Curtius Rufus' Roman reading of the proskynesis debate

Theatricality of power and free eloquence in the *Histories of Alexander the Great*

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At an unspecified date most probably in the first century AD[59], the historian Quintus Curtius Rufus wrote the *Histories of Alexander the Great*. Alexander the Great had always been a very famous figure in Roman cultural memory, and can even be called, as Spencer (2002) puts it, a "Roman cultural myth". He was the role model of several Republican generals and emperors[60], the subject of many moral *exempla* and declamation exercises: he found his way into all forms of literature and became a paradigm reflecting Roman concerns about monarchy and empire. Alexander was indeed a perfectly relevant case for a "study on power"[61]: in the *Histories*, from being a good and moderate ruler tolerating *libertas* according to the customs established by his fathers, he becomes a tyrant, corrupted by the East and Fortune[62]. Through the portrayal of Alexander's reign, Curtius thus wrote a discourse on monarchy. To articulate his reflection, he uses speech as an indicator of the nature of Alexander's regime. Oratory was indeed a central part of Roman culture and underwent profound changes when the Republic was replaced by the Principate, as is famously discussed in Tacitus' *Dialogue of the orators*. This topic is investigated in the passage I focus on, the debate on the king's deification in book 8 of the *Histories*.

Alexander's *adfectatio inmortalitatis* is introduced in book 4, when the king is told by the oracle of Hammon that he is the son of Jupiter. According to Curtius, the priest lies to flatter him, and Alexander is blind to it because Fortune has already started to corrupt his character[63]. In book 8, Alexander now wants to be worshipped as a god by all his subjects. To this end, he wishes to impose the proskynesis, a Persian ritual. Persians indeed prostrate themselves before the Great

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[59] See Baynham (1998, pp. 201-219) who summarizes the state of art on this matter. I follow her and Yakoubovitch (2015) who demonstrate that Curtius most probably wrote under Vespasian. Some scholars suggest other dates, most often Claudius, as Atkinson (1980, pp. 25-34).
[60] Surveys on *imitatio Alexandri* are found in André (1990), Martin (1994, pp. 296-315) and Spencer (2009).
[61] Baynham (1998, p. 9).
[62] Yakoubovitch (2014) and Müller (2016) examine the construction of this evolving portrait.
[63] Curt. 4.7.25-32.

King, as they believe his power reaches that of the gods[64]. This is a crucial political matter, for according to Curtius Rufus and a long tradition before him, the Persian monarchy is a *dominatio*, and the proskynesis a sign of the subservience of the Persian subjects to the Great King. During a banquet, Cleo the flatterer champions the proskynesis, and Callisthenes, Alexander's historian, speaks out against it, arguing that no living man can become a god and that Greeks and Macedonians should not forsake their customs. He rouses the opposition of the Macedonians and Alexander's attempt is given up. As for Callisthenes, he is executed on a false charge. The versions of the proskynesis affair that are found in Curtius' *Histories*, Plutarch's *Alexander* and Arrian's *Anabasis of Alexander* are very different from each other[65]. Only Arrian and Curtius report that a proper debate took place; but in the *Anabasis*, the sophist Anaxarchus, and not a man named Cleo, promotes the proskynesis, and Arrian's judgement on Callisthenes is strikingly negative. Curtius' historiographical choices are all the more notable in this passage as the tradition and the very character of Callisthenes seem to have been malleable.

It has been rightfully acknowledged that the content of the speeches reflects the Roman standards of the imperial cult[66]. However, the account is also a Roman reading of a political conflict. Pownall (2018) convincingly draws a parallel between Callisthenes' fate and Nero's killing of Seneca. However, *libertas*, which is the main focus of the episode and the distinctive trait of the Olynthian, is not particularly a Senecan feature. The passage is indeed a study on speech under tyranny relying on a contrast between the court and Callisthenes. Baynham (1998, pp. 192-195) notices Curtius' contemporary prejudices concerning flattery and compares Callisthenes to the Neronian Stoic Thrasea Paetus, also figure of *libertas*. Her conclusions must be furthered and some of them nuanced: to that end, I examine the construction of the antagonism between tyranny and speech and draw parallels between Curtius' account and Tacitean narrative structures and political analysis. First, flattery should be re-examined as part of a larger problem: the corruption of speech. More precisely, the passage makes a specific use of theatricality, thus showing that the distortions of language which are highlighted make court life appear as constant role playing. I thus hope to underline the proximity between Curtius and Tacitus as they both bring to light a feature of tyranny which Boesche (1987) calls "the politics of pretence". I then analyse the portrait of Callisthenes, following a path opened by Spencer (2009, p. 270), who examines the Roman reception of the Olynthian historian as becoming "a means of interrogating the kinds of freedom

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[64] Some modern historians demonstrated that the ritual had no religious meaning and was misunderstood by ancient authors. Alexander's intentions regarding proskynesis and deification are still debated: see Robinson (1943), Balsdon (1950), Badian (1981), Bosworth (1988, pp. 113-114), Badian (1996), Friedricksmeyer (2003), Bowden (2013), Pownall (2014).

[65] Curt. 8.5.5-25; Plu. *Alex*. 54; Arr. *An*. 4.10-12. Arrian himself underlines that there were various versions of the conflict (*An*. 4.14. 3-4); his comment allows to conclude that Curtius does not follow the versions of Aristobulus and Ptolemaeus, but that of the vulgate tradition. See Atkinson (1980, pp. 58-67) on Curtius' sources. However, Bowden (2013) rightfully emphasizes that the imperial accounts of the proskynesis affair have been contaminated by the moral tradition.

[66] See in particular Bosworth (1988, p. 118) and Baynham (1998, p. 193).

and discourse that are available to subjects"[67]. Curtius depicts him as a figure of resistance by making him the embodiment of free eloquence threatened by the dramaturgy of tyranny, and thus the focus of a reflection on discourse and truth under autocracy.

I- Expressing oneself under domination as wearing a mask

Firstly, the focus will be on two protagonists, the Greeks and Macedonians invited to the banquet as a collective character, then Cleo the flatterer. Their depiction shows that the loss of *libertas* has as a corollary the spread of *(dis)simulatio* at court. At the beginning of the debate, the Greek and Macedonian elite keeps silent, as emphasized by the narrator after Cleo's speech:

> *Is tum silentio facto, unum illum intuentibus ceteris …*[68]
>
> He [Callisthenes] then, as silence had been made and the rest was staring at him alone …

This must be regarded in a wider context, for when the debate takes place, it has been some time since the Macedonian elite was silenced. The first half of book 8 is punctuated by three sympotic episodes which reflect the corruption of speech and of which the proskynesis debate is the third. At the beginning of book 8, Alexander kills the general Cleitus[69]. The man, while drunk, vehemently castigates Alexander, showing *licentia uerborum*[70]. The king, enraged and drunk as well, slays him with a spear, a horrifying act which causes his friends to distrust and fear him. Consequently, little before the proskynesis debate, when Alexander marries the Persian captive Roxane, Curtius reports that the Macedonian aristocrats dissimulate their disapproval:

> *Sed, post Cliti caedem* ***libertate sublata,*** *uultu, qui maxime* ***seruit****, adsentiebantur.*[71]
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> But since after the murder of Cleitus freedom of speech had been suppressed, they assented by expression of their faces, which is the most subject to servitude.

As freedom of speech has been suppressed, the Macedonians are forced to conceal their feelings and perform approval, which is described as acting like slaves: Curtius uses an antithesis between *libertas* and *seruire* to emphasize the change in Alexander's governing which has been revealed by the murder of Cleitus. *Vultus*, which is supposed to be the mirror of the soul in rhetorical

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[67] See also Spencer (2002, pp. 135-138).
[68] Curt. 8.5.14. I translate Curtius' text. As for the other authors, I use the translations which are found in Loeb Editions, except where indicated.
[69] Curt. 8.1.19-52.
[70] Curt. 8.2.2.
[71] Curt. 8.4.30.

theory[72], is here precisely what pretends: a mask. Hypocrisy is a first step towards open flattery, which is one of the major themes of the proskynesis episode.

After Curtius has broached the subject of Alexander's desire for deification, he portrays the characters who encourage his ambition:

> ***Non deerat talia concupiscenti perniciosa*** *adulatio****, perpetuum malum regum, quorum opes saepius adsentatio quam hostis euertit.*** *Nec Macedonum haec erat culpa […] sed Graecorum, qui professionem honestarum artium malis conruperant moribus, Agis quidam Argiuus, pessimorum carminum post Choerilum conditor, et ex Sicilia Cleo (hic quidem non ingenii solum, sed etiam nationis uitio adulator) et cetera urbium suarum purgamenta, quae propinquis etiam maximorumque exercituum ducibus a rege praeferebantur, hi tum caelum illi aperiebant […].*[73]
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> In his desire for such things he did not lack pernicious flattery, the perpetual evil of kings, whose power is more frequently overthrown by constant assent than by foes. And this was not the fault of the Macedonians […] but of the Greeks, who had corrupted their profession of the liberal arts by evil habits. Agis, an Argive, the composer of the worst poems next after Choerilus, and Cleo, from Sicily (the latter indeed a flatterer, from a defect not only in his own character, but also in his nation) and other sweepings of their own cities, whom the king preferred even to his nearest friends and the leaders of his greatest armies, these people then were opening the sky to him […].

Curtius blames Greeks and exonerates Macedonians, insisting on a conflict between the two which is also mentioned by other sources but not so prominently[74]. It serves to draw a clearer contrast between the flatterers and Callisthenes as Greek men of letters[75] and to underline the Macedonians' respect for their ancestral customs. Furthermore, *Graeca adulatio* is a Roman motif mentioned by Tacitus in a similar context, as he refers to the divine honours bestowed by the Greeks to Theophanes of Mytilene[76].

Flatterers have been the traditional escort of kings at least since Herodotus, which Curtius knows about since he broadens the scope by making a general statement: *perpetuum malum regum*. The spreading of flattery at Alexander's court is attested by other historians[77], but Curtius is also close to Roman treatments of this moral and political problem. In Cicero's *De amicitia*, the flatterer is

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[72] Cic. *de Orat*. 3.59.221: *imago est animi uultus*, "the face is the mirror of the soul" (my translation). See also Cic. *Pis*. 1.1 : *oculi, supercilia, frons, uoltus denique totus, qui sermo quidam tacitus mentis est, hic in fraudem homines impulit, hic eos quibus eras ignotus decepit, fefellit, induxit* : "it was your eyes, eyebrows, forehead, in a word your whole face, which is a kind of silent language of the mind, which pushed your fellow-men into delusion; this it was which tricked, betrayed, inveigled those who were unacquainted with you" (I altered N. Watt's translation). There, Cicero admits that deception is possible.

[73] Curt. 8.5.6-8.

[74] See in particular Plut. *Alex*. 54.2.

[75] Curtius is not very explicit on Cleo's identity, except on his "profession of the liberal arts", which is vague. Arrian's Anaxarchus, on the contrary, is clearly a sophist. Cleo is elsewhere unmentioned. Edmunds (1971, p. 387) argues that Curtius invented the character whereas Bosworth (1995, p. 78) accepts his existence.

[76] Tac. *Ann*. 6.18.2.

[77] Particularly in the accounts of the proskynesis affair: see Arrian's and Plutarch's (footnote 7).

the fake friend, as opposed to the true friend, and is characteristic of the tyrant's entourage[78]. Due to the return of autocracy, the notion is popular in first century literature: Seneca, like Curtius, mentions how pervasive and dangerous flattery is for monarchies, while the most precious good for kings is precisely a friend who speaks truth to power[79]. In Tacitus' works, as a lot of senators, seeking their self-interest or out of fear, support the emperor's desires, *libertas* is replaced by adulation, which is a symptom of the elite's abasement. Speech is no longer a means of directing public life as it was theoretically under the Republic, but a means of pleasing the prince: therefore, *adulatio* is a corrupted speech, the language of enslavement[80]. The contrast Curtius draws between *libertas* and *adulatio* is similar to this Tacitean motif, as will be further developed.

The flatterer does not speak the truth but tells everything his target wants to hear. Therefore, he is defined by his very falseness:

> *Secerni autem blandus amico a uero et internosci tam potest adhibita diligentia quam* ***omnia fucata et simulata a sinceris atque ueris***.[81]
>
> But by the exercise of care a fawning friend may be separated and distinguished from a true friend, just as everything made up and false may be distinguished from what is genuine and true.

The characteristic vice of flattery is *simulatio*, pretending what is not, as is also shown by the make-up metaphor (*fucata*). He is only a mask beneath which the true face cannot be discerned.

Tyrannical power is thus defined by its ability to corrupt language and communication, to the extent that it breaks the relationship between character and speech, between thinking and speaking. The disappearance of freedom of speech results in the spread of *dissimulatio* and *simulatio*, which manifest themselves in servile flattery and faked approval. Communication becomes pretending and role playing, as will be deeper explored. As the only choice left is between staying silent or speaking the language of the master, Alexander keeps a firm hold on public discourse.

II- The proskynesis debate as a performance

Furthermore, Curtius' narrative borrows features from the field of theatre, as soon as the debate is introduced:

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[78] See Cic. *Amic*. 24-26. Curtius uses the word *amici* to translate ἑταῖροι, which refers to the escort of the Macedonian king, composed by riders protecting him and spending most of the time with him; nevertheless, he exploits the latin meaning of *amicus*, referring to the codified relationship of *amicitia*, which is obvious in the account of Philotas' trial for example (see Curt. 6.10.26).
[79] Sen. *Ben*. 6.30-33.
[80] Kapust (2011, pp. 112-113) and Strunk (2017, pp. 133-165). See for example Tacitus' lament on *adulatio*: Tac. *Ann*. 3.65.
[81] Cic. *Amic*. 25.95 (I altered W. Falconer's translation).

Igitur festo die omni opulentia ***conuiuium exornari iubet****, cui non Macedones modo et Graeci principes amicorum, sed etiam Persarum nobiles adhiberentur. Cum quibus cum discubuisset rex, paulisper epulatus, conuiuio egreditur. Cleo,* ***sicut praeparatum erat****, sermonem cum admiratione laudum eius instituit* […].[82]

Therefore on a festal day he ordered a banquet to be prepared with all magnificence, to which not only the first Macedonians and Greeks of his friends, but also the nobility of the Persians were invited. As the king had taken his place at table with them, after feasting for a little while, he left the banquet. Cleo, as had been prearranged, began the conversation by expressing admiration for the king's distinctions.

The debate is staged in advance: the king, as a playwright, chooses the place, circumstance and scenery. Events unfold in a predefined order as in a script where every carefully chosen guest has a role to play, whether they know it or not: Alexander must be absent, the flatterer must start speaking, the Greeks and Macedonians must be the audience listening and the Persian nobles are expected to prostrate themselves before the king when he comes back, to set an example for others[83]. The flatterer speaks for the king on his command, which makes him the main actor of a play orchestrated by power: this is a clever use of this stock-character, who is by definition master of *simulatio*.

The fact that the only deliberative debate between the friends of the king starts with the speech not of an orator, but of a court actor, should be emphasized. The assembly speech, whose flourishing is characteristic of a free state, cannot be but a performance staged by power. Speech is no longer a means of getting political support and achieving consensus, but of dissimulation and manipulation designed to conceal the king's burning desire to enslave his own people. Orchestrating public performances is a way to control public discourse and one of the distortions of speech that are highlighted in the passage.

Furthermore, after Callisthenes' speech and the Macedonians' reactions to it, the narrator reveals a piece of information:

Nec quicquam eorum, quae inuicem iactata errant, rex ignorabat, ***cum post aulaea, quae lectis obduxerat, staret.***[84]

And the king was not unaware of anything that had been said on one side and the other, since he was standing behind the curtains which he had spread round the couches.

[82] Curt. 8.5.9-10.
[83] Curt. 8.5.21.
[84] Curt. 8.5.21.

The term *aulaea* belongs to the realm of theatre, referring to the curtains which separate the stage from the audience before and after the show[85]. If one considers who is watching and who is watched, the king is actually a second audience, since he himself watches the Greeks and Macedonians' reactions to Cleo's speech. The court is monitored by the assessing gaze of power as if trapped on a stage. Because Callisthenes will break the performance of assent and speak his mind, he will suffer the king's wrath. Based on these elements, the narrative could be analysed through the theatrical paradigm as a descriptive model for power relations which was developed by sociological and political science studies. The anthropologist Scott (1990) demonstrates how subordinates are forced to play a role which corresponds to the appearances the dominant wants to see, a facade he calls the "public transcript". Bartsch (1994, pp. 1-35) uses this model to explore Tacitus' account of Nero's reign[86]. Departing from Nero's own performances as an actor, she notices a reversal of roles between actor and audience, since the audience is forced to praise the emperor's acting as they are monitored by the gaze of power. She also demonstrates that Tacitus uses this very theatrical paradigm to shape the emperor's interactions with his relatives, who are forced to play roles in front of him: she concludes by calling Tacitus one of the first theoreticians of theatricality. The two criteria she retains, the emphasis on role playing and the function of gaze, can apply to Curtius' account of the debate. As a historian and political observer, Curtius not only shows Alexander producing manipulative dramaturgy and staging propaganda, but also that autocracy causes the court to be turned into a theatre where everyone is forced to play a role in keeping with expectations defined by power. Curtius' court can be paralleled with Tacitus' Julio-Claudian society, whose characters, princes as well as subjects, constantly conceal, manipulate and pretend, to such an extent that Galtier (2011, p. 158) calls the Tacitean man "*homo personatus*", the masked man. Tacitus' historiographical enterprise was to unveil the true faces of men, truth behind appearances. Both historians used very similar interpretive models and narrative strategies and the theatrical paradigm as hermeneutics of autocracy.

Curtius portrays Alexander's court at this point as the reign of false pretences and masks. The polysemy of the word *persona* could indeed encapsulate the problem of speech under autocracy as reflected by the opposition between controlled and free speech. It originally refers to the theatrical mask but is also the Latin word for rhetorical *ethos*. Even though the rhetorical *persona* is forged by the orator, far from being a mask, Cicero conceived it as revealing the true character of the orator. Roman culture considered the actor and the orator as opposite, for the face and speech of the orator were supposed to reveal his true self, whereas the actor wore masks and practiced *imitatio*, counterfeiting[87]. What tyranny provokes through the repression of *libertas* is

[85] See for example Cic. *Cael.* 65 or Hor. *Ep*. 2.1.189.
[86] On theatricality in Tacitus' *opera maiora*, see also Galtier (2011, pp. 143-224).
[87] See Guérin (2009, 2011) and his comprehensive study of rhetorical *persona*. Dupont (2000) discusses this differentiation between actor and orator and calls the actor "l'orateur sans visage", "the faceless orator".

a paradigm shift in political life: speech becomes a mask and the court actor rises to power, whereas free and transparent eloquence cannot survive.

III- The shaping of Callisthenes as figure of resistance

The performance of power is shattered by Callisthenes, Aristotle's nephew, a rhetor, philosopher and Alexander's court historian. He is introduced after Cleo's speech:

> *Grauitas uiri et **prompta libertas** inuisa erat regi, quasi solus Macedonas paratos ad tale obsequium moraretur.*[88]
>
> The austere dignity of the man and his ready freedom of speech were odious to the king, as if he alone were delaying the Macedonians who were prepared for such obsequiousness.

Callisthenes is a charismatic man combining *libertas* as freedom of speech and *grauitas*, which indicates influence over other people. Not only does he display independence of mind, but he seems also able to rescue others from further enslavement.

Baynham (1998, pp. 192-195) writes that Callisthenes' speech is rash; however, whereas Arrian and Plutarch blame Callisthenes for speaking inappropriately or being foolish, Curtius strikingly does not. Callisthenes' frank speech reminds Herodotus' Greek wise advisors to Persian arrogant despots, such as Solon speaking truth to Croesus[89], and yet this is a fundamentally Roman version. As opposed to Cleitus, whose insulting words were judged excessive by the narrator, Callisthenes' speech is moderate, praises Alexander, gives priority to defending religion and customs and avoids political matters that are raised by the narrator himself, who sees the proskynesis as a despotic symbol[90]. His frankness, which is therefore free from foolhardiness as well as from flattery, is the expression of his independent spirit. Furthermore, what is unique to this character is that his *libertas* works at the individual but also at the collective level, as shown by what happens after his speech:

> *Aequis auribus Callisthenes, ueluti **uindex publicae libertatis,** audiebatur. Expresserat non adsensionem modo, sed etiam uocem, seniorum praecipue, quibus grauis erat inueterati moris externa mutatio.*[91]
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> Callisthenes was heard with favourable ears, as the defender of the public liberty. He had stirred up not only assent, but also voices, especially of the older men, for whom it was painful to change their long-standing customs to those of strangers.

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[88] Curt. 8.5.13.
[89] Hdt. 1.32.
[90] Curt. 6.6.1-5.
[91] Curt. 8.5.20.

The catchword *uindex publicae libertatis* has a strong political meaning and had a long Republican history before being famously claimed by Augustus[92]. Labelling Callisthenes this way definitely makes Alexander the enemy of freedom. First, because he speaks against proskynesis and prevents the ritual to be imposed, he defends political freedom – freedom from *dominatio* that the king wants to establish[93]. Furthermore, Macedonians start to express their support overtly, as shown by the emphasis on the word *uox*. The previous public performance has been breached and free speech has been – temporarily – restored, as if Callisthenes was serving as *exemplum* of freedom and had pulled their voices out of them. In this way, he combines political freedom and freedom of speech[94].

Callisthenes dies for his opposition under a false pretence: he is accused of plotting the Pages conspiracy and is executed without having had the right to speak in his defence. His conviction and death reveal how much Alexander fears free speech, as emphasized by Callisthenes' young friend Hermolaus, one of the plotters:

> *At Callisthenis* ***uox carcere inclusa est****, quia solus potest dicere. Cur enim non producitur, cum etiam confessi audiuntur? Nempe quia* ***liberam uocem*** *innocentis audire metuis ac ne* ***uultum*** *quidem pateris.*[95]
>
> But the voice of Callisthenes is shut up in a dungeon, because he is the only one able to speak. For why is not he brought before you, when even those who have confessed are heard? No doubt because you fear to hear the free voice of an innocent man and cannot even endure his face.

Free speech (*libera uox*) is here metaphorically contrasted with imprisonment (*uox carcere inclusa*) – the context of the trial lends itself to it. Callisthenes is not only metonymically defined by *uox*, but more specifically by his eloquence: *quia solus potest dicere*. The words *uox* and *uultus* reappear to designate the voice and face of the true orator, kept free against all odds. Callisthenes thus serves as a medium to convey the antagonism between tyrannical power and free eloquence.

To achieve that purpose, Curtius shaped his character on a Roman model, which is made obvious by the different uses of *libertas* I commented on, but also if one compares Callisthenes to Roman

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[92] Aug. *RG* 1.1. Wirsubszki (1950, p. 103) lists Republican examples. Cogitore (2011, pp. 136-137, 155, 158-159) surveys Claudius', Flavian and Antonine uses of *libertas* as catchword. After Augustus who used it against Antony, the slogan *de facto* appears after the death of "bad" emperors (Caligula, Nero and the civil war of 69, Domitian). The emperor is expected to ensure the preservation of *libertas* – which Alexander fails to do in the passage, thus similar to bad *principes*.

[93] *Libertas* in a political sense is essentially freedom from tyranny in the *Histories*. Monarchy can authorize *libertas*, as demonstrated by the traditional Macedonian regime (see Curt. 4.7.32). In the second pentad, Curtius exploits the antithesis between *libertas* and *seruitus* to portray Alexander not as a *rex* anymore but as a *dominus* looking like a Persian Great King and bearing the features of the "rhetorical tyrant" which Dunkle (1971) traces: see Curt. 6.6.1-11 and 8.7.

[94] For all these reasons, I do not think, as Baynham (1998, p. 194) does, that *ueluti* must be analysed as showing that the narrator does not endorse the Macedonians' reaction.

[95] Curt. 8.7.8-9.

imperial figures of resistance. The reference to Seneca which Pownall (2018, p. 67-68) underlines reflects Callisthenes' depiction as a tutor but not as a figure of political *libertas*. It is rather the characteristic of another Neronian philosopher, Thrasea Paetus, as portrayed by Tacitus. More precisely, a parallel can be drawn between the structure and meaning of the proskynesis episode and the trial of Antistius Sosianus in book 14 of the *Annals*[96]. The praetor Antistius, because he has read a satirical poem about Nero during a banquet, is charged with *maiestas*. Whereas every senator approves the death sentence to please Nero, thus bringing dishonour on the assembly, Thrasea alone takes the floor to oppose it, arguing that under the reign of a good prince, a free Senate should not put people to death as if law did not provide for proper punishment. After the speech, Tacitus writes:

> ***Libertas Thraseae seruitium aliorum rupit**, et postquam discessionem consul permiserat, pedibus in sententiam eius iere, paucis exceptis, in quibus **adulatione** promptissimus fuit A. Vitellius, optimum quemque iurgio lacessens et respondenti reticens, ut pauida ingenia solent.*[97]
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> The freedom of Thrasea broke through the servitude of others, and, on the consul authorizing a division, he was followed in the voting by all but a few dissentients – the most active flatterer in their number being Aulus Vitellius, who levelled his abuse at all men of decency, and, as is the wont of cowardly natures, lapsed into silence when the reply came.

Thrasea is contrasted with flatterers and sycophants such as the future emperor Vitellius, in the same way as Callisthenes with Cleo. He is the only one that dares to oppose the death sentence approved by the Senate out of obsequiousness. Thanks to his moderate speech which demonstrates his *libertas*, as freedom of speech and independent spirit, he liberates the Senate from assent and flattery, that is from servility, as is emphatically shown by the juxtaposition of *libertas Thraseae* and *seruitium aliorum*. Therefore, his freedom too works at the individual and at the collective level: not only does he show *libertas* as moral independence of spirit and speech, but he is also a freedom-maker[98]. Baynham (1998, pp. 194-195) points the resemblance out, but states that Curtius demonstrates a "reserved attitude" towards Callisthenes, as Tacitus towards Thrasea. However, as some scholars like Strunk (2017, p. 108) argue, Thrasea certainly dies because of his opposition, but Tacitus' account highlights the horror of Nero's tyranny rather than it denounces the rashness of the philosopher. This same conclusion applies to Callisthenes. Curtius, who most probably wrote under Vespasian, may have been inspired by the historical Thrasea. In any case, the characteristics shared by Curtius and Tacitus as historians should be especially highlighted. Experiencing the Principate provided them with a set of political attitudes, types of conflicts, oppression and resistance, which results on similar interpretations of History

[96] Tac. *Ann.* 14.48-49.
[97] Tac. *Ann.* 14.49.
[98] On Tacitus' Thrasea Paetus see Wirszubski (1950, pp. 138-143, 165), Heldmann (1991), Morford (1991, pp. 3442-3447), Devillers (2002), Strunk (2017, pp. 104-121).

and power. Thus, the historical characters they wrote about, once transformed into figures by the narrative, show similarities.

Curtius made Callisthenes the most formidable opponent and victim of Alexander, whereas no other historian gave this key role to this character[99]. As the man was at the same time an orator, a philosopher, a historian, he symbolizes various forms of discourse: oral and written, rhetorical, moral, memorial. The king's deification, as Curtius tells the reader when relating the oracle of Hammon, was intended to forge the legend of the king, and was based on deception and promoted by flattering discourse[100]. Alexander's control on public discourse is also a control over his own image. The proskynesis affair therefore deals with what choices are left to men of letters under a tyrannical regime: Cleo and Agis are depicted as *qui professionem honestarum artium malis conruperant moribus*, and Callisthenes in contrast as *praeditu[s] optimis moribus artibusque*, "with the best habits and arts"[101]. Spencer 2009 (p. 268) argues that "the figure of Callisthenes opens up, for Roman authors, strategically interesting ways of focusing on and exploring relationships between historiography, autocracy, and individual responsibility". Even though Callisthenes' status as historian is not mentioned in the passage, the fact that the man in charge of the conqueror's memory is made the embodiment and martyr of free discourse against flattery and falsification must be emphasized. It is all the more remarkable as it happens in a historiographical work whose narrator undertakes to reveal the facts behind the performance of power. As a historian, Curtius shows concerns about the corruption of memory and truth by autocracy, as will Tacitus, especially in his account of the trial of the historian Cremutius Cordus who is convicted of having praised Cassius and Brutus under Tiberius and speaks in defence of freedom of expression[102]. Both stories, though different, deal with the fate of discourse under despotism and shape historians as defenders of *libertas*.

In this study on discourse and power, Curtius reveals that the loss of *libertas* gives way to the reign of false pretences, flattery as well as the control on public speech by power. These different kinds of perverted discourse can be encapsulated in the theatrical paradigm. The distortion of speech under autocracy reflects a wider issue: Boesche (1987, p. 208) writes about Tacitus' works that "despotism substitutes appearance to reality, the playing of role for sincere opinion, acting for genuine accomplishments". A similar fracture between deep truth and surface can be observed in Curtius' account of Alexander's reign at this point. The man who ultimately shatters the

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[99] On Callisthenes, see Brown (1949), Pédech (1984, pp.15-69), Golan (1988), Pownall (2014). The reception of Callisthenes in late Republican and early imperial Roman texts shows that he became an *exemplum* of the intellectual victim of tyranny (see Cic. *Rab. Post*. 9.23; Sen. *Suas*. 1.5; Sen. *Nat.* 6.23.2-3), which, as Bowden (2013) shows, influenced the imperial accounts of the proskynesis affair.
[100] See Curt. 4.7.8 and 4.7.29-30. See Spencer (2002, p. 138): "But the underlying assumption, made explicit in Curtius' story, is that behind the mystique of a ruler, there may be more manipulation than action".
[101] Curt. 8.8.22.
[102] Tac. *Ann*. 4.34-35. On Cremutius Cordus and freedom of speech, see Strunk (2017, pp. 151-165).

dramaturgy of power and the "politics of pretence" is the orator and historian, who is made the embodiment of freedom and truth. As parallels have been drawn between Curtius and Tacitus, the common focuses, interpretive tools and narrative frameworks that were highlighted suggest that these texts are underpinned by a common "anatomy of tyranny"[103] and thus reflect a Roman early imperial paradigmatic tyranny.

[103] The expression is borrowed from Walker (1960, p. 233), cited by Boesche (1987, p. 189).

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