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SLAVISHNESS IN BRITAIN AND ROME IN TACITUS' *AGRICOLA*

I. INTRODUCTION

It is now more than 40 years since J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz insisted on the thematic unity of the *Agricola* in an article in this journal.[1] Yet it is still all too common for the *Agricola*'s Roman and British narratives to be discussed separately, with little or no consideration for the connections between them.[2] Moreover, not even Liebeschuetz's article does justice to the elaborate system of parallels that connects provincial subjection to Rome and senatorial subjection to Domitian in Tacitus' account.[3] One aim of this paper is to demonstrate that the two accounts are inextricably linked – that they demand to be read together and not in isolation. Its second and complementary goal is to highlight the thematic importance of

[1] J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz, 'The theme of liberty in the *Agricola* of Tacitus', *CQ* 16 (1966), 126–39, reprinted with revisions in R. Ash (ed.), *Oxford Readings in Tacitus* (Oxford, forthcoming).

[2] The tendency to focus on one section to the exclusion of the other is particularly noticeable in readings of the British narrative. K. Clarke, 'An island nation: re-reading Tacitus' *Agricola*', *JRS* 91 (2001), 94–112 at 112 explicitly excludes the Roman frame from her focus. R. Evans, 'Containment and corruption: the discourse of Flavian empire', in A.J. Boyle and W.J. Dominik (edd.), *Flavian Rome: Culture, Image, Text* (Leiden, 2003), 255–76 at 276 acknowledges some parallels between senate and Britons, but the rest of the article treats the British narrative as an unproblematic document of Flavian imperial ideology. S. Rutledge, 'Tacitus in tartan: textual colonization and expansionist discourse in the *Agricola*', *Helios* 27 (2000), 75–95 largely ignores the Roman narrative in order to explore the *Agricola* as an imperialist text. To read this inward-looking text for insights into Roman imperialism is, I will argue, to miss the point. D. Braund, *Ruling Roman Britain: Kings, Queens, Governors and Emperors from Julius Caesar to Agricola* (London, 1996), 162–3 and 172, recognizes the importance of approaching the *Agricola* as an organic whole, but his analysis of the British narrative is undermined by a surprisingly uncritical reading of the Roman narrative, which sees Agricola as an unambiguously positive paradigm of behaviour under domination. Many readings of the Roman narrative suffer from the opposite fault. Thus H. Haynes, 'Survival and memory in the *Agricola*', *Arethusa* 39 (2006), 149–70 focusses almost exclusively on Rome (apart from a brief mention of Britain at 165–6). T. Whitmarsh, '"This in-between book": language, politics and genre in the *Agricola*', in B. McGing and J. Mossman (edd.), *The Limits of Ancient Biography* (Swansea, 2006), 305–33 stands out for its even-handed treatment of the two spheres of domination.

[3] Note his surprisingly cautious conclusion: 'The *Agricola* as a whole does not leave the impression that it was designed to bring out a parallel between the rule of the Caesars over the Romans and that of the Romans over their subjects' (138 n. 1). Liebeschuetz's article only scratches the surface of the parallels between the two narratives. While his insights have been acknowledged by others, they have not been developed much further. See Whitmarsh (n. 2), 306, D. Sailor, *Writing and Empire in Tacitus* (Cambridge, 2008), 98 and B. McGing, 'Syncrisis in Tacitus' *Agricola*', *Hermathena* 133 (1982), 15–25 at 22. Many of the correspondences discussed here have never been acknowledged, let alone adequately interpreted. This paper aims to show their importance for any attempt to understand the *Agricola* as a whole.

slavery and slavishness for the *Agricola* as a whole.[4] In Liebeschuetz's formulation, what unites the different parts of the *Agricola* is a concern for 'the consequences of subjection' (136). His avoidance of the word 'enslavement' is curious given how often the *Agricola* uses the language of slavery (*seruus*, *seruitus*, *seruire*).[5] The distinction is significant because enslavement in the *Agricola* is more than a synonym for subjection; it is also a moral condition – a state of mind and spirit.

This paper begins by illustrating the prominence of slavery metaphors in both the Roman and the British narratives (II). It goes on to show that slavery is repeatedly associated with a set of (slavish) traits including compliance, passivity and silence (III). It argues that Tacitus develops a psychology of slavery to explain the dynamics of domination both at home and abroad. He represents slavishness both as a consequence of enslavement (the experience of slavery engenders slavishness) and as serving to perpetuate it (the slave is complicit in his own subjection) (IV–V). The final part of the paper returns to the broader question of how the British and Roman narratives speak to one another, by exploring two particularly suggestive parallels – between Calgacus and those senators who defy the emperor and between Agricola and those provincials who submit to Roman rule (VI).

II. ENSLAVEMENT AT HOME AND ABROAD

The preface introduces the theme of slavery when it describes the senate as having plumbed the depths of *seruitus* under Domitian (*sicut uetus aetas uidit quid ultimum in libertate esset, ita nos quid in seruitute*, 2.3). It goes on to promise a future work that will provide a record of that former state of enslavement (*prior seruitus*, 3.3). The imagery of slavery to the emperor returns towards the end of the work when Agricola, returning to Rome after his successes in Britain, is granted only a brief reception before being lost in the crowd of slaves (*turba seruientium*, 40.3).[6]

[4] The concept of slavishness or servility has received surprisingly little attention in recent readings of the *Agricola*. Haynes (n. 2), 154 has some suggestive remarks, in the context of *Agr*. 2.3, about slaves not having histories. D. Sailor, 'Becoming Tacitus: significance and inconsequentiality in the prologue of the *Agricola*', *ClAnt* 23 (2004), 139–177 at 154 observes that *inertia* in the same passage has servile associations; Sailor (n. 3), 64 (again on 2.3) connects *patientia* with servitude. But none of these pursues the theme of slavishness further.

[5] In focussing attention on slavery and slavishness as well as freedom, this paper is aligned with M.B. Roller, *Constructing Autocracy: Aristocrats and Emperors in Julio-Claudian Rome* (Princeton, 2001) in its critique of a style of scholarship that has asserted a compartmentalized, political sense of *libertas* remote from the lived reality of slavery (see especially 214–33). Such attempts to compartmentalize Tacitean *libertas* include M. Morford, 'How Tacitus defined liberty', *ANRW* II 33.5 (1991), 3420–50, M. Vielberg, *Pflichten, Werte, Ideale: eine Untersuchung zu den Wertvorstellung des Tacitus* (Stuttgart, 1987), J. Percival, 'Tacitus and the principate', *G&R* 27 (1980), 119–33, M. Ducos, 'La liberté chez Tacite: droits de l'individu ou conduite individuelle?', *BAGB* 2 (1977), 194–217, H.W. Benario, 'Tacitus and the principate', *CJ* 60 (1964), 97–106, M. Hammond, '*Res olim dissociabiles: principatus ac libertas*. Liberty under the early Roman empire', *HSPh* 67 (1963), 93–113, W. Jens, '*Libertas* bei Tacitus', *Hermes* 84 (1956), 331–52, and C. Wirszubski, *Libertas* (Cambridge, 1950), 160–7.

[6] The substantival use of the participle instead of *serui* encourages a metaphorical reading. It has consistently been read as a reference to Domitian's court in general rather than to his slaves and freedmen alone. Cf R.M. Ogilvie and I.A. Richmond, *Tacitus: Agricola* (Oxford, 1967), H. Furneaux, *Cornelii Taciti Vita Agricolae* (Oxford, 1898) ('courtier crowd') and H. Heubner, *Kommentar zum Agricola des Tacitus* (Göttingen, 1984) ('sarkastisch für *salutantium*').

The language of slavery is widespread in the British narrative. The ethnography represents Rome's provincial subjects as living in a condition of slavery, saying that the Gauls lost their courage when they lost their freedom (*amissa uirtute pariter ac libertate*, 11.4) and that the same has happened to those Britons who have been conquered (*quod Britannorum olim uictis euenit*, 11.4). Roman rule is again identified with enslavement when Tacitus claims, apropos Rome's support for king Cogidumnus, that it is an old and long-established custom of the Roman people to use kings to enslave others (*uetere ac iam pridem recepta populi Romani consuetudine, ut haberet instrumenta seruitutis et reges*, 14.1). In the short account of Boudicca's revolt, the Britons discuss the evils of slavery (*mala seruitutis*, 15.1), seek inspiration from German success in shaking off the yoke (*sic Germanias excussisse iugum*, 15.3), and attack Camulodunum because it was the seat of slavery (*ut sedem seruitutis*, 16.1).

The much-cited account of Agricola's efforts to promote Roman culture (21) concludes with the notorious barb that the Britons mistook for civilization what was really part of their enslavement (*idque apud imperitos humanitas uocabatur, cum pars seruitutis esset*, 21.2). Many readers who have been troubled by the implication that Agricola was responsible for the enslavement of Britain have sought to contain and disarm the closing reference to *seruitus* by distinguishing the aspects of Roman culture promoted by Agricola, *templa fora domos* (temples, forums, houses), from the vices adopted by the Britons of their own accord, *porticus et balineas et conuiuiorum elegantiam* (porticoes, baths and elegant dinner parties), and seeing their enslavement as the result of those luxuries rather than Roman rule *per se*.[7] But such attempts to exculpate Rome in general or Agricola in particular from the charge of enslavement fly in the face of the recurring descriptions of Roman rule as slavery elsewhere in the *Agricola* – and the fact that luxury is only *part* (*pars*) of their *seruitus* here.[8] Indeed Tacitus later explicitly ascribes masterly rhetoric to Agricola himself, when he records that his father-in-law once said that it would have been easy to conquer Ireland and thereby deprive the Britons of even the sight of freedom.[9]

The language of slavery reaches a crescendo in Calgacus' speech before the battle of Mons Graupius. The British chieftain is addressing the massed Caledonians, who have resolved either to have their revenge or to be enslaved (*ultionem aut seruitium expectantes*, 29.3). He promises that this day will be the beginning of freedom for all Britain (*initium libertatis toti Britanniae*, 30.1). He congratulates his fellow Caledonians for having no experience of slavery (*seruitutis expertes*, 30.1), for being so remote from Rome's empire that even their eyes are uncorrupted by the

[7] See Braund (n. 2), 161–5 for a recent version of this argument.

[8] Moreover, there is no reason to believe that Roman readers would have been troubled by the idea of the provinces being enslaved to Rome. While senatorial slavery is obviously condemned in the *Agricola*, the moral valence of provincial slavery is far less clear. After all, slavery is regularly invoked as a normative model for empire throughout Roman literature. See M. Lavan, *Slaves to Rome* (forthcoming). We should not be misled by our own conviction that slavery is morally unjustifiable into presuming that to describe empire as enslavement is necessarily to condemn it. The connotations of a comparison with slavery must be different in a culture where slavery is a feature of everyday life and where its legitimacy as an institution is never seriously challenged.

[9] *saepe ex eo audiui legione una et modicis auxiliis debellari obtinerique Hiberniam posse; idque etiam aduersus Britanniam profuturum, si Romana ubique arma et uelut e conspectu libertas tolleretur* (24.3).

contagion of mastery (*contactus dominationis*) since they cannot see the coast of the servile Gauls (*litora seruientium*, 30.2), and for being the last of the free (*libertatis extremi*, 30.2). He complains that their children and friends are conscripted to be slaves elsewhere (*alibi seruituri*, 31.1). Real slaves (*nata seruituti mancipia*) have it better: they are sold once and then fed by their masters, whereas Britain has to pay for her slavery (*seruitus*) daily and feed herself (31.2). The Britons will be the prey of their fellow slaves (*conserui*) in the old slave-gang that is the world (*orbis terrarum uetus famulatus*, 31.2). Calgacus laments that provincials, once Rome's enemies and now her slaves (*serui*), spill their blood in the service of Roman mastery (*dominatio*, 32.1). But he promises that the Gauls will remember their old freedom (*libertas*, 32.3). Finally, he warns them that defeat will bring tribute, labour in the mines and the other punishments suffered by slaves (*ceterae seruientium poenae*, 32.4).

Tacitus is certainly not unique in using the language of slavery to describe either the condition of the senate under an emperor or that of the provinces under Rome. Claims of senatorial enslavement are common in hostile representations of emperors such as Nero and can be traced back to Republican political invective, while Calgacus' rhetoric of provincial enslavement has antecedents in Caesar's Critognatus and Sallust's Mithridates (and even the representation of Roman rule as enslavement by the narrative voice can be paralleled in Caesar and Livy).[10] Nevertheless, the *Agricola* is remarkable for the sheer scale of its use of servile imagery in both contexts. The following sections will argue that the theme of enslavement has a special importance in this text, because Tacitus turns to the psychology of slavery (as he imagines it) to explain the persistence of domination in both Rome and Britain.

III. SLAVISHNESS

From the outset, slavery is an inward as well as an outward condition. When *seruitus* is first mentioned in the preface, it is associated with compliance and silence:

> dedimus profecto grande patientiae documentum; et sicut uetus aetas uidit quid ultimum in libertate esset, ita nos quid in seruitute, adempto per inquisitiones etiam loquendi audiendique commercio. (2.3)
>
> We certainly gave clear proof of our submissiveness. Just as the past age witnessed the extremes of liberty, so we have seen the extremes of slavery. Even the intercourse of speaking and listening was taken from us by spies.

[10] For enslavement to Nero, see Roller (n. 5), 261–2. Roller ch. 4 explores the broader use of the master as a paradigm for the bad ruler in the Julio-Claudian period. On the use of the trope in the Republic, see G. Manuwald (ed.), *Cicero, Philippics 3–9* (Berlin, 2007), 1.428, G. Achard, *Pratique, rhétorique et idéologie politique dans les discours 'optimates' de Cicéron* (Leiden, 1981), 321–2 and J. Hellegouarc'h, *Le vocabulaire latin des relations et des partis politiques sous la république* (Paris, 1963), 559. Cicero's *Philippics* and Sallust's 'speech of Macer' (*Hist*. 3.48=3.34 McGushin) are particularly rich in examples. For Calgacus' antecedents, see for example Caes. *B Gall*. 7.77 (Critognatus) and Sall. *Hist*. 4.69 (Mithridates). For the narrative voice, compare Caes. *B Gall*. 3.10 and 7.76 and Livy 34.18.1–2 and 40.49.1 and see further Lavan (n. 8).

The conjunction *et* connects the statement that the senate plumbed the depths of slavery to the preceding description of senatorial *patientia*.[11] *Patientia* is a distinctly Roman concept whose wide range of meanings has been teased out by Robert Kaster (they include endurance, patience, forbearance, passivity and submissiveness). Although it can be a virtue in the face of forces of nature, *patientia* is always problematic in the world of social relations. Submission to the will of another implies a differential of power and so raises the spectre of servility. 'Insofar as it entailed inactivity in the face of *iniuria* and *contumelia* – insofar as it entailed turning the other cheek – it looked uncomfortably like the *patientia* of a slave.'[12] Kaster's arguments are certainly borne out elsewhere in Tacitus' works, where *patientia* is regularly glossed as a distinctively servile trait.[13] In the *Agricola*, *patientia* is explicitly associated with *seruitus* both here and when Boudicca's rebels complain of the evils of slavery (*mala seruitutis*), saying that their *patientia* has gained them nothing but harsher treatment (15.1). The defeat of that revolt sees the province returned to its former state of *patientia* (16.2). All this suggests that the senate's *patientia* is a slavish submissiveness.[14]

The senate's enslavement is also connected, by the ablative absolute that follows, to the loss of 'the intercourse of speaking and listening' (*loquendi audiendique commercio*). The next sentence goes on to lament the senate's loss of voice (*uox*) and its silence (*tacere*). When the slavery motif recurs at the end of the preface it is again associated with silence, since the slavery of the past (*prior seruitus*) is contrasted with the untried speech (*rudis uox*) of the present (3.3).[15]

My point is that these opening references to senatorial enslavement construct slavery as a moral condition by associating it with submissiveness and silence. To these we might add the passivity (*inertia*, *desidia*) that Tacitus describes when explaining the difficulty of resuming intellectual activity in 3.2 (a passage I return to below).[16] Together these traits imply the loss of the ability – even the will – to resist. This is a vision of the servile condition to which both Roman and British narratives will repeatedly return.

[11] Sailor (n. 3), 64 too notes the connection between *seruitus*, *patientia* and silence here.

[12] R.A. Kaster, 'The taxonomy of patience, or when is *patientia* not a virtue?', *CPh* 97 (2002), 133–44 at 144.

[13] *Ann.* 3.65.3 (*seruientium patientia*), 12.50.2 (*quamuis seruitio sueti patientiam abrumpunt),* 14.26.1 (*seruilis patientia*) and 16.16.1 (*patientia seruilis*).

[14] A.D. Leeman, 'Structure and meaning in the prologues of Tacitus', *YClS* 23 (1973), 169–208 at 203 suggests that their *patientia* is the Stoic virtue *karteria*, but this is unconvincing given its association with *seruitus* here, at 15.1 and in the *Annals*. When Tacitus later says that it is the willingness to endure *iniuriae* that distinguishes slavery from mere obedience (13.1), this is further confirmation that submissiveness a characteristically servile trait. *Patientia* also hints at sexual exploitation, which was also part of the slave's lot. So Sailor (n. 4), 154 n. 46 and Evans (n. 2), 173–4. On the sexual connotations of *patientia* see J.N. Adams, *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary* (Baltimore, 1982), 189–90 and, for Tacitus, *Ann.* 6.1.2. On the sexual exploitation of slaves, see K.R. Bradley, *Slaves and Masters in the Roman Empire: A Study in Social Control* (Brussels, 1984), 118–22, J. Kolendo, 'L'esclavage et la vie sexuelle des hommes libres à Rome', *Quaderni Camerti di Studi Romanistici* 10 (1981), 288–97 and M.I. Finley, *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology* (London, 1980), 95–6.

[15] See Sailor (n. 3), 64 on the connection between speech and freedom in the *Agricola*. R. Strocchio, *I significati del silenzio nell'opera di Tacito* (Turin, 1992) surveys Tacitus' use of silence more widely.

[16] On *inertia* in the *Agricola*, see further Jens (n. 5), 332–8.

IV. CREATING SLAVES

The British narrative describes provincial subjection to Rome in very similar terms. Like Domitian's senate, Rome's subjects are reduced to slavish submission:

plus tamen ferociae Britanni praeferunt, ut quos nondum longa pax emollierit. nam Gallos quoque in bellis floruisse accepimus; mox segnitia cum otio intrauit, amissa uirtute pariter ac libertate. quod Britannorum olim uictis euenit: ceteri manent quales Galli fuerunt. (11.4)

The Britons show greater spirit, since they have not yet been softened by a long peace. For we have read that the Gauls too used to excel at war. But then passivity came with inaction; and they lost their courage with their freedom. The same happened to those Britons who were conquered some time ago; the rest remain as the Gauls once were.

This passage stresses the transformational effects of Roman rule. The provincials have been softened (*emollierit*) and enervated (*amissa uirtute*) by enslavement to Rome (*amissa libertate*) and the peace it brings (*pax*).[17] Inaction (*otium*) has bred passivity (*segnitia*) – a claim that should remind us of the senate's *inertia* and *desidia* in the preface (3.1).

'They lost their manhood/courage with their freedom (*amissa uirtute pariter ac libertate*)'. Tacitus' pithy *sententia* recalls the Homeric adage that Zeus takes away half a man's ἀρετή on the day he becomes a slave.[18] The idea that slavery is an emasculating condition plays an important role in ancient ideologies of slavery. But it is a perspective that has been marginalized by modern fascination with Aristotle's theory of natural slavery. It is worth remembering that the idea of slavishness does not presuppose a genetic theory – that slaves can be made, as well as born. This conception of slavish character as the *result* of enslavement is central to the *Agricola* as a whole.

In Tacitus, the degeneration into slavishness is gradual, not instantaneous. He returns to the idea that servility is produced by enslavement slightly later in the ethnography:

ipsi Britanni dilectum ac tributa et iniuncta imperii munia impigre obeunt, si iniuriae absint: has aegre tolerant, iam domiti ut pareant, nondum ut seruiant. (13.1)

The inhabitants of Britain are not slow to comply with the levy, tribute and the other obligations imposed by empire – provided they are not treated unjustly. Injustice they do not bear lightly. They have been broken to obedience, but not yet to slavery.

Men have to be broken or tamed (*domiti*) into servile obedience (*ut seruiant*). The Britons may have been enslaved (11.4), but they have not yet been reduced

[17] The enervating effects of peace are a commonplace of Hellenistic and Roman thought. See E. Fraenkel, *Horace* (Oxford, 1957), 212–13 with *TLL* s.v. *otium* 1179.48–73 and s.v. *pax* 870.7–23 for Roman examples (and cf Tac. *Agr*. 15.3, *Germ*. 14.2 and 36.1 and *Hist*. 1.88.2). What Tacitus does here is to identify peace with enslavement. Peace here is an aspect of enslavement to Rome (just as *otium* is an aspect of the senate's subjection under Domitian). Like other aspects of slavery it works to engender a disposition towards passivity.

[18] ἥμισυ γάρ τ' ἀρετῆς ἀποαίνυται εὐρύοπα Ζεὺς | ἀνέρος, εὖτ' ἄν μιν κατὰ δούλιον ἦμαρ ἕλῃσιν ('Far-thundering Zeus takes away half a man's worth when the day of slavery overcomes him', Hom. *Od*. 17.322–3). Plato treats this passage as paradigmatic of one common conception of slavery (*Leg*. 777a).

to the depths of slavishness.[19] Yet the *nondum* implies it is only matter of a time: servility is the inevitable end result of being broken to Roman rule. The same idea of a gradual, but inevitable, process of degeneration can be seen in the previous passage (*ut quos nondum longa pax emollierit*, 11.4). It is worth noting that what distinguishes slavery (*seruire*) from mere obedience (*parere*) here is the willingness to endure *iniuriae*. This servile disposition to accept injustice meekly recalls the *patientia* of the proem. Like Domitian's senate, Rome's tamed subjects will endure the unendurable.

In its enervating effects, enslavement is like a disease. A.D. Leeman has highlighted the series of medical metaphors in chapter 3 of the proem, which represents the senate as recovering from the debilitating disease that was Domitian's reign – notably *redit animus* (of regaining consciousness) and *remedia* (remedies).[20] The metaphor returns in the British narrative when the British leader Calgacus congratulates his countrymen for living out of sight of Roman rule and thus keeping their eyes 'pure of the contagion of mastery' (*a contactu dominationis inuiolatos*, 30.2). The condition of provincial slavery is like a disease that can infect those who so much as look upon it. Calgacus resumes the metaphor a little later when he describes his people as 'unimpaired and unconquered' (*integri et indomiti*, 31.4). So long as they are unconquered they remain *integri* – whole and healthy.[21] These disease metaphors resonate with the idea of enslavement as a debilitating condition.

V. COMPLICITY

Slavishness in the *Agricola* is not just produced by domination; it also serves to perpetuate it. Both the Roman and the British narratives explore how the dominated become complicit in their own subjection. Part of the problem is that slavery is a seductive condition. Describing the difficulty of resuming the practice of historiography after the silence of Domitian's reign, Tacitus writes of the pleasures of passivity:

> et ut corpora nostra lente augescunt, cito extinguuntur, sic ingenia studiaque oppresseris facilius quam reuocaueris: subit quippe etiam ipsius inertiae dulcedo, et inuisa primo desidia postremo amatur. (3.1)

[19] If there seems to be an inconsistency (in that the Britons are not yet slaves here), it is because slavery in the *Agricola* is both an outward (social) and an inward (moral) condition. As psychological states, freedom and slavery form a continuum, not a simple polarity – as is implied by the reference to extremes of freedom and slavery in the preface (*sicut uetus aetas uidit quid ultimum in libertate esset, ita nos quid in seruitute*, 2.3). The Britons have been enslaved in the first sense, but they have not yet reached the depths of slavery in the second sense. They are not (yet) as slavish as Rome's other provincial subjects – notably the Gauls. The distinction returns when Calgacus congratulates the remote Caledonians for not even being able to see the shores of slaves (*seruientium litora*, 30.2). This is presumably in contrast to the southern Britons who do indeed look on the shores of Gaul. So Furneaux (n. 6), Ogilvie and Richmond (n. 6) and Heubner (n. 6). The implication is that the southern Britons (whom the Caledonians can see) are not yet *seruientes*. Again it is the Gauls who are truly slavish.

[20] Leeman (n. 14), 203–5. On the importance of medical metaphors elsewhere in Tacitus, see especially A.J. Woodman, 'Mutiny and madness: Tacitus *Annals* 1.16–49', *Arethusa* 39 (2006), 303–30.

[21] See the passages cited at *OLD* s.v. *integer* § 10 ('unimpaired by ill health or disease').

As our bodies grow slowly but are quickly destroyed, so it is easier to crush our faculties and spirit than it is to revive them. For the very pleasure of doing nothing steals over us and we come to love the indolence which we once despised.

Inertia (idleness/passivity) may at first have been forced on the senate against its will. But pleasure (*dulcedo*) soon replaces disgust, as the inherent pleasure of inaction overcomes their better nature.[22] The seductions of slavery recur in the British narrative in the famous passage describing Agricola's encouragement of the adoption of Roman practices by the Britons:

sequens hiems saluberrimis consiliis absumpta. namque ut homines dispersi ac rudes eoque in bella faciles quieti et otio per uoluptates adsuescerent, hortari priuatim, adiuuare publice, ut templa fora domos extruerent, laudando promptos, castigando segnes: ita honoris aemulatio pro necessitate erat. iam uero principum filios liberalibus artibus erudire, et ingenia Britannorum studiis Gallorum anteferre, ut qui modo linguam Romanam abnuebant, eloquentiam concupiscerent. inde etiam habitus nostri honor et frequens toga; paulatimque discessum ad delenimenta uitiorum, porticus et balineas et conuiuiorum elegantiam. idque apud imperitos humanitas uocabatur, cum pars seruitutis esset. (21.1–2)

The following winter was spent on a very sound policy. The aim was to use the pleasurable life to accustom to peace and quiet men who were scattered and uncivilized and therefore always ready for war. He encouraged individuals and assisted communities in the construction of temples, forums and houses, praising the energetic and rebuking the indolent. Thus competition for honour made compulsion unnecessary. Moreover, he educated the sons of the chieftains in the liberal arts and praised the talents of the Britons over the learning of the Gauls. As a result, those who used to spurn the Latin language began to covet its eloquence. Even our dress acquired prestige and the toga became ubiquitous. Little by little they strayed to the seductions of vice – porticoes, baths and the refinements of dining. In their ignorance they called this culture, when it was part of their enslavement.

If the Britons end up in a state of slavery (*seruitus*), their own desires play a central role in their subjugation. It is pleasure (*uoluptates*) that accustoms them to peace and leisure; desire (*concupiscere*) that makes them study Roman oratory. It is particularly telling that these Britons learn to covet the Latinity they once rejected. This mirrors the moral corruption described in the proem, by which senators came to love the idleness they once despised (3.1). These Britons are just as complicit in their own degeneration. The point of these two passages is that there is an inherent attractiveness to the servile condition (a conceit that is not unique to the *Agricola*).[23] Both senators and Britons are corrupted by this pleasure to the point of forgetting their own best interests.

The pernicious consequences of enslavement extend even further. The *Agricola* insists that it is in the nature of slaves to prey on each other and that it is always

[22] Leeman (n. 14), 203–5 interprets *ipsius inertiae dulcedo* as suggesting 'the lethargic euphoria of the ill patient'. But his exclusive focus on disease does not give slavishness and its seductions their due. Most subsequent readings of the passage have followed Leeman. So Haynes (n. 2), 158 and Sailor (n. 4), 154. The latter acknowledges the description of 'moral corruption and collapse', noting perceptively its representation 'of not doing anything, of letting other people do things to us, and, worst of all, of enjoying it', but focusses on the idea of effeminacy rather than servility.

[23] W. Fitzgerald, *Slavery and the Roman Literary Imagination* (Cambridge, 2000), ch. 2 discusses the attractions of slavery in the imagination of the Roman elite, exploring how some aspects of the slave's condition – notably freedom from the demands of self-restraint – could be imagined as dangerously attractive.

other slaves who enforce the master's authority. When Calgacus seeks to convince his countrymen of the necessity of confronting Rome, he tells them that they are the newest slaves in Rome's household and reminds them of the abuse inevitably suffered by new slaves at the hands of their fellows:

ac sicut in familia recentissimus quisque seruorum etiam conseruis ludibrio est, sic in hoc orbis terrarum uetere famulatu noui nos et uiles in excidium petimur. (31.2)

As in a household the newest slave is always the sport even of his fellow slaves, so in the long-standing slave gang that is the world we are new and worthless and so are being hounded to death.

A little later, Calgacus encourages his countrymen by reminding them of the preponderance of provincials in Rome's armies. He promises them that adversity will dissolve the Roman army:

nisi si Gallos et Germanos et (pudet dictu) Britannorum plerosque, licet dominationi alienae sanguinem commodent, diutius tamen hostes quam seruos, fide et adfectu teneri putatis. (32.1)

Unless you believe that Gauls and Germans and – shameful though it is say it – many Britons, who though they give their blood for foreign mastery were nevertheless enemies longer than they have been slaves, are bound to Rome by loyalty and affection.

Calgacus laments the fact that these slaves (*serui*) spill their blood in the service of Roman mastery (*dominatio*). In this slave-gang, it is slaves who enforce the masters' will. Calgacus goes on to promise that they will remember who they are and where their interests lie, but of course they do not. Such blindness is characteristic of the servile condition as it is presented elsewhere in Tacitus.[24] The battle narrative that follows confirms that the Romans exercise their powers by proxy. The Roman legions play no role in the fighting. They are stationed in the rear, while it is the auxiliary cohorts – whose ethnic origins are clearly marked (*Batauorum ... ac Tungrorum*, 36.1; *Bataui*, 36.2) – who fight Rome's battle.[25] The later stages of the fighting are described as a vast and awesome spectacle (*grande et atrox spectaculum*, 37.2). The spectacle is for the benefit of the Roman legions as much as for the Roman reader.

Such provincial complicity in Roman domination has its parallel in the senate's involvement in the suppression of resistance to Domitian, which Tacitus acknowledges in a famous passage at the end of the work:

[24] Cf A.J. Pomeroy, 'Tacitus' *Histories*', *CR* 55 (2005), 147–9 at 148 on *libido seruitii* (servile whim) in Tacitus: 'enslavement does not so much rob its victim of choice as replace it with mere whim, with no thought for the common good.' See also C. Edwards, *The Politics of Immorality in Ancient Rome* (Cambridge, 1993), 195–8 for the importance of the idea that slaves are ruled by sensual pleasure in the broader Roman discourse of slavery.

[25] Most commentary on this passage has focussed on the extent of, and the rationale for, this form of deployment. See C.A. Gilliver, 'Mons Graupius and the role of auxiliaries in battle', *G&R* 43 (1996), 54–67 and Ogilvie and Richmond (n. 6) ad loc. Regardless of its historicity, however, this account of Roman military practice resonates with the description of senatorial complicity in the purges of Domitian's reign.

mox nostrae duxere Heluidium in carcerem manus; nos Maurici Rusticique uisus <adflixit>; nos innocenti sanguine Senecio perfudit. Nero tamen subtraxit oculos suos iussitque scelera, non spectauit: praecipua sub Domitiano miseriarum pars erat uidere et aspici. (45.1–2)

Soon ours were the hands that led Helvidius to the cell; it was we who were struck by the gaze of Mauricius and Rusticus; it was we who were drenched with Senecio's innocent blood. At least Nero hid his eyes; he ordered outrages but did not watch them. The worst of our miseries under Domitian was to watch and be observed.

The insistent repetition of *nostrae* and *nos* underscores the senate's complicity in these horrors, recalling the provincials' complicity in the enslavement of Britain.[26] There is a further echo of the British narrative in the description of Domitian's gaze that follows. Here too, the real oppressor looks on while the oppressed persecute each other. Again we find that the Britons have been acting out the plight of the senatorial class under Domitian.

Thus far this paper has shown that the Roman and British narratives share a system of slavery metaphors; that in both cases slavery is associated with a set of slavish traits which includes compliance (*patientia*) and passivity (*inertia* or *segnitas*); and that such slavishness is represented both as the inevitable result of enslavement and as working to perpetuate it. The *Agricola* draws on this implicit psychology of slavery in order to explain the interdependence of domination and slavishness in both Rome and Britain. Like slaves, both senators and provincials are not just broken but corrupted by the experience of subjugation. They lose their will to act; they submit to any and all forms of abuse; they become blind to their real interests – even to the extent of becoming complicit in their own subjection.

VI. BRITAIN AND ROME

It should by now be clear that the *Agricola*'s Roman and British narratives are structured around a shared set of polarities – compliance and resistance, silence and speech, passivity and action, masculinity and effeminacy, self-indulgence and self-control, oblivion and memory – which can be encompassed within a broader, governing opposition between slavishness and freedom. No reading of the *Agricola* can afford to ignore the interweaving of the two narratives. The problem is particularly acute for readers who are tempted to see the British narrative as a document of Roman imperialism.[27] It is the relationship between emperor and senate that occupies centre stage in the *Agricola* as a whole. The British narrative provides a space for exploring the political, cultural and moral crisis Tacitus sees confronting his own society.[28] To read it for insights into Roman imperialism is, in many ways, to miss the point.

[26] The importance of senatorial complicity as a theme of the *Agricola* has been highlighted by Liebeschuetz (n. 1), 133–4 and Haynes (n. 2).

[27] These problems are too often ignored, as is evidenced by N. Shumate, *Nation, Empire, Decline: Studies in Rhetorical Continuity from the Romans to the Modern Era* (London, 2006), ch. 3, Evans (n. 2) and Rutledge (n. 2), all of which treat Tacitus' text as an unproblematic document of Roman imperial ideology.

[28] Cf. M. Roberts, 'The revolt of Boudicca (Tacitus, *Annals* 14.29–39) and the assertion of *libertas* in Neronian Rome', *AJPh* 109 (1988), 118–32 at 131 on the Boudiccan revolt in *Annals* 14: 'The reader of the *Annals* is more likely to apply the model of imperial oppression estab-

Conversely, Tacitus' presentation of senatorial *seruitus* cannot be understood in isolation from the British narrative. The figure of Calgacus is particularly significant for any understanding of the moral valence of resistance and submission in Rome. His angry and defiant speech must take on broader significance in the context of the *Agricola*'s insistence on its own status as a speech act after the enforced silence of Domitian's reign.[29] Even more striking is his condemnation of a policy of accommodation to Roman rule:

sed nulla iam ultra gens, nihil nisi fluctus ac saxa, et infestiores Romani, quorum superbiam frustra per obsequium ac modestiam effugias. (30.3)

There is no nation beyond us, nothing but the sea and the rocks and – deadlier still – the Romans. Obedience and restraint offer no escape from their arrogance.

'Obedience and restraint' (*obsequium ac modestia*) are the very same words used to describe Agricola's conduct under Domitian, in what is often regarded as the political manifesto of the work:[30]

sciant, quibus moris est inlicita mirari, posse etiam sub malis principibus magnos uiros esse, obsequiumque ac modestiam, si industria ac uigor adsint, eo laudis excedere, quo plerique per abrupta sed in nullum rei publicae usum ambitiosa morte inclaruerunt. (42.4)

Those who are inclined to admire transgression should know that even under bad emperors men can become great. Obedience and restraint can, if they are combined with diligence and spirit, attain to the same heights of glory more often reached by those who have won fame through an ostentatious death – a difficult path, but one that is of no benefit to the state.

Calgacus condemns the very values for which Agricola is praised.[31] His language thus aligns him with those senators who prefer an ostentatious death to a policy of restraint and accommodation (presumably Thrasea Paetus, Helvidius Priscus and their like). By identifying the Stoic opposition with Calgacus, the *Agricola* associates their policy of resistance with the barbarian and thus the irrational.[32] Their defiance is condemned as ultimately futile (*in nullum rei publicae usum*); Calgacus' stubbornness proves fatal when the ensuing battle sees the destruction of his people and the devastation of their land.

lished for Britain to the Roman context than vice-versa; Rome will be perceived as the tenor, Britain the vehicle, though, of course, in principle the two are capable of mutual revelation'.

[29] Where Tacitus offers only a record of enslavement after the fact (*memoria servitutis*, 3.3), Calgacus testifies to Roman enslavement in the present. Note also that Boudicca's rebels reject the *patientia* that Tacitus and his colleagues endured (15.1~2.3). Of course, both instances of defiant speech prove futile.

[30] On *obsequium* as the middle course between *seruitus* and *libertas* in Tacitus, see especially Vielberg (n. 5).

[31] The striking echo has not always received the attention it deserves. Ogilvie and Richmond (n. 6) do not even acknowledge it in their commentary on the passage. But see McGing (n. 3), 23, Rutledge (n. 2), 89, Whitmarsh (n. 2), 316 and Sailor (n. 3), 98.

[32] My reading of Calgacus as a paradigm of defiance that is attractive but nevertheless futile and thus irrational owes much to the reading of Boudicca in *Annals* 14 by Roberts (n. 28). The figure of Boudicca plays much the same role in *Annals* 14 that Calgacus does in the *Agricola* – though Tacitus exploits her gender in order to further reinforce the connection between resistance and irrationality.

But this can only be half the story. The *Agricola*'s rejection of outright defiance in favour of a policy of *obsequium ac modestia* is not without ambivalence. There is a degree of sympathy for those who resist, both Roman and British, and the idealization of Agricola (and the course he espouses) leaves room for doubt and equivocation.[33] Several readers have drawn attention to Agricola's implication in the enslavement of Britain.[34] But it is far from certain that Roman readers would have found the representation of conquest as enslavement as disquieting as we do.[35] More obviously problematic is the hint that even Agricola shares in the slavishness common to senators and provincials:

mox inter quaesturam ac tribunatum plebis atque ipsum tribunatus annum quiete et otio transiit, gnarus sub Nerone temporum, quibus inertia pro sapientia fuit, idem praeturae tenor et silentium; nec enim iurisdictio obuenerat. (6.3)

The time between being quaestor and tribune of the people and even the year of the tribunate itself he passed in peace and quiet, since he understood the nature of Nero's reign – a time when inaction counted as wisdom. His praetorship had the same character and silence, since he was not allotted judicial responsibility.

Agricola's *inertia* may be pragmatic and his *silentium* a matter of chance (in that his praetorship involved no judicial duties). But it is still disquieting to find him indulging in *silentium* and *inertia*, both of which featured prominently in the earlier description of the senate's slavishness under Domitian (3.1, 3.2).[36] The discordant note is reinforced by the comment that Agricola passes his tribunate in 'peace and quiet' (*quiete et otio*). This is the same condition into which he will later lure the Britons when he uses luxury to pacify them (*ut homines dispersi ac rudes ... quieti et otio per uoluptates adsuescerent*, 21.1).[37] The end result is their enslavement (21.2). It is also the same passive posture that Domitian's intimates will press on Agricola at the end of his career when they persuade him to excuse himself from the governorship of Africa or Asia that he would normally be entitled to (*quietem et otium laudare*, 42.1). The parallels suggest that Agricola's policy of withdrawing himself from public life aligns him to some extent with the provincials who slavishly submit to Roman rule. Despite his virtues, he does not entirely escape the slavishness that results from living under domination.[38]

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[33] Whitmarsh (n. 2) is the best account of the ambivalence of the *Agricola*'s political and ethical message. 'The *Agricola* is an ambiguous text. It dramatizes a position of quietist *obsequium*, enacts a rhetoric of compliance; but in doing so, it points up the array of choices, exposes the roads not taken' (324). See also Liebeschuetz (n. 1), esp. 134, Clarke (n. 2) and Haynes (n. 2).

[34] Clarke (n. 2), 109, Evans (n. 2), 276, E. Dench, *Romulus' Asylum: Roman Identities from the Age of Alexander to the Age of Hadrian* (Oxford, 2005), 85, Haynes (n. 2), 165–6 and Whitmarsh (n. 2), 306.

[35] See n. 8 above.

[36] Haynes (n. 2), 163 seizes upon Agricola's *inertia* here, but surprisingly neglects his *silentium*.

[37] Whitmarsh (n. 2), 319–20 too notes the echo.

[38] Many thanks to Rhiannon Ash, Mary Beard, William Fitzgerald, Chris Kraus, Chris Whitton, Tony Woodman, the other participants at the 'Agricola Day' seminar in Cambridge in May 2009 and the anonymous reader for *CQ* for their helpful comments on different versions of this paper.