-criteria of Republican historiography, but the reinvented discourses of flattery and invective will produce their own political truths, as we will see in subsequent chapters.<sup>8</sup> The important phrase here is *veritas . . . infracta . . . inscitia rei publicae ut alienae*, which shows knowledge, discourse, and power acting upon each other in multiple ways. The truth of historical discourse is broken, Tacitus says, because of ignorance about the workings of the state. This ignorance is in turn explained by the phrase *ut alienae*: because the state was in the possession of another. This is usually taken to be the extra-senatorial princeps, but the lack of specificity emphasizes the dispossession and alienation of the senate.<sup>9</sup> It is possible to take this as an objective condition, which is developed through Tacitus' coinage of the term *arcana imperii*, 'Secrets of State', and the idea that it is in the interest of the state to bar its citizens from full knowledge of state workings.<sup>10</sup> Dio's more extensive explanation of how the Augustan regime inaugurates this bar of knowledge implicitly takes such an objective stance.<sup>11</sup> But the interdependence of *inscitia* and *ut alienae* also betrays the lack of external support for this truth. That is, the 'recognition' that the state is the property of another comes from those existing in a state of ignorance: it may be a *misrecognition* which exemplifies that ignorance, reversing the tenor of cause and effect. The ambiguity of *ut*, which I've rendered 'as (if it were)' points to how this truth about power is never accorded absolute objective status.<sup>12</sup>

What difference does this make? My point here is that the discourses which produce truth under the Principate (in Tacitus and other authors) are not simply responding to changes in power; they are generating those changes through their own discursive transformations which determine what can be perceived and spoken as the truth. Tacitus does not present a simple picture of a power grid descending upon and constraining the speech of senators and historians. He shows us their speech marked by passionate engagement with different modes of addressing imperial power – 'passion for compliance or hatred of those holding supremacy' – which radically determine how that

power is perceived and experienced. The Principate becomes a co-production in the dialogues between subjects and ruler.<sup>13</sup>

Thinking about the Principate as a regime of truth which is produced by discourses opens the way for considering how, and by whom, different political truths can be propagated. This provides a space for considering the agency of imperial subjects. The choice between compliance and resistance, for a senatorial speaker like Lepidus or a historian like Tacitus, ceases to be an ethical struggle within an unyielding system and becomes an ethical-political act of engagement with a continually evolving and partially responsive domain. This is not to overstate the agency of senators and historians in the Principate. In this, Lepidus' participation in a treason trial serves as a salutary reminder of the limits to what a senator can achieve. Nor are these limits all exclusively the effect of the imperial regime;<sup>14</sup> the boundaries of what can be thought and known by the Roman senatorial class also impose restrictions on what new political truths can be propagated. But neither, I suggest, should our awareness of those limits lead us to discount the effects of senatorial actions and the use senators can make of what agency they claim.

Throughout this reading of the preface to *Histories*, I have increasingly interpreted what Tacitus says about historical writing as applicable also to the practice of senatorial speech. I do so because there are clear parallels between the two discourses as vehicles of political knowledge, where the pressures of imperial life are manifested and negotiated. This is evident from the similarity between the extremes of resistance (*contumacia*) and complaisance (*obsequium*) in Tacitus' discussion of the Lepidus episode, and those of hostility (*odium*) and desire to flatter (*libido adsentandi*) in his presentation of imperial historiography. But the conflation of history and speech may obscure a significant difference: that the historian, speaking about regimes of the past, has a greater degree of freedom than does the orator, addressing the present ruler. Historical distance, in this view, enables Tacitus to uncover the workings of earlier imperial truth regimes which could not be accessed by the senators of the time. This is an important difference between history and political speech, but it has too often been overstated in such a way as to deny any potential effectiveness in either discourse. For example, Tacitus' careful analysis of truth and power in the preface to *Histories* has often been seen as fatally vitiated by his concluding praise of the emperors under whose rule he writes.

*quod si vita suppetit, principatum divi Nervae et imperium Traiani . . . senectuti seposui, rara temporum felicitate, ubi sentire quae velis et quae sentias dicere licet.*

*Hist. 1.1.4*

But if enough life remains for me, I have set aside for my old age the subject of the divine Nerva's principate and the reign of Trajan, in that rare happiness of times when it is permitted to think what you want and say what you think.

It is difficult for contemporary readers to read this as anything other than the sort of flattery that Tacitus has just condemned as corrosive to imperial politics. The solution is to assume that Tacitus here does not mean what he says.<sup>15</sup> When he refers to the new regime as a time when he *can* mean what he says, Tacitus implies a self-consciousness which further destabilizes the truth-claim and suggests that the reader needs to take up the task of critique which the historian lays down. Certainly, recent scholarship has been sceptical of 'taking Tacitus at his word' here, a position which has also been adopted in relation to the speech of imperial subjects more generally.<sup>16</sup> It is important to explore this more fully in order to recover a position where we can take Tacitus at his word when he declares a belief in the efficacy of speech in an imperial regime. For the rest of this section I will examine the theory of figured speech, which has become the default interpretative position for scholars of Roman imperial texts, and will outline its limitations for understanding senatorial speech in Tacitus. I will then return to Tacitus' praise of Nerva and Trajan to propose an alternative interpretation of it as a declaration of truth guaranteed by the authority of the historian.

Terms such as 'figured speech'<sup>17</sup> and 'doublespeak',<sup>18</sup> as well as 'irony'<sup>19</sup> and 'poetics of conspiracy',<sup>20</sup> have been used to map out how the discourses of imperial subjects accommodate a suspension of meaning. Carefully calibrated statements require the audience to complete their meaning, but are fashioned in such a way that an alternative meaning always remains available. This enables the speaker or writer to steer their way between dangerous criticism and ignominious flattery, by maintaining 'plausible deniability' about the final meaning of their discourse. Readers who take this approach to Tacitus' praise of Nerva and Trajan, for example, see it as deliberately ironized by its context: uttering this praise demonstrates its necessity at the same time as its terms have already been emptied of significance.<sup>21</sup> Tacitus 'saves face' with rulers

and fellow subjects alike, while conveying an important truth about the Principate.

A neat episode from *Annals* illustrates how figured speech of this kind might work in a senatorial context. Thanks to the machinations of Claudius' wife Messalina, Poppaea Sabina has been accused of adultery and driven to commit suicide before trial. The senate proposes various condemnations after the fact, which compels Poppaea's widower, Cornelius Scipio, to contribute to the debate.

*rogatus sententiam et Scipio, 'cum idem' inquit 'de admissis Poppaeae sentiam quod omnes, putate me idem dicere quod omnes', eleganti temperamento inter coniugalem amorem et senatoriam necessitatem.*

*Ann.* 11.4.3

Scipio, also required to give his opinion, said 'since I feel the same way about Poppaea's crimes as everyone, take it as read that I say the same things as everyone', a measured statement, judiciously balancing a husband's love and a senator's duty.

Scipio explicitly calls on the principle of the audience completing the meaning of his words, while also implicitly commenting on the possibility that the rest of the senate does not say what they feel.<sup>22</sup> His statement is even taken by some scholars to be an ironic reference to Claudius' strictures on senatorial participation in debate.<sup>23</sup> It thus encapsulates what readers of figured speech find compelling: a statement that leaves open the possibility of diverse readings, while also constituting a reflection on the difficulties of speech in relation to power. It is a posture which, in modern eyes, redeems many imperial subjects from an attitude to the ruler which we find impossible to respect; the idea of figured speech is therefore often invoked when we encounter material (such as praise) which challenges our sense of a subject's integrity.<sup>24</sup> But figured speech does not exemplify most senatorial speech acts in Tacitus' narratives.<sup>25</sup> Here I will point out some of the limitations of focussing exclusively on figured speech, before delineating another way of approaching Tacitus' praise of emperors, as well as the discourse of praise more generally. This will provide the groundwork for considering the productive potential of senatorial speech acts in section 2.

We may start by observing the referent of figured speech, what transforms it from suspended meaning (or meaninglessness) to pointed meaning: it is

taken to refer to the conditions which produce the speech itself. The terms in which Tacitus speaks of Nerva and Trajan's regime 'conveys something about the Principate, where it is so difficult to be sure that anything said . . . can be taken straight'.<sup>26</sup> Figured speech, in short, talks (obliquely) about its own production – if it has anything to say, that is, beyond the exigencies of the immediate situation. A less salutary example than that of Scipio shows another Claudian senator using ambiguous language simply to avoid committing himself, without commenting further on the power struggle which he aims to survive.

*inter diversas principis voces, cum modo incusaret flagitia uxoris, aliquando ad memoriam coniugii et infantiam liberorum revolveretur, non aliud prolocutum Vitellium quam 'o facinus! o scelus!' instabat quidem Narcissus aperire ambages et veri copiam facere; sed non ideo pervicit, quin suspensa et quo ducerentur inclinatura responderet.*

*Ann. 11.34.1*

While the emperor's self-contradictory remarks wavered between accusations of his wife's crimes and recollections of their marriage and their little children, Vitellius made no declaration beyond 'oh, the crime! the wickedness!' Narcissus, to be sure, put him under pressure to clarify his ambiguous words and elaborate the truth of his thoughts; but he did not prevail, in that Vitellius replied with words where the meaning was not completed, and which could be interpreted whichever way the emperor led.

Vitellius' speech suspends meaning to the point of non-intervention, while that of Scipio provides a wry commentary: both are inherently reactive, and the primary aim is avoidance, another instance of the 'path clear of ambition and dangers'. Many other instances of speech, however, show us different and more active modes: prosecutions and defence pleas; proposals and counter-proposals in senate; justifications and altercations. Senators are, for the most part, trying to do things with words, so their speech needs to be more proactive and for the most part more concrete than the suspensions of figured speech would allow. The references of their speech become a world they want to act upon, whether (for instance) by acquitting or condemning another citizen, instituting or annulling honours for rulers, limiting the payment of advocates, or establishing the sanctuary status of provincial temples.<sup>27</sup> Some of the aims and achievements of speech may be trivial or degrading (issues I will address

again in later chapters), but in seeking to act upon the world, such speeches exceed the descriptive and analytical capacity of figured speech.<sup>28</sup>

The open possibility for interpretation presented by figured speech draws readers into a world characterized by what Shadi Bartsch has called 'linguistic bankruptcy'.<sup>29</sup> As she puts it in relation to Tacitus, 'terms like *freedom*, *happiness*, and *safety* are always already undermined by their unveiling as hollow in the very works in which they appear'.<sup>30</sup> The suspension of meaning, as well as the thorough excavation of ideology by Tacitus, continually brings us to this point of bankruptcy, and its effects are not to be underestimated. But senators and historians also continue to deal in the currency of speech, even ambiguous speech, as (if) it held purchase on the world. Is this, as Bartsch suggests of Pliny's *Panegyric*, a failed attempt to restore meaning? Let us return to Tacitus' declaration about the present regime, and ask the question, 'In what way does it act upon the world?'

First, we should be clear that this is not an attempt to dispel ambiguity from Tacitus' text, but rather to explore the potential effects of his statements in order to conjecture what they might do for the historian. As I've already suggested, earlier in the preface, Tacitus has distinguished between imperial historiography's transmission of the regime of truth and a more rigorous historiography's critique of that regime, such as he already begins to offer with this account. The next stage of critique, if it is to move beyond reactive commentary or critique, is to propose an alternative, a modification, or even a reaffirmation of the existing regime. What happens if we take Tacitus' declaration seriously as just such a proposal?

Foucault provides a way of thinking towards such a reading when he discusses how any truth – no matter how 'self-evident' – depends upon a non-logical element. It is significant that he conceives of this element as a speech act: an assertion. He calls it 'an assertion that does not belong exactly to the realm of the true or false, that is rather a sort of commitment, a sort of profession . . . that consists in saying . . . it is true, *therefore* I submit'.<sup>31</sup> The non-logical 'therefore', he maintains, constitutes a 'profession' because it is in this assertion that the speaker comes into being as a subject (that is, a subject who can declare 'I' and who is subjected to the truth). Importantly, the assertion grounds the subject as a practitioner within the discourse that produces this acknowledged truth. Hence, 'profession' is both disciplinary (the profession of

the historian) and non-logical (the profession of faith). Let us consider this again in relation to Tacitus as a practitioner of history.

As soon as Tacitus declares 'I', he grounds himself in both politics and history by orienting his attitude to previous emperors around his political career and his commitment to the truth procedures of historiography.

*dignitatem nostram a Vespasiano inchoatam, a Tito auctam, a Domitiano longius provectam non abnuerim: sed incorruptam fidem professis neque amore quisquam et sine odio dicendus est.*

*Hist. 1.1.1.3*

I would not deny that my senatorial status was begun by Vespasian, it was considerably advanced by Titus, and promoted much further by Domitian: but no emperor should be spoken of with excessive affection or hatred by those who profess incorruptible truth.

The impersonality of the final phrase signals the separation between Tacitus' experience and the discourse to which he will now submit. But his promise, immediately following, to speak of Nerva and Trajan in the future, 'internalizes' historical discourse, which now becomes the truth not imposed from without but emerging from within: to feel what you like and say what you feel. Tacitus thus declares not just his willing subjection to the disciplinary regime of history, but his emergence as a senatorial historian through that subjection. It is only through Tacitus' willing subjection that the happiness of the present regime can be constituted as truth, for it cannot be self-evident.

Now, it could reasonably be objected that this, first, is only one way of reading these notoriously elusive sentences, and, second, presents an overly optimistic view of a speaker's agency in the Principate. These are valid points, and I will take a moment to address them together. I have assumed a progression here between Tacitus' two statements about speaking: no one should be spoken of (by historians) with excessive love or hatred; (I will write a history of) the rare happiness of times when you can feel what you like and say what you feel. This progression could, however, be a disjunction, especially if we emphasize Tacitus' introduction of *quod* – 'but' – and the ambiguity over whether the rare happiness of times is the present regime, or Tacitus' anticipated old age.<sup>32</sup> One possible alternative reading could be: no one should be spoken of with excessive love or hatred, *but* if I live, I will make a history of the present age,

when I am old enough to say what I really feel. A reading like this produces a statement of future dissent and coheres with the image of Tacitus as the exposé of ideological facades.

My first point about such a reading is that it does not substantially alter the way Tacitus makes (his) history the discourse which guarantees the truth. Whether we characterize Tacitus' discourse as a commitment to a new regime or an ongoing destabilizing of regimes, we still have to proceed by way of this discourse. Where there is substantial difference between these two readings is in the degree of optimism – or I would prefer to say faith – with regard to what this discourse produces. Does Tacitus look forward to stripping bare the falsehoods of Trajan's principate, once it is safe to do so? Or does he choose to believe in a new regime of speech and, by choosing, take one step towards making it true?<sup>33</sup> The non-logical element in Tacitus' commitment to truth would then be his commitment to the truth of the present as a time of true speech.

Tacitus' declaration of truth then becomes a profession of faith which produces and sustains truth. It can also exemplify the effects of speech I want to pursue in this book; for Tacitus' formulation concretizes the regime he professes in strongly experiential terms. We have already seen how Tacitus identifies affective orientations towards power – 'hatred and excessive affection' – as detrimental to independent historical discourse. But he positions himself in the present regime (or in a future old age) which is defined affectively as 'happiness' (*felicitas*). This constitutes an intervention in what Carlos Noreña has called a 'politics of emotion', where discussing the nature of happiness – the activities and experiences through which it is felt and expressed – entailed a debate about the role and place of a citizen in the imperial state. As Noreña observes, a difference emerges between expressions like Tacitus', which link *felicitas* to senatorial autonomy and agency, and other perspectives where *felicitas* is associated with abundance of material benefits, positioning the citizen not as an agent but as a consumer.<sup>34</sup> Noreña, following Seneca, associates this latter experience of happiness with the depoliticizing of the imperial subject, encouraged to concentrate on leisure and material comfort. Against this, we might evoke Vivasvan Soni's vision of a lost politics of happiness which reconnects speech, thought, and action on the one hand, and physical well-being on the other, thereby 'encompassing all concerns germane to a life's