

CHANGES OVER NIGHT: AN ANALYSIS OF THE AFTERMATH OF MONS GRAUPIUS

IN TACITUS' *AGRICOLA*

by

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A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the

DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES AND CLASSICS

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

WITH A MAJOR IN CLASSICS

In the Graduate College

THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

2018

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Acknowledgements

Foremost, I thank my committee, for without their patience, wisdom, and advice this thesis would be a mere shadow of its current form. I thank my peers for their support, camaraderie, and good humor. Heartfelt thanks goes to my family for their aid in difficult times and love at every step of the way. Finally, boundless gratitude to my dear Stephanie, the unwavering wind at my back, the bloom in my meadow, the sun's prickle on my cheek.

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Author's Note

All translations in this paper are my own. For *Agricola* I have used the text M. Winterbottom and R. M. Ogilvie, *Tacitus: Opera Minora* (Oxford 1975).

List of Abbreviations

Citations that omit the title are of *Agricola*. Citations that omit the author are Tacitus.

OLD *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (Oxford 1968-82)

O-R R. M. Ogilvie and I. Richmond, *Tacitus: Agricola* (Oxford 1967)

W-K A. J. Woodman and C. S. Kraus, *Tacitus: Agricola* (Cambridge 2014)

Abstract

Despite its impressionistic quality and engaging imagery, Tacitus' description of the aftermath of the battle of Mons Graupius has largely been ignored in scholarship. When treated, it is regarded as a problematic passage that either regards the biographee with ambivalence or comments negatively upon Roman imperial conquest and by extension Agricola himself. In order to interpret this passage, this thesis engages with *Agricola* as a work of literature and analyzes the passage in light of Tacitus' rhetorical goals of bestowing praise on his deceased father-in-law and showing contempt for the deposed emperor Domitian. The first chapter considers how Tacitus puns on Agricola's *cognomen* to portray Agricola as a farmer who has travelled to the edges of the world to drive off wild beasts and clear the landscape for cultivation in service to Rome. The second explores the thematic and symbolic unity created by Tacitus' focus on Britain's unique nights and its influence on the structure and content of the description of the aftermath. This thesis concludes that Tacitus' description of the aftermath is not ambivalent about Agricola's character, but a testament both to his accomplishment and Domitian's desire to thwart good men from achieving glory for themselves and Rome.

Introduction

Et nox quidem gaudio praedaeque laeta victoribus: Britanni palantes mixto virorum mulierumque ploratu trahere vulneratos, vocare integros, deserere domos ac per iram ultro incendere, eligere latebras et statim relinquere; miscere in vicem consilia aliqua, dein separare; aliquando frangi aspectu pignorum suorum, saepius concitari. Satisque constabat saevisse quosdam in coniuges ac liberos, tamquam misererentur. Proximus dies faciem victoriae latius aperuit: vastum ubique silentium, secreti colles, fumantia procul tecta, nemo exploratoribus obvius. Quibus in omnem partem dimissis, ubi incerta fugae vestigia neque usquam conglobari hostis compertum et exacta iam aestate spargi bellum nequibat, in finis Borestorum exercitum deducit. (38.1-2)

And night indeed was happy with joy and plunder for the victors. The Britons were dispersing and dragging their wounded with a mixed cry of women and men; they called to the uninjured; they abandoned their homes and on account of their anger set fire to them of their own accord; they chose hiding-places and immediately left them; they shared some plans one after the other, then separated; at times they were broken by the sight of their own loved ones, but more often they were infuriated. It was well enough known that some mauled their spouses and children to death, as if they were pitying them.¹ The next day widely revealed the appearance of victory: a desolate silence was everywhere; the hills were deserted; smoking roofs far off; no one met the scouts. The scouts were sent out into every region, and when it was verified that that the tracks of flight were confused and the enemy never swarmed together it was not possible for war to be sown since the summer was already completed, he led the army into the territory of the Boresti.

In war victory is often determined only after the dust has cleared. The victorious take their spoils and celebrate, while the defeated gather their dead and hold onto what of their dignity remains. When the accounts of wars are told after the fact, whether implied or explicitly stated

¹ The act of killing one's family before they fall into enemy hands appears in Liv. 21.14.4 (Saguntum) and 31.18.7 (Abydus), but Tacitus differs from Livy in that he uses the term *saevissime* to describe the act of slaughtering.

by reporters, the aftermaths of battles often remind audiences of all the planning, effort, and action that led up to the critical point. Images of battlefields strewn with bodies, the turmoil in the defeated camps, and celebrations of the victors are not only shaped by the preceding campaign but also reflect the characteristics of the path that led there. The aftermath is the culmination of a campaign, the battle's fruits that vary by side. For Romans the triumph was a display before the Roman people of the aftermath of a battle, or a series of battles, so that victorious generals might receive their merited recognition. Sailor (2008: 51-118), however, notes that since after Lucius Cornelius Balbus' triumph on March 27, 19 BCE no one outside the imperial family was allowed to celebrate a triumph, men who in the past would have earned a triumph won comparatively little recognition, and historians and biographers thus became increasingly important as a means of bestowing praise on virtuous men.² Like a literary version of a Roman triumph, descriptions of the aftermath of a great battle become a method of bestowing praise on the subject: the victor is touted, as the conquered are shown laid low.

Despite this summarizing quality of aftermath descriptions, Tacitean scholarship pays little attention to Tacitus' first account of a major battle's aftermath, that of the battle of Mons Graupius (38.1-2). In this thesis I offer fresh insights into the complexity and significance of Tacitus' description of the aftermath of the battle of Mons Graupius. I will first provide a brief introduction to Tacitus' life with respect to oratory, an overview of *Agricola*, a discussion of *Agricola's* genre, the target audience and rhetorical aims of the text, the current state of Tacitean scholarship on the aftermath, and a note on methodologies.

² For discussion of narrative historiography as a type of "monument," see Roller (2009).

Tacitus' life before becoming an author is steeped in politics and oratory, and his first work, a textual incarnation of a eulogy, seems to naturally stem from his life experience. Evidence for Tacitus' life suggest that he was a provincial of equestrian rank who eventually rose through the ranks to become consul in 97 CE.³ Rhetorical education for elites in imperial Rome was a given, and Tacitus eagerly pursued the art of rhetoric and every chance to hear the great orators of his day (*Dial.* 2.1). In addition to giving speeches in the Senate, Tacitus likely was used to publicly speaking at other occasions, for instance giving an elaborate *laudatio*, a type of funeral speech that praised the deceased through an account of his ancestry, notable deeds, and noble character.⁴ It is unremarkable that Tacitus' first literary work was a written version of a type of oratory to which he was accustomed.

In modern culture Tacitus' legacy is mostly associated with his historical writings *Historiae* and *Annales*, but in order to assess the development of his style and literary complexity, readers must turn to Tacitus' first publication *Agricola*. Because Tacitus speaks acidly about Domitian and with high praise of Nerva's reign, there is consensus that Tacitus published the *Agricola* in the 97/98 CE, likely during or very shortly after Nerva's reign. Tacitus laments the fact that he is writing so long after Agricola's death in 93 CE due to ubiquitous silence among the elite during Domitian's reign (2.3). Tacitus composed the work primarily as a eulogy for Agricola and proof that men of honest character can still exist under a despot (3.3).

To understand the scope and arrangement of *Agricola*, it is useful to examine its overarching structure. Tacitus opens by stating his purpose in writing and providing historical background to the work (1-3). He then introduces Agricola, his birth, his upbringing, and the

³ For discussion and assessment of evidence for Tacitus' political life, see Birley (2000).

⁴ Pliny the Younger records that Tacitus gave a funeral oration for Verginius Rufus in 97 CE (Plin. *Ep.* 2.1.6). For discussion on Tacitus' movement from orator to author, see Syme (1958: 112-20).

beginnings of his military career, as well as a brief summary of the governors of Britain before Agricola (4-9). After Tacitus describes Agricola's appointment as the governor of Britain, he provides geographical, climatological, and ethnographic sections on Britain and its relationship with Rome (10-17). Once the audience has a mental picture of the landscape and peoples of Britain, Tacitus treats Agricola's governorship, his campaign against the the revolting British tribes, and his complete subjugation of the island (18-38). Following his description of the Roman victory at Graupius Mons and the circumnavigation of Britain, Tacitus turns the narrative focus back to Rome. Domitian recalls Agricola with feigned praise and Agricola spends the last decade of his life in obscurity (39-43). Tacitus reports Agricola's death, gives a succinct, laudatory summary of his life, and concludes the work with another authorial statement that effusively expresses regret over losing such a virtuous Roman and family member. The entire work is presented using a ring composition, with authorial statements bookending the work, the campaign narrative holding the center.

At the outset Tacitus makes clear that he is about to narrate his father-in-law's life (*narraturo vitam mihi defuncti hominis* 1.4) and sets the work in the genre of biography. Yet, the genre of ancient biography is fraught and problematic, just as modern biography is so today.⁵ Modern audiences often have the misconception that ancient biographers strove for historical accuracy over laudation, but as Woodman and Kraus (W-K 1) note, they were free to choose praise as their primary goal. Roman biography, as seen in the Tacitus' conclusion of *Agricola* (46.1-3), can be read in close association with the Roman custom of displaying ancestral death masks and celebrating their ancestors' *res gestae*. Nevertheless, elements of *Agricola* have led

⁵ See Hägg (2012) for issues concerning the study of biographies, both ancient and modern. See Kraus (2010) for discussion of the relationship between ancient historiography and biography.

some to read the text as a historiographical work since the text narrates Agricola's British campaigns and includes elements found in the historiographical tradition, e.g. speeches, battle scenes, geography, and ethnography.⁶ Citing the late third century literary theorist Menander Rhetor's prescription for encomium, a genre very close to that of biography, Woodman and Kraus (W-K 3-4) argue that *Agricola* fits remarkably well into Menander's framework, and that *Agricola*'s historiographical elements are to be read within the framework of encomium. Thus, readers should understand that the text's unifying objective is to bestow praise on Agricola.

Furthermore, in spite of the question of *Agricola*'s genre, we should understand that biography, encomium, and historiography are all rhetorical genres and aim to persuade or impress an audience, but before we assess how to read the aftermath of Mons Graupius, we must establish the identity of Tacitus' target audience. Judging by the Tacitus' status as a senator and his address to those who experienced the Domitian's *saevitia* first hand, we should assume that Tacitus intended his text to be read by the educated Roman elite who would be well-versed in the Greek and Latin literary traditions and entrenched in Roman imperial political culture. With this audience in mind, we look to what are Tacitus' rhetorical goals in writing *Agricola*. As stated above, the primary goal is for Agricola to receive the recognition and praise that he was unable to receive under the despotic reign of Domitian. Additionally, when discussing the year's before Agricola's death, Tacitus makes an addendum to the primary goal:

Sciunt, quibus moris est inlicita mirari, posse etiam sub malis principibus magnos viros esse, obsequiumque ac modestiam, si industria ac vigor adsint, eo laudis excedere, quo plerique per

⁶ Some elements in *Agricola* closely resemble those in the historical monographs of Sallust. Sallust, who focuses his *Bellum Catilinae* and *Bellum Jugurthinum* on conflicts against enemies of the Roman state, includes geographical and ethnographic passages, e.g. *Iug.* 17.1-19.8, in order to provide the reader with a stronger sense of where the events took place and with whom the Romans fought. In *Agricola* Tacitus does much the same, but with a goal of praising the central figure rather than inspiring disgust in his audience as Sallust does.

abrupta, sed in nullum rei publicae usum ambitiosa morte
inclaruerunt. (42.4)

For whom it is a custom to admire unlawful conduct, let them know that men are able to be great under bad emperors, and compliance and restraint, if diligence and vigor are present, can reach the peak of praise, which many have reached through precipitous paths, but they became famous by means of an ostentatious death without any benefit to the *res publica*.

Not only does Agricola merit praise, but he should the model of a great Roman under the principate. In protest of the horrible character and policies of a bad emperor, many made ostentatious displays of opposition, seemingly to earn themselves fame, but Tacitus believes it is imperative that a imperial Roman elite man still serve and benefit the *res publica*, that the body of the state is sustained and still functions although that the head is corrupted.⁷ Furthermore, implicit in the portrayal of Agricola as the ideal Roman citizen is the condemnation of Domitian. Those actions, or inactions, that are seen in hindsight as failings of senatorial elite collectively during this time, i.e. the siege of senate, slaughter of senators, the exile of noblewomen (45.1), are ultimately traced back to Domitian who figuratively enslaved Rome. It is towards these goals that Tacitus constructs the rhetorical program of *Agricola*.

Scholars largely ignore 38.1-2, the aftermath of the battle of Mons Graupius. Since the passage inspires in the reader sympathy for the conquered Britons and paints the aftermath of the battle in the daylight as a ravaged wasteland, scholars have been uneasy about how to interpret the passage in the light of *Agricola*'s rhetorical program. Although he does not address this passages specifically, Batomsky (1985) identifies other passages that could be read negatively and thus as detractions from Agricola's character. Ash (2012: 18) assents to Batomsky's

⁷ Ogilvie and Richmond (O-R 297) argue that Tacitus has the Stoics martyrs, notably Thrasea Paetus and Helvidius Priscus. Thrasea was forced to commit suicide and did so in a memorable fashion (*Ann.* 16.33.2-35.2), but Helvidius was put to death by Vespasian (Suet. *Vesp.* 15.1), supposedly because of his own provocation.

assessment and explains that the instances of ambiguity add a layer of complexity to Agricola's character and acknowledges "the compromises leading figures have to make in order to function under the principate." Laruccia (1980) assesses *Agricola* along similar lines and offers a negative reading of the aftermath, arguing that because in the daylight Romans are met with a vacuous landscape, Tacitus portrays *pax Romana* as a *solitudo*. Consequently, since Agricola is the vehicle for Roman rule, i.e. destruction and creation of wastelands, his character is rendered as ambiguous. Rutledge (2000: 89-90), however, contends that the tension is not in the character of Agricola but within the text and leaves "the audience in a reader's purgatory," caught between the close of the narrative of Agricola's campaigns and "an open-ended reading." The reader is left with a sense of incompleteness. I agree with Rutledge in that the aftermath of Mons Graupius is not meant to be a slight against, or even a mere ambiguity about, Agricola's character. Nevertheless, I find the current explanations insufficient in understanding 38.1-2 in its context and describing its relationship to *Agricola*'s rhetorical agenda.

Tacitus' description of the aftermath of the battle may also be largely neglected because of the deeper scholarly interest in the passages that flank it. On one side, Tacitus describes the rousing defeat of the Caledonians, accomplished by the military tactfulness of Agricola himself. Military historians are drawn to the battlefield by Tacitus' quintessential example of a Roman general, as a metonymy for the systematic and disciplined Roman legions, crushing a barbarian force.⁸ On the other, since Tacitus tells of Agricola's reluctant return to Rome and submission to Domitian, social and political historians revel in the chance to observe a successful military man's absorption into normal political life at Rome and reintegration into the imperial structure

⁸ A frequented topic for military historians is the exact location of the battle of Mons Graupius. For detailed analysis of literary, etymological, and archaeological evidence, see Hanson (1987: 128-139) and Maxwell (1990: 72-110).

under Domitian.⁹ Due to its position on the threshold between the conclusion of Agricola's military successes and his return to Rome, the aftermath of the battle is an easy piece to bypass. Furthermore, because of the interest in where Agricola went immediately following battle, the most discussed part of this passage is the final sentence, which describes Agricola leading his army to the Boresti.¹⁰

Commentaries on the *Agricola* discuss the passage at some length but do not treat it very fully. Most provide grammatical help and gloss the unusual usage of vocabulary, and also note connections to other sections of *Agricola*.¹¹ The commentaries note increased *pathos* due to a heightened sense of language.¹² Bews (1987: 208) cites the passage as “[a]n excellent example of impressionistic writing” and praises its ability to punchy vividness and colorful use of juxtaposition. Tacitus crowds the passage with action and emotion, fitting for the aftermath of the key battle in the work. Moreover, commentaries note how Tacitus enriches the scene by deploying several intertexts, both historiographical and poetic.¹³ By echoing Livy, Ovid, Vergil, and Lucan, Tacitus raises Agricola's achievements to the level of deeds performed by exemplary historical Roman figures and to the realm of epic.

Although the commentaries clarify these connections and some other qualities of the passage noted below, they do not explain how such a rich but seemingly ambivalent conclusion

⁹ E.g. Whitmarsh (2006), Sailor (2004), Sailor (2008: 51-118), Evans (2003), Schwarte (1979), Oakley (2009), Lavan (2011), and Lavan (2013).

¹⁰ Scholars debate about whether the object of the preposition should read *Borestorum*, since there was no people known by that name. Wolfson (2008: 65-74) makes the argument for the emendation to *boreos totum*, which Woodman and Kraus accept.

¹¹ E.g. Woodman and Kraus (W-K) 282 notes that *vastum silentium* (38.2) recalls Calgacus' speech to the Caledonians about the Roman policy of creating wastelands (30.5).

¹² O-R 281-2.

¹³ E.g. *mixto mulierum ac puerorum ploratu* (Liv. 5.21.11); *lux aperuit bellum* (Liv. 3.15.9); *vastum ... silentium* (Liv. 10.34.6); *secreti montes* (Ov. M. 11.765); *fumantia ... tecta* (Ov. M. 13.421); *incerta fugae vestigia* (Luc. 8.4); *spargi* (Luc. 2.682, 3.64); *spargam arma* (Verg. Aen. 7.551).

fits into Agricola's campaign. The audience is left with lingering questions about how this passage relates to the rest of Agricola's campaign narrative, and what role does it play in the work as a whole. The density of poetic and rhetorical flourish demands more insight and analysis, and in the following chapters I detail how Tacitus employs thematic reiteration, stylistics, form, and geographical context in his description of the aftermath of the Battle of Mons Graupius to subtly embody Agricola's campaign and praise the Roman general.

Some readers, particularly those concerned with the historicity of *Agricola*, might raise objections to the literary analysis of a work about a historical topic.¹⁴ To defend my approach, I follow the work of A. J. Woodman, the pioneer of engaging with ancient historiographical texts as prose literature concerned with historical content rather than completely objective accounts.¹⁵ To approach historiography with an eye to stylistics, theme, and form is not a denial of historical accuracy or truthfulness, but an appreciation of how the author presents his subject, excites and entices his audience, and composes a work of not only reasonable historicity, but also beauty. Accurate depiction of events and literary creativity and complexity are not mutually exclusive.

Because I engage with *Agricola* as a literary text as a means to understand how 38.1-2 fits into the text's rhetorical program, I employ tools from various schools of literary criticism. In order to make connections between disparate parts of the text via repetition of language and read

¹⁴ For concise discussion of the use of *Agricola* as a historical source, see Hanson (1991: 1742-8). Hanson's (1991:1778) conclusion to the article is on point: "There can be no doubt that Tacitus' 'Agricola' provides an extremely valuable literary source for both the Roman conquest of north Britain and the wider activities of a provincial governor. When combined with the archaeological evidence it allows a picture to be obtained which surpasses the simple sum of its constituent parts. But in the process the work should be critically assessed and its content carefully weighed against other sources of evidence, both archaeological and literary, in exactly the same way as any other written account. Indeed, the clear bias of the author in favour of the subject of his biography requires even greater care and critical awareness. The almost verbatim acceptance of Tacitus' assessment of the character and achievements of his own father-in-law, which permeates many modern commentaries, seems little short of naivety."

¹⁵ Nearly all Woodman's Tacitean scholarship reflects this view, but Woodman (1998: 1-20) speaks to the treatment of ancient historiography on its own terms, not by the measuring stick of modern historiography.

unity in the text, I look to Sharrock (2000)'s discussion of intratextuality and its application to ancient literature.¹⁶ Likewise, to gain insights into the usage of language to focalize narration and express meaning through the narrative's space, I draw on de Jong (2015)'s discussion of narratology and its application to ancient texts. These tools enhance my reading of the text and lead me to fresh interpretation of the aftermath of Mons Graupius.

¹⁶ Hinds (1998) is also an excellent resource for understanding how recontextualization of language or codes of language can activate a network of meaning, opposing the fundamentalist conception of one-to-one references.

Chapter 1: The Farmer and the Beast

To illustrate the aftermath of the Battle of Graupius Mons, Tacitus weaves a rich text that pulls threads from various parts of the narrative in Briton. He not only develops themes introduced earlier in the work, but creates a manifestation of those themes in both diction and structure, as we will see in chapter two. While the passage is a testament to Tacitus' literary adroitness in working with historical material, the question of the effects of adding such a flourish to the end of Agricola's campaign effects.

Latin writers often saw writing, especially historiography, as a *certamen*, a competition where the goal is to create works more powerful, engaging, or beautiful than previous writers as judged by readers.¹⁷ If we look for a previous historian's the aftermath of a battle, we can see that Sallust makes at least one vitally important to his rhetorical program. Sallust's account of the aftermath of Catiline's final battle (Sal. *Cat.* 61.1-9) concludes his *Bellum Catilinae*. Like Tacitus' account of the aftermath of the battle of Mons Graupius, Sallust uses this narrative to bring central themes about the incongruousness and taint of civil war to their culminations. Moreover, ancient historiographers used the *urbs capta* topos, which can be categorized as an aftermath passage, to demonstrate their skill at employing *enargeia* and stirring the emotions of their readers, and Quintilian explains the topos in his discussion of *enargeia* (*Inst.* 8.3.67-70).¹⁸ The passage of the aftermath of the battle of Mons Graupius includes some of the typical features of the *urbs capta* topos that Quintilian mentions: crys of many of mixing together, burning

¹⁷ Tacitus signals that he has entered into this arena by telling the reader in the geographical section that other writers have written much about the shape of Britain (10.1). See Marincola (1997) for discussion on the historiographer's struggle both to draw on and stand out from tradition, especially (111-17) on his claims of novelty and (241-57) for his claim of continuity and culmination of Roman tradition.

¹⁸ The quintessential example of an *urbs capta* was the Fall of Troy. Woodman (1998: 150-154) argues that Tacitus' account of the collapse of the amphitheater at Fidenae casts the event as a metaphorical *urbs capta*. Keitel (2010) elaborates on Woodman's work and connects it to other disaster narratives in the Tacitean corpus.

buildings, the company of family in the final hour, and confused flight. Although these elements are present in the passage, Tacitus seems to manipulate them, the significance of which I will address in the second chapter.

In conjunction with the fact that Tacitus draws inspiration from the historiographical tradition, we must also inspect the context of the passage. Since the passage acts as the structural capstone to Agricola's subjugation of Britain, it should also be the thematic culmination of Agricola's success. Tacitus makes it the last description of Agricola's subjugation of Britain before the narrative turns to the circumnavigation of Britain and then back to Rome, where brooding Domitian plots against Agricola. After Agricola returns to Rome, he retreats further into private life because of Domitian's grip on politics in Rome. Therefore, the governorship of Britain was Agricola's most important duty, and the subjugation of Britain his greatest achievement.¹⁹ Since this passage concludes the narrative, it stands as the literary monument that commemorates the extensive campaign Agricola undertook not only to quell the uprising of British tribes but also to annex the rest of the island to the Roman Empire.

Broadening the scope of the question of context even further, we must consider the main purpose of *Agricola*. Tacitus himself supplies the reason for why he wrote the piece: an encomium for his late father-in-law (3.3). The entire work is dedicated to celebrating Agricola, who in Tacitus' eyes was one of the few men during the despotic times of Domitian to have the *virtus* to uphold the *mos maiorum*. Consequently, the whole narrative works to glorify Agricola. Although some sections seem to be disparate pieces, e.g. the geographical and ethnographical

¹⁹ On the prestige of Roman governorships Salway (2002: 211) writes, "[U]nder the Early Empire, it is said that the governorship of Britain ranked alongside Syria in conferring the highest prestige ... With a garrison of three full legions (sometimes four) plus a large number of regular auxiliary units its military establishment was remarkably large: it has been calculated that at times it represented 10 per cent [sic] of the entire imperial army."

sections Tacitus includes before the account of Agricola's tenure as governor of Britain, they vivify Agricola's achievement for readers by providing context for Agricola's actions and even influence Tacitus' descriptions as shown in the next chapter. To know the landscape in which Agricola wages his campaign and the types of people he battles makes the audience appreciate Agricola all the more.²⁰

Since Tacitus' work revolves around his father-in-law, we must take into consideration all the qualities of the man in our analysis of the monument to his life. As we sift through the different qualities of Agricola as a person that Tacitus provides—his origins as a provincial Roman, his education and turning from philosophy, his character as an effective but humble commander (4.1-9.6)—we discover that one quality sheds light on how the aftermath of the battle reflects upon Agricola: his name. Woodman and Kraus (W-K 35) note that Tacitus is very aware of the names of characters in his works, and since Agricola's name is the only one which Tacitus gives in the order of *praenomen*, *nomen*, *cognomen*, we should be especially sensitive to language that puns on his *cognomen*.²¹ For example, Tacitus uses agricultural terminology to describe Agricola's actions as governor in Britain: *excidere* ("to cut down" *OLD* 1b), *coerco* ("to prune" *OLD* 3b), *circumcisis* ("clipped around" *OLD* 2c).²² By using these terms metaphorically, Tacitus portrays Agricola as a farmer who cultivates the land, prunes the plant, and clips dead branches from the trees.

²⁰ Rutledge (2000: 88) adds that Caesar and Sallust also include these types of narratives "as a buildup to what is usually a final triumph."

²¹ Woodman and Martin (1996: 3.75.1n) have an illuminating discussion of the pun on the name of Antistius, who was an "outstanding" lawyer, and cite many ancient examples of name-based puns. Woodman (1998: 222) states, "Cumulative evidence such as [the puns just mentioned] leaves little doubt that Tacitus habitually plays on names and is in no way immune to the fascination which names and their significance have for other Greek and Latin authors, including historians."

²² W-K 191-2, 194.

If we apply the metaphor agriculture to the aftermath of Mons Graupius, we recognize that Tacitus portrays Agricola as a farmer who develops wild land for cultivation. On the day after the battle, Agricola sends scouts to explore the area, and they verify “that the tracks of flight were confused and that the enemy was not amassing at all” (*incerta fugae vestigia neque usquam conglobari hostis* 38.3). *conglobari*, literally meaning “to shape into a ball” (*OLD* 1), here means “to form into a crowd, to mass together (persons and animals)” (*OLD* 3a). Varro uses it to describe how bees swarm together to look like bunches of grapes (Var. *R.* 3.16.29).²³ Since the subjects of the action are the barbarians who have shown prior animalistic behavior by skulking in the forest and marshes, Tacitus explicitly describes them like animals that would flock together like sheep or bees. Moreover, the root of the word, *globus*, recalls its etymological cousin *gleba*, which denotes clumps of earth, such as when a plowman overturns the earth in preparation for planting.²⁴ To further stress the agricultural imagery, Tacitus uses the term *spargi* to describe Agricola’s decision not to wage further war on the Caledonians (38.3). *spargo*, “to cast out seed” (*OLD* 1b), again evokes the image of Agricola the farmer planting the seeds of war in northern Britain. Woodman and Kraus (WK 282) identify *exacta iam aestate spargi* as another agricultural metaphor to cast Agricola as a prudent farmer who knows that he must wait until next spring to sow seed because it is already too late in the season.²⁵ Before Agricola leads

²³ Tacitus uses this word later in other works (*Ann.* 1.35, 13.39, 14.32).

²⁴ De Vaan (2008: 264-5); e.g. *Lucr.* 1.211, 1.888; *Verg. G.* 1.44.

²⁵ Since Agricola has defeated the Britons and would turn to Romanization if he were not recalled, the metaphor of *war* being sown seems out of place. We might expect Tacitus to say that peace was unable to be sown. I interpret this metaphor as focusing on the conclusion of the campaign season and the need for Agricola to move his troops to their wintering quarters but cast in agricultural terms to highlight Agricola as farmer. Thus, “not being able to sow war” means that Agricola’s campaign was over for the season, but it is also important to note that both fought enemies and constructed buildings during campaigns. If the army must pull back to winter quarters, they cease military activities in the area, meaning not only fighting but also building. Therefore, although there is often an association between war and destruction, war includes constructive activities. Furthermore, the construction of forts and roads in Scotland would be the first step of Romanization.

his army to the Boresti, Tacitus paints him as a farmer ready to plow the fields, sow the seeds, and cultivate the land in service to Rome.²⁶

Now that we see how Tacitus has reminds his audience of the image of Agricola the farmer, we also see how Tacitus shapes the passage to fit this metaphor. Yet, if Agricola is the victor and the object of praise, then why does Tacitus dedicate much of the passage to the Britons instead of Agricola himself? Tacitus could praise the man's virtue and his victory over the Caledonians directly, but it would seem trite in a work that already so explicitly praises his character at other points. Instead, Tacitus shows the *outcome* of Agricola's action in order to praise his father-in-law by detailing how his actions affect those that stand in the way of his power and the expansion of Rome's empire. With an eye to practicality, Tacitus shows not only how Agricola possesses *virtus* but also that he is effective in channeling it into action. Therefore, by emphasizing the defeated Caledonians rather than the victorious Romans, Tacitus chooses a technique effective in both praising his father-in-law's achievements and highlighting Agricola's humble but diligent character.

An explanation of Tacitus' agricultural metaphor now leads to what the Caledonians represent in opposition to Agricola. To better understand this, we must look to the beginning of Tacitus' account of Agricola's campaign. Tacitus needs the reader to know both about the landscape, climate, and peoples in Britain in order to fully appreciate Agricola's achievement. He devotes a majority of this section to the ethnography of the people of Britain and lays more emphasis on *whom* Agricola conquered than *where* he conquered. Tacitus persuades the reader

²⁶ For elite Romans the farmer symbolized simple, old-fashioned character, often contrasted to the "modern" vice of greed and lust for luxury. Among the historical exempla Cincinnatus stands out as a farmer who, when asked by the messengers of the senate to receive the role as dictator, left his plow in the middle of his field and took up his toga in service for his state (Liv. 3.26.7-10).

that Britain is essentially a wasteland at the edge of the known world (10.2-6). To reinforce this notion, Tacitus has Calgacus, the Caledonian leader, state that there is nothing beyond where they live: they in their wilderness are the only ones who now stand between the Romans and the endless Ocean (30.3). Essentially, what stands in the way of Roman power is not the hills, forests, or weather of Britain but its people.

If Britain were an open country, free of barbarian villages and their inhabitants, the Roman army would sweep across it, settle citizens there, and establish Roman institutions as anywhere else in the empire, but as almost every place that Rome has conquered, Britain is inhabited by people who are resistant to Roman rule. To make this relationship even more clear, Tacitus even devotes several sections of narrative to the historical relationship between the Britons and Romans (13.1-17.2). He begins with Julius Caesar's first incursions into Britain (13.1-2), details the tenures of previous governors of Britain, whose inclusion enhances the achievements of Agricola by comparison (14.1-17.2), and highlights the struggles against the natives, most notably the revolt led by Boudicca (16.1-2). By devoting so many words of *Agricola* to his ethnographic section and history of Roman occupation, Tacitus informs the reader that Britain's people are the major impediment to Roman rule.

The assembled Caledonians who gather at Mons Graupius under Calgacus are what stands between Agricola and his mission of finally subjugating an untamed land. To elaborate upon Tacitus' metaphor of Agricola the farmer, we must parse the analogous role that the Caledonians fulfill. If Agricola is a farmer who clears undeveloped land for cultivation, the Caledonians are native creatures that have lived there long before agriculture existed to turn up

the land with plows and oxen. In fact, Tacitus describes the Britons with characteristics often attributed to animals.²⁷

First, Tacitus repeatedly describes the Britons in close connection with the forests and the marshes. In the previous chapter, we analyzed the night assault that the Britons inflict upon the Romans. As the Romans rout the Britons and foil the surprise attack, the latter flee into the forest: *quod nisi paludes et silvae fugientes texissent, debellatum illa victoria foret* (26.2). As animals flee into the forest to escape the spears and arrows of hunters in pursuit, the Britons use the woods and the marshes to cover their flight from the victorious Romans. The analogy is further emphasized by the fact that the marshes and forests are the agents of the action that aid the barbarians. Tacitus states that if the landscape had not actively helped the Britons in their flight, the Romans would have concluded the campaign at that moment with a resolute victory.

Tacitus again shows collusion between the landscape and the barbarians during Calgacus' speech. The Caledonian leader reminds his troops that one of the disadvantages for the Romans is that they do not know the landscape around them:

Paucos numero, trepidos ignorantia, caelum ipsum ac mare et
silvas, ignota omnia circumspectantes, clausos quodam modo ac
vinctos dii uobis tradiderunt. (32.2)

The gods have handed to you them who are few in number and
anxious from ignorance because they see around them the very sky
and the sea and the forest, all unknown and because they are closed
off, so to speak, and bound.

Calgacus exhorts the army to keep in mind that the landscape around them is not only theirs but one of the greatest tools they have against the enemy. The Roman who tracks the barbarian into

²⁷ Livy describes northern peoples, usually Gauls, as beasts several times in his history (7.10.3, 7.24.5, 8.14.9, 10.10.11, 38.17.15-6). In the next chapter I will show how Tacitus describes the Britons as nocturnal creatures, intensifying the bestiality of the Britons.

the wilds has now become the hunted. Everywhere the Romans turn they see unfamiliar territory, and Agricola even echoes this fact in his own speech, although he uses it as an impetus for the Romans to be victorious (33.5).²⁸ The Romans invade a foreign territory of a people deeply invested in the land, so much so that after their defeat, they burn their homes so that the Romans cannot have them (38.1). Both sides of the conflict view the Britons as creatures entrenched in the area, and they draw military strength and effectiveness from their intimate knowledge.

Tacitus also conveys this sense of primeval character in his section on British ethnography. As with other tribes perceived to be barbarians, the Romans know too little about their history to be certain about their origins.²⁹ Tacitus notes the similarity of the Britons' appearance to that of the continental peoples, noting that the Britons must have either stemmed from these or at least mingled with visitors from the continent. Although Tacitus tells the audience that there is still uncertainty as to whether the inhabitants of Britain are originally an autochthonic or immigrant people (*indigenae an advecti*, Ag. 11.1), he makes clear that they have inhabited the island since ancient times, which obscures their origins (*initio coluerint ... ut inter barbaros parum compertum*, Ag. 11.1).

Furthermore, Tacitus attaches *ferox* and its derivatives, a term reminiscent of untamed beasts, to the Britons.³⁰ While recounting the state of Britain's government which Agricola inherits, Tacitus writes *praeerat tunc Britanniae Vettius Bolanus, placidius quam feroci*

²⁸ Woodman and Kraus (W-K 264-5) note that Agricola uses terms reminiscent of hunting, which coincides with the popularity of hunting statues during Domitian's reign. See Tuck (2005) for a discussion of why Roman elites favored hunting imagery in this period.

²⁹ For a discussion of the historical change from Late Iron Age Britain to Roman Britain, see Creighton (2006).

³⁰ Traub (1953) gives an overview of Tacitus' usage of *ferocia* across all his works. Tacitus uses *ferox* in *Ann* to highlight the typical savagery of reputed barbarians. Woodman and Martin (1996: 356) note that Sallust is the first to use *ferox* to produce the metaphor of the barbarian as wild beast (*H.* 1.11).

provincia dignum est (“At that point Vettius Bolanus was in charge of Britain, [but acted] more gently than was appropriate for the savage province” 8.1). Tacitus characterizes the entire province as savage, bellicose, and insufferable to a ruler, who cannot act in turn with proportionate force. Likewise, in the ethnographic section he compares the Britons to other “barbarian” peoples who have been subjugated and incorporated into the empire: *plus tamen ferociae Britanni praeferunt, ut quos nondum longa pax emollierit* (“To a greater extent the Britons, nevertheless, exhibit fierceness as is natural for those whom protracted peace has not yet softened” 11.4). Unlike the Gauls whose ferocity has atrophied under the Roman rule and culture, the Britons still try to escape their oppressors. In the words of Calgacus, the Britons themselves recognize and take pride in their indomitability: *virtus porro ac ferocia subiectorum ingrata imperantibus* (“Furthermore, the valour and fierceness of subordinates are displeasing to those in power” 31.3). By frequent use of *ferox/ferocia*, Tacitus emphasizes the innate, animalistic ferocity of the British tribes.

Finally and most strikingly, Tacitus represents the Britons as beasts by using vocabulary often associated with animals in the account of the aftermath. While describing how the barbarians regroup and make preparations to abandon their settlements, Tacitus says “they select and immediately abandon hideouts” (*eligere latebras et statim relinquere* 38.1). Although the fickleness that Tacitus describes effectively hints at the Briton’s emotional turmoil, the notable term here is *latebras*. *latebras* can be translated simply as “hideouts” (*OLD* 1b), but it also carries associations with wild animals. Furthermore, as stated above, Tacitus uses *conglobari* to describe how the barbarians assemble, a verb that denotes how a group amasses in a disorganized way. A most illuminating comparison is Varro’s description of bees swarming: they amass

together, one on top of the other, creating clusters that resemble bunches of grapes. When the Britons, distraught over their fate, slaughter their family members, Tacitus describes their action as *saeuisse*. When their tempers boil over, the defeated rage at their kin like wild boars or lions. Several times within this short passage Tacitus describes the Britons with language often associated with animals.

Throughout almost the entire narrative of Agricola's campaign Tacitus sets up the Britons as Agricola's adversaries, though he does so in way that does not present them as soldiers comparable to the Romans. He describes the barbarians in the manner of beasts: inhabiting the marshes and forests long before Roman contact, fleeing to wilderness dens, swarming together, and after defeat, raging as if cornered. The Britons of Tacitus' description play the role of the beasts fleeing the farmer Agricola as he clears the way for cultivation.

Moreover, as we have seen, the relationship between Agricola and the Britons emphasizes agriculture, especially the fact that the Britons as a whole stand in the way of Romans cultivating and reaping Britain. In the aftermath of the battle Tacitus brings the metaphorical relationship between Romans and Britons to its culmination, but the pathos that grips the reader here hinges on factors made explicit earlier in the work. One of Agricola's major concerns regarding the Britons' uprising is its effect on the grain dole, which the Roman settlements receive from the British tribes (31.2). If the Britons do not hand over the fruits of their cultivation, the Roman might fail to feed their own. In other words, since oversight of agricultural production and its distribution was one of the primary duties of the Roman governor, Tacitus stresses this agricultural aspect by using agricultural vocabulary in his description of Agricola's administration.

Yet, there are varying shades of the relationship depending on the location of the British tribes. Since they have been under the Roman yoke for some time, the southern tribes can inflict damage on the Romans by withholding their tribute, but the northern tribes, especially the Caledonians, have never felt the burden of Roman subjugation, remaining “untamed” themselves and keeping their land uncultivated for Roman overlords. The only way for them to resist is by meeting the enemy on the battlefield. With Calgacus as their spokesmen, the northern British tribes express their fear that the Romans will not only alter the Britons’ way of life but the very landscape they call their home: *corpora ipsa ac manus silvis ac paludibus emuniendis inter verbera et contumelias conteruntur* (“Between whippings and insults our very bodies and hands are broken down by transforming forests and marshes into roads” 31.2).³¹ The tribes worry that the Romans will terraform their land and weaken them just as they did the Gauls. In the eyes of Britons, especially the northern tribes, to lose the forests and the marshes is to lose a primary source of strength and refuge, a significant part of their identity. Tacitus has shown the Britons using the forests as a shield for their retreat after their night assault. In his rallying speech Calgacus even refers to northern Britain as *penetralibus*, which is rarely used to describe land (30.2).³² *Penetralia* often describe the innermost reaches of a house (*OLD* 1a), region (*OLD* 1b), or shrine (*OLD* 2) and convey a sense of protected sanctity, here reinforced by Calgacus’ statement that “we used to keep even our eyes unviolated from the taint of subjugation” (*oculos quoque a contactu dominationis inviolatos habebamus* 30.2).³³ If their native marshes and forests are transformed by the Romans, they will be left to wander like wild beasts deprived of their

³¹ For discussion of the historical transformation of landscape in Roman Britain, see Dark and Dark (1997).

³² W-K 239.

³³ A comparison can be made to the *Penates*, one group of the Roman household deities.

home by the encroaching farmer or, worse still, enslaved to cultivate and mine the land they once freely lived upon.³⁴

Therefore, in the night following the battle Tacitus shows that the Britons' fears have become a reality. With nowhere to stay the Britons fill the night with confusion. Agricola has finally uprooted them and deprived them of any stability, as shown by Tacitus' pairing of opposing verbs: *eligere/relinquere* and *miscere/separare*. The barbarians even set their own homes on fire, so as not to leave them for the Romans to use as shelter (*per iram ultro incendere*). Moreover, because of the instability the Britons' society internally ruptures, and the pacts that one had with another are broken (*frangi aspectu pignorum suorum*). Even their emotional stability is in turmoil: as if they have confused anger with pity, they rage at their wives and children (*saevisse quosdam in coniuges ac liberos, tamquam misererentur*). Agricola has wrought a waking nightmare for the defeated.³⁵

When dawn breaks, the Roman army sees that they have done their duty. All the Britons who were rushing around during the night have disappeared, and the landscape lies silent. The hills are abandoned, and the only activity in the scene is the smoking of distant houses, which the Britons had set fire to the night before. The scouts encounter no one on the roads and find the confused footsteps of the Britons' flight as the only traces of recent human activity. Although the scene seems to negatively reflect upon Agricola, the destruction can be interpreted in a positive light when compared to equally destructive agricultural techniques, such as the burning of fields. Vergil advocates burning fields in order to make sterile fields fertile again (*G.* 1.84-93), and

³⁴ Although Calgacus says that they have no mineral resources with which they can alleviate their subjugation (31.2), he stirs up the Caledonians by warning them that a Roman victory means slave labor in the mines (32.4).

³⁵ In his contextualization of the role of Agricola's campaign within ancient literature and the history of Roman Britain from Caesar to Trajan, Braund (1996: 171) only makes mention of the aftermath as a sign of the Britons' lack of self-control.

Pliny the Elder corroborates that fact in his own discussion of agricultural practices (*Nat.* 18.300). Despite the fact that setting fire to the fields seems to do violence to one's own property, this technique can return an exhausted to a productive state. Similarly, Agricola seems to have wrought destruction, complete with smoking roofs and empty landscape, but the ground is now ready to accept the seed of Romanization. In the context of northern Britain Agricola has now fulfilled the first phase of his role as cultivator.

Although he has driven the barbarians from their dens and cleared the landscape of what was impeding Roman expansion, Agricola stops short of the complete transformation of northern Britain into a Roman agricultural estate. Aware of the lateness of the season and the ensuing winter, Agricola decides not to cast the seeds of war further across northern Britain. Instead, he leads the army northward to the sea and then circumnavigates Britain to ensure that it is an island. After Agricola returns to the south, Tacitus switches the narrative to Domitian and his jealousy of Agricola's accomplishments. In order to stymie Agricola's growing reputation as the conqueror of Britain, Domitian orders the Senate to acknowledge his accomplishments sans a triumph and provide him with a governorship in Syria (40.1).³⁶ With a new assignment in a different province, Agricola cannot build upon his accomplishment, and his progress in the north is cut off at the knees.³⁷ He will never be able to sow the land that he cleared of wild inhabitants. The vacant landscape on which the dawn broke after the battle of Mons Graupius lingers in the

³⁶ Sailor (2008: 103) and Hedrick (2000: 166) discuss Tacitus' work as the "rehabilitation" of Agricola's reputation.

³⁷ On the state of Roman possession of Scotland after Agricola's campaign Mattingly (2006: 119) writes, "Indeed it is clear from the archaeological evidence that the sequel to the battle, under Agricola's anonymous successor, was the construction of forts far into Scotland, but that this system was abandoned within three or four years". Fulford (2002: 45-6) adds that pressing issues on the Danube and Rhine were the cause of drawing troops out of Scotland, most notably II *Adiutrix* from the incomplete fortress at Inchtuthil; cf. Shotter (2004: 35-6).

audience's minds as the last in-depth picture of Agricola's campaign before Tacitus ends his description and alters both the narrative's time and scope.

After the focused account of the subjugation of Britain ends, the audience is left with a sense of both accomplishment of the domination and expectation of Romanization. Agricola has not only proved himself to be a master of military strategy by completing a harrowing task against all odds, but also created a void that begs to be filled, like a field cleared of rocks, trees, and wild animals but yet unplowed for sowing. In creating such a strong sense of void, Tacitus highlights a central theme of the whole work: good men with old-fashioned *virtus* can still survive under a tyrannical regime. In fact, Domitian is in this case the stumbling block for Agricola's virtue. If Agricola were not recalled on account of Domitian's jealousy, he would complete the subjugation and transformation of northern Britain from an empty landscape into a cultural extension of the Roman Empire.³⁸ By concluding the narrative of Agricola's campaign with a well-wrought description, Tacitus constructs a literary monument that bears witness not only to Agricola's *diligentia* and *virtus* but also to Domitian's ability to thwart the intentions, and even the futures, of good men. By identifying Agricola as a farmer-soldier, Tacitus connects Agricola back to traditional, virtuous Roman men like Cincinnatus, while also making the argument that upright moral character under the principate means being compliant and restrained (*obsequiumque ac modestiam*). Tacitus' bitterness about Domitian's shutdown of the progress in Britain lingered long enough that he made a cutting comment several years later: *perdomita*

³⁸ We can see this sentiment echoed in Tacitus' comment on Ireland: "Often I heard from him that Ireland could be conquered and held by a single legion and a moderate amount of auxiliary troops" (*saepe ex eo audiui legione una et modicis auxiliis debellari obtinerique Hiberniam posse* 24.3). Had Agricola been allowed to govern Britain longer, he would have spread Rome's domination to Ireland as well. Moreover, Shotton (2004: 68) reports that two inscriptions from York that date from Agricola's governorship suggest that Agricola was already in the process of Romanizing northward through education and culture.

Britannia et statim omissa (“Britain was thoroughly subjugated and immediately thrown away”
Hist. 2.1).³⁹

³⁹ This quote suggests that at least into the *Historiae* Tacitus maintained the analogy of Britain, emblematic of its people, to a wild beast.

Chapter 2: Between Night and Day

After his description narrating Agricola's display of tactical acumen and the sound defeat of the Caledonians led by Calgacus at Graupius Mons, Tacitus describes the aftermath of the battle. But before ending the battle scene, he informs his audience that night ended both the battle and the subsequent pursuit of the fleeing Caledonians. Despite just having noted that night has fallen, Tacitus opens section 38 with *nox* immediately after the conjunction *et* to stress that the scene plays out under the cover of night. The fact that Tacitus repeats *nox* after such a short interval piques his audience's attention. Tacitus highlights *nox* as significant, but in order to understand the connotations of *nox* in *Agricola*, we must analyze the other examples of the word in the text.⁴⁰

In the entire text *nox* occurs nine times (12.3, 12.4 twice, 26.4, 34.1, 37.5, 38.1, 40.3 twice) in *Agricola*, and when Tacitus describes the aftermath of the battle, his audience has already encountered the word six times. I will analyze two passages that add to the word's complexity: Tacitus' section on the climate of Britain; the description of a barbarian night attack on a Roman fort in northern Britain. I believe these instances of *nox* are the most important for my argument, as they provide insights into how location influences the perception of the relationship between the Britons and Romans, and I will address the occurrences that come after the description of aftermath in the conclusion.⁴¹

Ag. 12.3-4

⁴⁰ As stated at the end of the introduction, I follow Sharrock (2000)'s discussion of intratextuality, that making connections between disparate parts of a text enhances our reading by seeking unity in the diversity of a text.

⁴¹ Other instances do not add significant weight to my argument and are not treated in this thesis.

Like Sallust before him, Tacitus breaks from the main narrative to supply details on the geography and ethnography of Britain.⁴² Since Tacitus sets his narrative in the cold and cloudy north, he must provide details that flesh out the location, so that his reader may understand the strangeness of the place and the difficulty in its conquest. Because he speaks to a Roman audience, Tacitus stresses how the climate of Britain differs from that of the Mediterranean.⁴³ A Roman reader of history might find the significant differences, whether geographic, climatological, or ethnographic, fascinating.⁴⁴ Exposition of these strange qualities attracts readers much in the same way that paradoxographers excite their audience with nearly unbelievable facts. Thus, Tacitus incorporates a lengthy section into the work both to provide his reader with information important to his narrative and to capture the reader's imagination.

After explaining Britain's shape and location relative to the European continent, Tacitus describes the peculiarity of Britain's days and nights:

Caelum crebris imbris ac nebulis foedum; asperitas frigorum abest. Dierum spatia ultra nostri orbis mensuram; **nox** clara et extrema Britanniae parte brevis, ut finem atque initium lucis exiguo discrimine internoscas. Quod si nubes non officiant, aspici per **noctem** solis fulgorem, nec occidere et exurgere, sed transire adfirmant. Scilicet extrema et plana terrarum humili umbra non erigunt tenebras, infraque caelum et sidera **nox** cadit. (12.3-4)

The sky is ugly because of constant showers and clouds; the harshness of frosts is absent. The length of the days is beyond the

⁴² For a discussion of the methods of verbal cartography in ancient texts, see Dueck (2012: 68-84).

⁴³ In regard to Latin historical texts about Britain Millett (1995: 26) states, "As all the sources were written by and for the elite who controlled the empire, they are almost exclusively Mediterranean in outlook. They were not written to provide an unbiased account of their world for posterity, but to influence and impress contemporaries within their own highly competitive social and political milieu ... Where texts do concern the details of events, they are often geographically unspecific as it was the military success that was important not its location within a country which was largely unknown to the intended readership."

⁴⁴ In *Annales* Tacitus states that exactly this type of material is pleasurable for readers: *Ceterum ut profutura, ita minimum oblectationis adferunt. Nam situs gentium, varietates proeliorum, clari ducum exitus retinent ac redintegrant legentium animum* ("But in the way that [my subject matter] will be useful, so it offers very little pleasure. For the geographical locations of peoples, the vicissitudes of battles, the famous deaths of leaders captures and revives the mind of readers" 4.33).

measure of those in our region. The night is bright and brief in the furthest part of Britain so that you can distinguish the end and the beginning of the day by only a thin interval. But if clouds do not obscure, they assert that the brightness of the sun is seen through the night and does not set and rise but passes along. Obviously, the flat edges of the lands do not raise up darkness with a low-lying shadow, and night falls short of the sky and the stars.⁴⁵

In order to cue the audience into the strangeness of the northern island, Tacitus describes Britain's constant gloominess and emphasizes the lengths of the day and night by not only dedicating several lines to the phenomenon but also rationalizing it. According to Tacitus, days in Britain last longer than nights, and at the furthest point of the island night seems to barely occur. Tacitus does not mention the variation in the day's length throughout the year and instead says that the clouds are the only factors in changing the brightness of days and nights. He describes Britain in such a way that its climate seems to ignore seasonal changes, and just as Britain's geography is static, so is its amount of daylight.⁴⁶

To add to the strangeness, Tacitus asserts that the sun's light actually infiltrates the night. If the sky is clear, one can see the *solis fulgor* even at night. Since the Mediterranean experiences a full night throughout the year, a Roman reader might marvel at a blurring between night and

⁴⁵ Tacitus' explanation operates on the theory that the sun travels underneath the earth, which is thought to be disc-like, and the position of the earth creates a conical shadow that has its apex over the middle of the earth. Thus, the light of the sun illuminates the sky over the edges of the earth, making the night seem almost nonexistent.

⁴⁶ Caesar also comments on the length of nights in Britain, but implies that they change depending on the season, since he sailed to Britain during the summer:

Complures praeterea minores subiectae insulae existimantur, de quibus insulis nonnulli scripserunt dies continuos triginta sub bruma esse noctem. Nos nihil de eo percontationibus reperiebamus, nisi certis ex aqua mensuris breviores esse quam in continenti noctes videbamus. (*Gal.* 5.13.3-4)

Additionally, several smaller islands are thought to lie near it [Mona], about which islands many have written that night during the winter is thirty consecutive days long. We discovered nothing about this through inquiries, except we observed from the exact measures of our water clock that the nights were shorter than on the continent.

day. As Tacitus explains, Britain lies so far north and close to the edges of the earth that, although the sun is passing on the underside of the earth, its rays still light up the sky.⁴⁷ Tacitus makes clear that in Britain there is a striking inequality between night and day, so much so that a visitor is barely able to discern whether night ever falls.⁴⁸

By informing the audience of the the unique qualities of Britain's nights, Tacitus infuses the term *nox* with additional meaning. The word is not just a signifier for what his Roman audience knows as the time between sunset and sunrise, but an encapsulation of the strangeness and the inequality created by Britain's location near the edge of the world. As I will show later, the peculiarity of the space, i.e. the shortness of night and the infiltration of day, anticipates the defeat of the Britons, who I will show next are closely associated with night.

Ag. 26.1-2

During the historical narrative of Agricola's subjugation of Britain, Tacitus uses *nox* again in describing the nocturnal barbarian assault against the Roman fort.⁴⁹ After years of unrest in Britain under previous governors, Agricola and his army march north to quell the uprisings that have been springing up around Britain in order to finally subdue the entire island.⁵⁰ Tacitus describes how the barbarians attempt to overcome the ninth legion at night, but are outmaneuvered and routed by Agricola:

Quod ubi cognitum hosti, mutato repente consilio universi nonam
legionem ut maxime invalidam **nocte** adgressi, inter somnum ac
trepidationem caesis vigilibus inrupere. Iamque in ipsis castris

⁴⁷ In explaining an unusual phenomenon Tacitus provides new details and thus more incentive to read his description rather than another author's. For example, Tacitus' discusses the sluggishness of the sea north of Britain, which supposedly separates the island from the quasi-mythical island Thule. For detailed discussion of Thule in Tacitus and the ancient imagination in general, see Wolfson (2008).

⁴⁸ Clarke (2001: 99) briefly describes the strangeness of the nights as an example of how Tacitus conveys the insularity and dissociation of Britain from the continent.

⁴⁹ Shotter (2004: 32) suggests that this fort is Dalginross.

⁵⁰ Rutledge (2012) provides a concise summary of Roman annexation of Britain from Julius Caesar to Agricola.

pugnabatur, cum Agricola iter hostium ab exploratoribus edoctus et vestigiis insecutus, velocissimos equitum peditumque adsultare tergis pugnantium iubet, mox ab universis adici clamorem; et propinqua luce fulsere signa. Ita ancipiti malo territi Britanni; et nonanis rediit animus, ac securi pro salute de gloria certabant. Ultra quin etiam erupere, et fuit atrox in ipsis portarum angustiis proelium, donec pulsati hostes, utroque exercitu certante, his, ut tulisse opem, illis, ne eguisse auxilio viderentur. Quod nisi paludes et silvae fugientis texissent, debellatum illa victoria foret. (26.1-2)

When this [Agricola's division of his forces] had become known to the enemy, the plan was immediately changed, and the whole army attacked the ninth legion at night, as this is when they are most vulnerable, and after the night watches were slaughtered, they attacked between sleep and alarm. And already there was fighting in the camps themselves when Agricola, after he was informed of the enemy's route by the scouts and chased them down by their tracks, orders the fastest of the cavalry and the infantry to attack the rear of the fighters, and a shout soon to be added by all at once. And the standards shown in the nearing dawn. Thus the Britons were terrified by this twofold evil, and heart returned to the soldiers of the ninth legion, and, moreover, unconcerned for their safety, they were contending about glory. And furthermore, on the other side, the contingent of the fastest cavalry and infantry attacked, and the battle was fierce in the very narrows of the gates while the enemy was pushed back since the army was attacking on both sides so that one group seemed to have brought help, and the other, to have not lacked assistance. But if the marshes and forests had not covered those fleeing, the war would have concluded with that victory.⁵¹

Although *nox* occurs only once in the passage, the night plays a central role in the entire scene. Since the British tribes are not as well equipped nor as well disciplined as the Roman army, they must find other ways to gain the upper hand. Attacking during the night is an effective strategy both to cloak themselves and muddle Roman military prowess with fear and confusion. Under

⁵¹ For a comparison between the narrative structure of this scene and that of the Column of Trajan, see Tanner (1991: 2701-12).

the cover of darkness the barbarians assume they can create the illusion of having a larger force and reduce casualties. In the eyes of the Britons the night belongs to them.⁵²

Yet, even with these advantages, the Britons are no match for Agricola's skillful tactics. Agricola understands the disadvantages of fighting in a foreign land and minimizes them by splitting his army into three contingents. He attacks and overwhelms the British forces on several fronts and puts them to flight. In the end, much to the Britons' chagrin, it is not the night that provides them protection, but the landscape itself into which they flee. Thus, Tacitus clearly associates *nox* with Briton but also shows that while facing Agricola, they do not have complete control over it. Ultimately, the Romans can still foil the Britons' attacks, even when conditions are in the Britons' favor.

Moreover, Tacitus weaves symbolism into the battle to focus the audience's attention on the juxtaposition of day and night. In the middle of the attack, as dawn begins to brighten the sky, the sunlight reflects off the Roman standards (*et propinqua luce fulsere signa*). Both sides catch sight of this phenomenon and interpret it in the same way: the Romans will win the day. Their reactions differ greatly: the Britons are filled with dread (*ita ancipiti malo territi Britanni*), while the ninth legion is rejuvenated (*nonanis rediit animus*). Just as daylight begins to replace the night, the Roman forces begin to crush their opponents and put them to flight. Day has dawned on the Roman victory, and the Britons once again seek darkness as protection by fleeing into the darkness of the marshes and forests.

Moreover, Tacitus does not make the association of Britons with night and darkness and the Roman with day and light exclusive to the narrator's perspective but has the British leader

⁵² Tacitus portrays this sentiment when the encamped Romans hear the hollering of the Germans echoing through the valleys of northern Germany (*Ann.* 1.65). Tacitus also tells of the mountain tribes in Thrace who made night assaults upon the Roman garrison and were eventually put down by Gaius Poppaeus Sabinus (*Ann.* 4.46-51).

Calgacus corroborate the narrative in his speech before the battle at Mons Graupius. While stirring up the Britons with the consequences of a Roman victory, Calgacus urges them to stand firm at the sight of the enemy: *ne terreat vanus aspectus et auri fulgor atque argenti, quod neque tegit neque vulnerat* (“Do not let the empty sight and shine of gold and silver terrify, because it neither protects nor wounds” *Ag.* 32.3). Calgacus draws a contrast between the poor, simply-armored Britons and the well-outfitted Romans and stresses Roman rapaciousness by noting that it is the shine of precious metals that terrifies.⁵³ Calgacus uses the term *fulgor* to refer to the glinting of Roman standards and weaponry, which recalls the scene of the night battle when Tacitus says the standards “shone” (*fulserunt*). Even in the eyes of the Britons, the Romans are associated with flashing light of day.

If we return to Tacitus’ section on the climate of Britain, we recognize another connection in terminology. In his explanation of the shortness of the night, Tacitus says that when the sky is clear, a viewer can see the *solis fulgor* move across the sky instead of setting or rising. In other words, the sun’s shining light is present even at night. Since Tacitus creates symbolic relationships between the Romans and daylight and the Britons and night, he makes a statement about the relationship between the Romans and conversely the Britons: if the Britons are not obscured by some sort of cover, i.e. forest or marsh, the Romans will conquer them even in their element. In fact, the closing description of the Britons’ night assault echoes this sentiment: if the forest and marshes had not obscured the barbarians’ flight, the splendor of the Roman army would have wiped them out (*quod nisi paludes et silvae fugientis texissent, debellatum illa victoria foret*).

⁵³ Roman greed is a central theme of Calgacus’ *cohortatio*.

Before returning to the aftermath of the battle of Mons Graupius, let us sum up the insights gained from exploration of Tacitus' use of *nox*. First, when Tacitus refers to *nox*, he is reminding the audience of the unusual qualities of night in Britain: short and, under certain conditions, infiltrated by the light of the sun itself. Although the dichotomy of night and day is thought to be balanced in the Mediterranean, in Britain it is strikingly unequal. Second, Tacitus shows that *nox* is the time when the Britons have the most protection and consequently take the most action. Third, *nox* activates the relationship of night and day, darkness and light, as a metaphor for the connection between barbarian and Roman. Since *nox* bears all these meanings, its placement at the head of Tacitus' description of the aftermath creates several expectations for the audience. Tacitus exploits these expectations at times to fulfill them, at others to subvert. By applying the additional meanings of *nox*, I will now explore how Tacitus plays with the readers' expectations through diction, style, and structure in order to create a passage that not only grips the audience but also brings central themes of the work to their culmination.

The first audience expectation of *nox* that Tacitus handles in the passage is the dichotomy of nights and days in Britain. To fulfill this expectation, Tacitus splits the entire passage into two parts. The first opens with *nox*, briefly mentions the Roman victory, and then details the barbarian actions during the night. The second describes the scene that appears in the daylight and the Romans' scrutiny of signs of the absent enemy. Thus, in the first case Tacitus has catered his narrative to what his audience anticipates when they first hear *nox*.

Next, the audience may anticipate that the nighttime part of the passage will use fewer words than of the daytime, since nights are unusually short, and the days long near the northernmost edges of Britain, where the battle has taken place. Nevertheless, Tacitus makes the

two passages almost equal in length, with the nighttime section consisting of fifty-three words, and the daytime forty-four words. Here Tacitus creates a quasi-*inconcinnitas* that jars with the audience's expectations.

Furthermore, Tacitus manipulates his audience by overloading the nighttime section with action. The section includes ten historical infinitives, the highest concentration in one passage throughout all of Tacitus' works.⁵⁴ Since the historical infinitive conveys speed and focuses the reader's attention on the action, a barrage of historical infinitives paints a very lively scene. Although the number of historical infinitives by itself makes the nighttime description dramatic, in comparison with the daytime section, which has almost no verbs, it seems disproportionately active. The audience expects the day to be full of action and the night to be still after such a battle, but Tacitus undercuts expectations by presenting their opposites. Tacitus, nevertheless, manages to express the brevity of the night by packing a striking amount of action into only a few lines. By using several historical infinitives in a short span, Tacitus rapidly launches action after action and creates a sense of intense activity, while supporting the anticipated, uneven dichotomy in a surprising way.

Tacitus also emphasizes the juxtaposition of night and day by including different aspects of the aftermath in each of the sections. The actions that Tacitus describes in quick succession are less focused on sight than on other senses. For instance, Tacitus focuses on the sounds of the Britons' wailing (*mixto virorum mulierumque ploratu*) and the calls to the uninjured (*vocare integros*).⁵⁵ Tacitus even adds how the Britons set fire to their homes, an action that would immediately catch the attention of any observer who was watching that night. The other actions

⁵⁴ Tacitus uses nine historical infinitives earlier in the *Ag.* 19.2-4 and later in the *Ann.* 4.51.1 when he narrates the Thracians' nighttime attack against Gaius Poppaeus Sabinus.

⁵⁵ The frequency of *ms* in *mixto virorum mulierumque ploratu* is reminiscent of sounds of grieving.

that Tacitus includes *necessitate* speech, i.e. planning (*miscere in vicem consilia aliqua, dein separare*). Since night has fallen over the battlefield, Tacitus provides the audience with details that are discerned by senses other than sight.

Furthermore, Tacitus creates an engaging scene for the reader not only by focalizing the narrative around the Britons but also incorporating elements of the *urbs capta* topos into his description. He describes the wailing of the Britons, the conflagration of their homes, the company of families—all actions that imbue the scene with pathos characteristic of an *urbs capta* description, although the action does not happen within a city. Tacitus, however, manipulates some of these elements, jarring the reader. Quintilian includes in his explanation of the *urbs capta* topos *infantium feminarumque ploratus* (“wailings of children and women” *Inst.* 8.3.68), but Tacitus describes *mixto virorum mulierumque ploratu*, exchanging the “children” for “men.” The fact that it is the men who are wailing when the audience might expect children could be perceived as a comment on how Briton men are supposedly less *virtuous* than other nations’. Also as in Quintilian’s description, homes are set on fire, but Tacitus depicts the Britons setting their own homes on fire. The British perspective is marked by the fact that Tacitus calls them *domos*, the term Quintilian uses, rather *casas* or *tecta* but a reader familiar with the *urbs capta* topos would find it unusual that the conquered are setting their own houses on fire. Quintilian likewise notes how the *urbs capta* topos usually contains *alii extremo complexu suorum cohaerentes* (“some clinging to each other in the last embrace of their loved ones” *Inst.* 8.3.68). Tacitus also shows the defeated with their loved ones, but sometimes they are broken by the sight of them, other times infuriated by them. Some even slaughter (*saevisse*) them out of pity. It would not be unusual for a Roman reader to encounter in literature the act of mercy killing one’s

family to save them from a supposedly worse fate, as Livy's accounts of Saguntum and Abydos, but Tacitus' word choice of *saevisse* is atypical. As shown in the previous chapter, the Britons are depicted as beasts, as evidenced by the language here. Although Tacitus subsumes components of the *urbs capta* topos, which stirs up pity for the inhabitants of the captured city, into his description of the aftermath, he complicates the reader's opportunity to feel pity for the Britons. What would normally induce sympathy in the reader—the plight of innocents, the loss of home, the embrace of family among the destruction—Tacitus warps, so that the reader is steered away from pitying the Britons without reservations.

When Tacitus opens the second section, the change to day reveals a scene to readers.⁵⁶ To stress the change from night to day, he now presents a tableau, one almost completely devoid of action: *vastum ubique silentium, secreti colles, fumantia procul tecta, nemo exploratoribus obuius*. Tacitus recalls the noise of the night before by expressing its absence (*silentium*) and attaches a modifier to transform what would be an aural characteristic into a visual one (*vastum*).

⁵⁷ The nighttime scene that was full of sound is now revealed to be empty in the daylight. Tacitus then adds three visual details in the form of adjective-noun phrases and removes any sense of activity that he described during the night. The hills that at night were full of those gathering their wounded and calling together their allies now stand devoid of any life. The homes that the barbarians had ignited in anger smoke in the distance. The scouts meet no one during their reconnaissance mission. Tacitus shows that the entire nocturnal scene has been overturned and the Britons have abandoned everything to the light of day.

⁵⁶ Tacitus portrays the gradual revelation of the landscape to the viewer, as if the shadows of night are fleeing from daylight. Woodman and Kraus (W-K 282) suggest that “as the presence of *faciem* and *latius* implies, the opening up of the landscape itself as the shadows disappear”.

⁵⁷ Tacitus borrows the phrase from Livy (10.34.6).

Furthermore, Tacitus reinforces the notion that the nighttime belongs to the barbarians by showing that the Britons are most active at night. In contrast, only in the first sentence does Tacitus mention the Romans: they do not reappear until the next day. Because the night provides protection from the dangers of a Roman attack, the Britons can collect their wounded, forge plans, and abandon their settlements without any enemy intrusion. Even in defeat the Britons remain nocturnal and complete all the preparations for their escape before daylight. When the sun rises, there are no Britons to be seen anywhere, only confused tracks from their flight in the night (*incerta ... vestigia*).

By highlighting the barbarian's association with the night, Tacitus also reminds the audience of the Roman half of the analogy. Although the Romans are almost completely absent from the first section of the passage, in the second section Tacitus focalizes the scene through their eyes: the Roman scouts meet no one and only see the vestiges of the Britons' nocturnal activity. Elaborating upon the analogy of Roman is to daytime as barbarian to nighttime, Tacitus portrays the two sides as not just following the dichotomy but reflecting the peculiarities of nights in Briton. As mentioned above, the Romans only receive a brief mention at the beginning of the passage. Their presence nevertheless casts a shadow, or better, a light on the rest of the nighttime section. The Britons are goaded by anger at, and fear of the Roman conquerors to flee their homesteads. The Romans, explicitly absent from the scene, provide the impetus for the Britons to undertake all their preparations under cover of night. With the protection of their combined forces stripped away, the Britons are left exposed to the might of the Romans, and even in their element, night, they can still sense and fear their Roman conquerors, just as the most remote parts of Britain see the light of the sun even at night.

In conclusion, Tacitus fashions his description of the aftermath of Mons Graupius to reflect the peculiarities of Britain. Tacitus reveals how the qualities of a place can influence the perception, and retelling, of the events. The strangeness of British nights shapes his account of the upheaval of the native inhabitants and the victors' inadvertent transformation of the landscape overnight. Additionally, Tacitus adds another layer of complexity to his description by recalling the previous analogy of the relationship between nights and days in Britain to the relationship between reputed barbarians and Romans. In making the barbarian/Roman relationship parallel to a natural phenomenon, Tacitus suggests that it was inevitable for the Britons to fall to the Romans and that Agricola's leadership was the chosen tool of fate. In effect, the previous instances of *nox* foreshadow the defeat of Britons by showing there is little room in Britain for the night and, by extension, the Britons. According to Tacitus, as there is only a sliver of nighttime in the northernmost region of Britain, so there is only a fraction left of Britain left for Agricola to conquer before the entire island is subdued.

Conclusion

After Agricola receives his new orders from Domitian, he prepares to leave Britain and travel back to Rome:

Tradiderat interim Agricola successori suo provinciam quietam tutamque. Ac ne notabilis celebritate et frequentia occurrentium introitus esset, vitato amicorum officio **noctu** in urbem, **noctu** in Palatium, ita ut praeceptum erat, venit; exceptusque brevi osculo et nullo sermone turbae servientium inmixtus est. (40.3)

Meanwhile, Agricola had handed over the peaceful and safe province to his successor. And lest his entrance be conspicuous because of a crowd and constant meetings with people, he avoided friends paying their respects and went into the city at night, to the palace at night, just as the rules had dictated. He was received with a brief kiss and with no conversation was made to mingle with the throng of those in servitude to the emperor.

Tacitus tells the audience that Agricola comes into the city under the cover of night to avoid fanfare, but the repetition of *noctu* is striking. Again, Tacitus' use of *nox* activates the previous instances of the word in *Agricola*, especially the most recent one in the aftermath of the battle of Mons Graupius. Yet, the narrative is no longer set in the chilly northernmost part of Britain but in Rome, and thus night is no longer the peculiar, short time of darkness often infiltrated by the sun's rays. In the Mediterranean setting readers now revert back to their accustomed understanding of night: the pitch black period that stands in stark opposition to daytime. Although Agricola had brought the *fulgor* of the Roman standard to the northern edges of Britain, in Rome he is now the one who makes his way under the cover of night. The man who put the Britons under the yoke now enters into the crowd of Domitian's political slaves.⁵⁸ Although he is received, albeit coldly, back into Domitian's realm, Agricola maintains his

⁵⁸ For a discussion on the analogy between conditions of the subjugated in the provinces and those in Rome and possibly sympathy for "barbarians" under Roman rule, see Lavan (2011) and Lavan (2013: 127-42).

upright and diligent character. Agricola's good reputation does not flicker out under the oppressive night of Domitian's regime.⁵⁹

According to Tacitus Domitian stopped Agricola from achieving his ultimate goal of converting Britain, and even Ireland, into islands of Roman culture at the edge of the world. As shown in the case of the aftermath of the battle of Mons Graupius, Agricola's work is left unfinished. He successfully cleared the land of its native inhabitants and prepared it for cultivation. Cultivation, however, never comes. In his description of the aftermath, Tacitus craftily creates a monument that weaves thematic imagery, the peculiarities of place, and agricultural metaphor to not only bestow appropriate praise on a model of Roman *virtus*, but also strike back at an emperor who crushed the will of noble Romans and sent Rome into a long night.

Although many have viewed the aftermath of the battle of Mons Graupius as an ambivalent, or even negative, anomaly in an otherwise laudatory work, I interpret the passage as conforming to rhetorical agenda Tacitus' presents in *Agricola*. Tacitus depicts Agricola as his namesake, the farmer, who has travelled to the edges of the world to drive off the wild beasts and clear the landscape for cultivation in service to Rome. Furthermore, Tacitus anticipates the defeat of the Britons by associating the almost imperceptible British night with the Britons and connecting the near omnipresent day with the Romans. The analogy of night to Britons as day to Romans influences the structure and the content of the description of the aftermath, highlighting the seemingly natural course of Agricola subjugation of northern Britain. Tacitus' description of

⁵⁹ The idea of Domitian's rule as a great darkness over Rome interlocks with Tacitus' statement that Nerva and Trajan have restored Rome to the light of day: *primo ... beatissimi saeculi ortu* ("at the [sun]rise of the most blessed age" 3.1); *hanc beatissimi saeculi lucem ac principem Traianum* ("this light of the most blessed age and emperor Trajan" 4.5).

aftermath remains as a monument both to Agricola's skill, diligence, and leadership and Domitian's paranoia, pettiness, and jealousy.

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