

Tenere Dicere ... Diserte Saltare

Tacitus' *Dialogus de Oratoribus*, a complex work in many respects, borrows and blends elements from a number of genres including historiography, rhetoric, philosophy, and drama; this amalgamation of components is reflected in the work's format (a dialogue embedded within an epistle), as well as content. From the outset, the author suggests that he intends to address what, at first, appears to be an issue of terminology (that is, why there are no longer *oratores*, as opposed to *causidici*, *advocati* and *patroni* [1.1.5–6]), but soon proves a matter of distinction between professions and activities appropriate to different roles. Tacitus offers his account of a dialogue between his own teachers (Julius Secundus and Marcus Aper) and their associates (Curiatius Maternus and Vipstanus Messala). Discussed are the duties and abilities of a competent orator, the modern departure from eloquence, and the environment in which children are raised and educated for a career at court. The interlocutors attempt to substantiate their arguments with historical examples and social insights. The latecomer, Messala, is the most concerned about the dearth of modern orators (15.1.5). Through the participants' use of theatrical language, it is implied that even Maternus, the would-be poet, believes that these *causidici*, *advocati*, *et patroni* are closer to entertainers playing to the audience than serious lawyers (39.4).

This paper examines the use of theatrical terms in Tacitus' *Dialogus* and the interlocutors' attitudes towards actors and the life of Silver Age Rome's principal actor: Emperor Nero. I will consider the theatre-related language found in the *Dialogus*, the differences in interlocutors' attitudes towards composition and performance of drama, and a few similarities between *Dialogus* and Tacitus' description of Nero in the *Annales*. Finally, I will review Seneca's role in the *Annales*, to explore whether Tacitus holds Seneca accountable for Nero's interest, not only in

composing drama, but performing it, and whether the prototype for Seneca can be found in the *Dialogus' rhetores* and *scholastici*.

This paper builds upon observations already made by A. J. Woodman concerning Tacitus' self-referential habits (1979, 70–85). Woodman's study demonstrates that Tacitus reuses material from the *Historiae* to describe different battlefields in the *Annales* and goes as far as to question the historical veracity of some of these episodes (80). Woodman's scope is limited to consideration of individual episodes within the *Annales* and *Historiae* (in relation to both each other and works of other authors), but it can be shown that similar relationships exist between the *Annales* and the *Dialogus*. Specifically I argue that Tacitus had Nero in mind when he wrote the *Dialogus* and the *Dialogus* in mind when he wrote about Nero.

Contrasting the *Dialogus* and *Annales* allows one to consider the following: Tacitus narrates both pieces but the format is drastically different. The *Dialogus* presents the opinions of others, whether actual people or characters, but the *Annales* contains significantly less dialogue by volume. Second, the *Dialogus* presents a model where orators are corrupted by the habits of actors, but the *Annales* describes the same effect on a supreme ruler.

Bibliography

Woodman, A. J. 1979. "Self-Imitation and the Substance of History: Tacitus, *Annals* 1.61–5 and *Histories* 2.70, 5.14–15," in *Tacitus Reviewed*. Oxford: 70–85.