

**The Stock Tyrant and the Roman Emperors:
The Influence of the Traditional Portrait of Tyranny on Suetonius' *Caesares***

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Abstract

This dissertation analyzes the influence of the epideictic rhetoric, and in particular of the traditional portrait of the tyrant drawn from invective, on Suetonius' *Caesares*. Using the works of Xenophon, Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian, it first establishes that both the form of a Suetonian biography and the way in which Suetonius describes the ancestry and early life of each emperor, reflect the rhetorical practices traditionally employed to praise a great man in antiquity. It then demonstrates that for the substance of his portraits Suetonius turned to the stock figure of the tyrant. It traces the development of the traditional portrait of the tyrant in Greek and Roman drama, historiography, oratory, rhetoric, and political philosophy. It then shows that Suetonius portrayed the Caesars as men who not only exhibited the vices traditionally associated with the tyrant but also governed and ruled in ways consistent with the accounts of tyrannical government found in the historians and philosophers and died in the ways tyrants have always died. The Roman biographer far from being the collector of delightful trifles and salacious gossip that many have taken him for, was in fact creating a consistently political portrait of each emperor and of the principate itself.

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Introduction

ma pensi un po' a ciò che è stato Svetonio al tempo dei cesari. No, lei parte con una ambizione di denuncia e arriva al favoreggiamento d'un complice, ma lei vede che confusione, che ambiguità.

Federico Fellini, *8 1/2*

There are few ancient authors more popular with students and mainstream readers — and more consistently and thoroughly denigrated by modern scholars — than Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus.¹ Although some have tried to explain his *Caesares* as the product of specific literary traditions or of a specific social, philosophical, or political point of view,² the

¹ For the life of Suetonius, see Townend (1967) 79-81; Baldwin (1983) 1-51; Wallace-Hadrill (1983) 2-8. Suetonius exercised a considerable influence on ancient and medieval biography. Bowersock (1998) 194-5 has observed that, while both Suetonius and Plutarch embarked upon separate works of sequential lives, Suetonius alone had successors: “Obviously, something must have moved Plutarch and Suetonius to invent the *vita Caesarum* when they did. Something must also have moved them to elect such very different ways of doing their work. Finally, something must have made the Suetonian form so popular in the following centuries while leaving the Plutarchean form utterly without successors. These are fundamental problems in achieving an understanding of imperial biography.” For Marius Maximus as a continuator of Suetonius and for Suetonius’ specific influences on Maximus, see Syme (1980) 57 and 124-5. For the influence of Suetonius on pagan and Christian biographers generally, see Bowersock (1998) 206-9. For the displacement of annalistic history by biography after Suetonius, see Syme (1980) 36: “No Latin writer of annalistic history existed in the age of the Severi. Since Suetonius, biography held the field. Indeed, the Greek Cassius Dio is much under the influence of the pattern and tradition – observe his treatment of Hadrian.” For the specific influence of Suetonius on the form of later biography, see Bowersock (2010) 912-3; Hägg (2012) 230-2.

² Macé (1900) 84 and Ailloud (1931) xxxiii represent the traditional view that Suetonius shared the senatorial point of view. Della Corte (1958) argued that the *Caesares* reflect

consensus of opinion today remains that Suetonius wrote biographies that, at best, reflect his idiosyncratic tastes, antiquarian interests, and peculiar personality, or, at worst, partake “of the nature of a *chronique scandaleuse* based upon tittle-tattle about the emperors and compiled by a literary man with the muckrake, too keen upon petty and prurient detail to produce a scientific account of his subjects.”³ Although some historians

the particular biases and aspirations of the equestrian order; this thesis aroused considerable interest when first proposed, but has not generally been accepted. Paratore (1959) 326-41 in turn argued that Suetonius shared the viewpoint of the common man. For the different class and social attitudes of Suetonius and Tacitus, see Sage (1991) 338, who notes that Suetonius “is frankly approving and little disturbed by the end of the primacy of the Republican aristocracy. He remains impatient with Republican nostalgia and sincere in his admiration of Augustus.” See also Paratore (1959) 341: “Il n’a ni foi politique, ni foi religieuse ou philosophique.” Galand-Hallyn (1991) 3577 observes that the nineteenth-century scholarly appraisals likewise tended to conclude that Suetonius wrote with no particular philosophical or ideological perspective: “L’ensemble de son oeuvre ne serait, d’ailleurs, soutenu par nulle idéologie, nulle perspective philosophique.”

³ Duff (1927) 508. Perhaps the most often quoted judgment passed on Suetonius as a literary author is, however, that of Funaioli (1927) 26: “ma un vero scrittore non è.” For a thorough and convenient review of the diction and style of Suetonius, see Mooney (1930) 611-39, who usefully catalogues the findings of Thimm (1867), Bagge (1875), Freund (1901), and Dalmasso (1906). The most notable feature of Suetonius’ writing is its brevity, which, as Mooney (1930) 634-6 observes, the author achieves by a very free use of participles, frequent and varied ellipses, asyndeton, a wide and frequent use of the ablative absolute, a “bold use of relative clauses in apposition to substantives,” and the use of prepositions with participial force. Suetonius avoids *concinnitas* in favor of *variatio*, which he achieves most often, as Freund (1901) and Dalmasso (1906) are reported by Mooney (1930) 636 to have catalogued, by pairing adjectives or adverbs with nouns in the genitive or ablative or dependent on a preposition; juxtaposing adjectives

consider Suetonius a reliable historical source — being an author devoid both of literary artistry and of the aspiration to write history, Suetonius would have lacked the craft to deceive⁴ — the appraisal of his biographies as works of literature remains predominantly negative and often dismissive.⁵

The modern scholarly study of Suetonius begins with the publication in 1900 of A. Macé's *Essai sur Suétone*.⁶ Macé concluded that the *Caesares* are not the representative of a biographical, or even literary, tradition, but are rather the product of the scholarly and academic tendencies of their author. Suetonius, the learned antiquarian, collected and catalogued his findings about the emperors much as a grammarian would

and adverbs; and answering a clause with *ut, ne, quo*, etc. with a noun. Finally, Mooney (1930) 637-8 offers examples of how Suetonius will occasionally use all of the ordinary figures of speech, both rhetorical and syntactical, including alliteration, anacoluthon, anaphora, ἀπὸ κοινοῦ, asyndeton, chiasmus, ellipsis, hendiadys, hypallage, hyperbaton, litotes, metaphor, metonymy, omission, pleonasm, polysyndeton, prolepsis, synesis, and zeugma. As Macé (1903) 379-81 established, moreover, Suetonius made frequent use of metrical *clausulae*.

⁴ Paratore (1958) 341, for example, concluded that Suetonius was a reliable source because of his tendency to assemble his mass of material mechanically. His approach is often compared to a clerk, operating “a system of drawers into which facts can be stored conveniently” (Luck (2000b) 167). For a comprehensive assessment of the value of Suetonius as a source for the historian, see generally Gasco (1984).

⁵ For a survey of modern Suetonian scholarship, see Galand-Hallyn (1991) 3576-622; Benediktson (1993) 377-447.

⁶ Suetonius enjoyed an equally low reputation among nineteenth-century scholars. See Galand-Hallyn (1991) 3577: “Les études consacrées à Suétone, à la fin du XIX^{ème} et au début du XX^{ème} siècle, renvoient l’image d’un auteur totalement dépourvu d’initiative, d’originalité et de talent.”

have catalogued the parts of speech in a scholarly work on the Latin language: “comme il eût catalogué, dans les paragraphes d’une ‘ars’, i.e., les noms, les verbes, les adjectives, les particules” (54).

In his 1901 work, *Die griechisch-römische Biographie nach ihrer literarischen Form*, F. Leo argued that the *Caesares* reflect neither the personality of Suetonius nor the habits of the *grammaticus*, but rather a particular form of scholarly biography that Alexandrian biographers had used to write about the lives of literary men. Leo divided ancient biography into a Peripatetic branch, which included biographies of rulers and other public figures, and an Alexandrian branch, which included biographies of poets, authors, artists, and other cultural figures. These Peripatetic biographies were more polished works of literature that were concerned more with character than action. They also resembled history inasmuch as they relied on chronological narrative in their efforts to shed light on the character of the individual and its development over time. It is this form of biography that Plutarch used to write his *Parallel Lives* and in which, Leo concludes, Suetonius would have been expected to write his lives of the emperors. Alexandrian biographies were simpler works, more schematic in their form and systematic in their approach.⁷ These works aimed to describe the individual as a private and static phenomenon. Leo holds that Suetonius wrote his *de Viris Illustribus* using this form of Alexandrian biography. Extending its use to writing his biographies of the

⁷ Leo (1901) 135 concluded that Heraclides Lembus was the author primarily responsible for developing this Alexandrian form of biography. Momigliano (1993) 88 observes that the basis for Leo’s attribution to Heraclides is unclear, a judgment in which I must concur. For a thorough critique of Leo’s theory, see Steidle (1951) 126-77; Geiger (1985) 27-65.

Roman emperors was his innovation. Leo's appreciation of Suetonius remains fundamentally negative; the imperial biographer remains the cataloguer of anecdotes imagined by Macé. Leo adds to the negative consensus of opinion a theory explaining that the *Caesares* are not a manifestation of the author's personality, but of a scientific tradition of scholarly and analytical biography improperly applied to writing biographies, not of Latin poets, but of Roman rulers.⁸

In his 1928 Sather Classical Lectures, *Epochs of Greek and Roman Biography*, D. R. Stuart responded to Leo by arguing that Suetonian biographies are not the result of Alexandrian scholarly influences, nor even the end product of a primarily Greek tradition of biographical writing. Echoing Macé, Stuart acknowledges that the form and content of the *Caesares* may well simply reflect "the mental traits and the literary processes of the author himself."⁹ He recognizes that these traits and processes are those of a Roman author, however, and that they are ultimately derived from primitive Roman commemorative practices. Roman biography (as exemplified both by Varro's *Imagines* and the biographies written by Cornelius Nepos and ultimately by the *Caesares* themselves) may therefore simply be the natural development of the *laudatio funebris*

⁸ For the continuing negative influence of Leo's theory that Suetonius forced the public lives of great men into a structural form ill-suited to their depiction on the modern scholarly appraisal of Suetonius, see den Hengst (2010) 89.

⁹ Stuart (1928) 230, who also notes that Suetonius "was a compiler extraordinary, a chronic lexicographer; many of his books were organizations of material under head and subhead and were thus the results of the industrious use of the method of the 'card catalogue' or its ancient equivalent."

and of Roman epitaphs.¹⁰ Stuart specifically refers to the *elogia* of Barbatus and his son, “which itemize schematically character, offices, military deeds, and building activity” as a likely predecessor.¹¹

Stuart, in my opinion, provided a needed corrective to the exclusively Hellenistic theory of ancient biography advanced by Leo. It does not seem unreasonable to imagine that Roman literary sources and traditions would have exercised some influence, and quite probably some considerable influence, on the writing of Roman biography. One should not, however, succumb to the temptation to conclude that the *Caesares* are the product solely of Roman influences, or that Suetonius is a literary descendant only of Varro and Nepos. Indeed, in spite of the emphasis that he placed on Roman sources, Stuart avoided this temptation himself, concluding that the *Tyrants of Sicily* attributed to the Peripatetic biographer Phaenias of Eresus was “a forerunner of the biographical cycle of Suetonius on the Caesars” in at least the one respect of being a chronologically-ordered collection of ruler biographies.¹² Suetonius himself named both four Greek and

¹⁰ For his analysis of the *laudatio funebris* and of Roman epitaphs, see Stuart (1928) 189-220.

¹¹ Stuart (1928) 229.

¹² Stuart (1928) 133 concluded that Phaenias’ work “exemplifies the chronic fascination that the personalities and the acts of potentates have exerted on mankind throughout political history. This plan of a homogeneous biographical series illustrated in the work had had, as we have seen, precedent in the studies of Damastes and Glaucus. Phaenias applied it to the lives of rulers. The *Tyrants of Sicily* was thus in one respect a forerunner of the biographical cycle of Suetonius on the Caesars.” Geiger (1985) 60-2 considers this series on the tyrants of Sicily to be rather a history of a country by means of a series of rulers. For a review of Geiger’s position, see Stem (2012) 102-3.

four Roman biographers who influenced his *de Viris Illustribus*: Varro, Santra, Nepos, and Hyginus among the Latins, and Hermippus the Peripatetic, Antigonus of Carystus, Satyrus, and Aristoxenus among the Greeks.¹³ Suetonius was therefore probably aware of the Peripatetics and their biographies, but whether they influenced his imperial biographies must remain a matter of pure speculation.¹⁴

Since the Second World War, W. Steidle and A.F. Wallace-Hadrill are the two scholars who have dominated Suetonian scholarship. In *Suetonius und die antike Biographie* (1951), Steidle argued that Suetonius drew the form and structure of his work from Greek models and, in particular, the βασιλικὸς λόγος, the sort of occasional encomiastic composition written to honor the emperor. This structure reflects the Greek understanding of the ἀκμή of a man's life; a biographer would accordingly first describe the period of the man's growth using chronological narrative of his deeds, and then illustrating his *floruit* topic by topic. As we will see in chapter one, Suetonius divides each life into sections that narrate the events of the emperor's life in chronological order and sections that synchronically set forth the features of the emperor's personality and reign under rubrics. I will argue, in line with Steidle's argument, that there is a

¹³ See Jer. *de Vir. Ill.* prologue. It has long been agreed that Jerome had not read any of these Greek authors himself, but instead simply took his list of influences verbatim from this preface to Suetonius' *de viris illustribus*.

¹⁴ For the limited significance of this Suetonian list of influences, see Geiger (1985) 30-2, who argues that they should be considered potential influences only on the *de Viris Illustribus*. This is, however, to assume a distinction between political and literary biography that is, ultimately, a matter for debate. As Momigliano (1993) 88 observes, "we have no reason to believe that [this form of Alexandrian scholarly biography posited by Leo] was ever restricted to the nonpolitical biography."

fundamental difference between the life of a man and the reign of an emperor and that the difference is reflected in this division of Suetonian biography. Using the life of *Julius* as the focus for his investigation, Steidle also sought to explain, by reference to a broad range of Roman influences, the attributes and actions upon which Suetonius focused. Finally, Steidle concluded that, although Suetonius does not make explicit his moral judgments about each emperor, he arranged his facts in such a way that they would speak for themselves, and would create a consistent portrait of each emperor.

In 1983, Wallace-Hadrill argued in his *Suetonius: The Scholar and his Caesars* that “negatively Suetonius wrote not-history; positively he wrote scholarship.”¹⁵ This argument responds directly to Leo’s contention that Suetonius wrote biographies of historical figures in a form properly used for depicting the lives only of literary men. Wallace-Hadrill rejects Leo’s position on the ground that Leo had attributed “an absolute value to the ancient conception of history” and had utterly ignored “the claims of ancient biography to be independent of history.”¹⁶ Suetonius differentiated his biographies from works of history by his choices of structure, style, and subject matter. His decision to mix chronological narrative and topical analysis constitutes a conscious rejection of the narrative form of annalistic history, as does his rejection of the subject matter and the topics of history — the state and its wars and its public, political life — in favor of the often arcane material that is typical of the antiquarian scholar. Suetonius, according to Wallace-Hadrill, eschews also the elevated style and high rhetoric of the historian who “sought to sweep his reader with him, and to dazzle him into admiration; not just (as he claimed) to tell a plain unvarnished story, but enlist his sympathies to impose ... his

¹⁵ Wallace-Hadrill (1983) 10.

¹⁶ Wallace-Hadrill (1983) 10.

interpretation, and to excite emulation of his heroes and disgust for his villains.”¹⁷ For Wallace-Hadrill, Suetonius is writing works that are not history, but scholarly and antiquarian works of biography. Suetonius’ mundane style and his rejection of the “fundamental contribution” of rhetoric to the historian’s task of persuading and impressing his reader, his antiquarian subject matter, and his choice of structure may all, finally, reflect his decision to write a work of biography that is not a work of history.

Wallace-Hadrill interpreted the *Caesares*, in sum, as the product of a range of influences each of which explains a particular facet of the work. These influences are often diverse and disparate. Suetonius used rubrics because that was the practice recommended by epideictic; his businesslike tone and his interest in technical matters and administrative reforms, so foreign to Roman panegyric and invective, in turn reflect the author’s antiquarian tendencies. The virtues upon which Suetonius focuses may reflect, as others have noted, those around which a *laudatio funebris*, or some other form of eulogy or encomium, would have been constructed; they may reflect some lost Platonic, Stoic, or other philosophical canon of virtues; efforts have also been made, finally, to explain the rubrics in the *Caesares* by reference to Roman coins and imperial propaganda.¹⁸

¹⁷ Wallace-Hadrill (1983) 19.

¹⁸ Charlesworth (1937) 105-33 first proposed the canon of four imperial virtues (*virtus*, *clementia*, *iustitia*, and *pietas*), which he derived from the golden shield of Augustus; he concludes that the programmatic imperial virtues were spread through Roman coinage. Wallace-Hadrill (1982) 298-319 notes the imperfect fit of this proposed canon with the virtues displayed on Roman coinage and also (318) the role of Greek philosophy in stimulating this use of virtue language. For Greek philosophical influences on the canon of virtues, see Noreña (2011) 39-46. Noreña (2001) 146-68 had earlier studied

The fundamental problem of the *Caesares* remains largely unchanged since Macé and Leo published their works at the turn of the last century. Leo's search for a single source of influence that would explain the form and the content of these biographies was by and large abandoned, following the work of Stuart and Steidle, in favor of more *ad hoc* and eclectic approaches. These often do little more than identify features that the *Caesares* happen to share with other genres or, perhaps, that reflect the author's idiosyncratic proclivities. Suetonius is said to have shown an interest in games and changes to military practice, for example, because he was an antiquarian who had a scholarly interest in games and military customs. These explanations are limited to the material they can explain and none of them purport to explain very much. None explain, moreover, why he chose to write biographies of Roman emperors, rather than scholarly and antiquarian works about those subjects in which it is so often suggested that Suetonius was genuinely more interested. The result is an account of an author who wrote the type of work that he did because he was the type of man that he was; the *Caesares* become, as Macé held, an eclectic and scholarly work of an eclectic and scholarly author.

In this dissertation, I will propose a reading of the *Caesares* as reflecting the natural outcome of Suetonius' rhetorical education. The disparate Greek and Roman influences that seem to lurk behind the *Caesares* can, I intend to show, be best explained as the result of the Greco-Roman rhetorical training that Suetonius received. The

personifications on imperial coinage of the virtues of *aequitas*, *clementia*, *indulgentia*, *iustitia*, *liberalitas*, *munificentia*, *patientia*, *pietas*, *providentia*, *pudicitia*, and *virtus*; these are, with the addition of *constantia*, the virtues identified by Wallace-Hadrill (1982) 310; see also Noreña (2011) 55-62 (identifying the same eleven virtues). Noreña (2001) 157 reflects the developing consensus that there is no fixed canon of imperial virtues.

structure of the work and much of the method that Suetonius uses can be traced to the rhetorical handbooks. The way that Suetonius divides his lives into sections of chronology and sections in which material is gathered under rubrics reflects the practices recommended by the rhetoricians; a great deal, although not all, of what Suetonius does comports with the advice offered by Quintilian and Menander Rhetor, while the remainder can be explained by reference to the theoretical works of Aristotle and Cicero, and the practices followed in the encomiastic works of Xenophon and Isocrates. The disparate Greek and Roman influences at work in the *Caesares*, which Leo, Stuart, Steidle, and Wallace-Hadrill all sought to explain with varying degrees of success, can be explained by reference to the unifying influence of Greco-Roman rhetoric.

My contention is that both the form and the content of these biographies can be explained by reference to ancient rhetoric. The form of a Suetonian biography reflects the practice of which the masters of epideictic rhetoric approved. He describes the ancestry, birth, and early life of the emperor using the methods that epideictic rhetoric advised using to praise the life of any great man. He turned to the stock tyrant, the figure familiar from Roman invective and declamation, when he was in need of a template that he could use to analyze and describe the lives and reigns of the Roman emperors. He may have turned to the tyrant, as Stuart suggests, because the collection of tyrant-biographies composed by Phaenias of Eresus provided a natural model for writing a collection of biographies of the first twelve Caesars. He may simply have recognized that the figure of the tyrant provided him with a suitable model template for describing and evaluating the lives and reigns of the Roman *principes*. Whatever the case may be, it is the influence of

Roman rhetoric and Roman rhetorical education that I believe provides the best and simplest explanation for why Suetonius wrote biographies of the sort that he did.

My argument has two distinct parts, reflecting my dual aims of establishing the influence of Roman rhetoric on both the form and the content of the *Caesares*. First, I argue that Suetonius embraced and used the techniques of epideictic rhetoric in order to create more effective and persuasive portraits of the twelve Caesars. I will demonstrate that both the fundamental structure of the lives and much of the material that Suetonius chooses to include in the lives reflect the precepts of the rhetoricians regarding what should be included in a work that aims to praise or to blame an individual. Just as Tacitus wrote his histories using the tools that Roman rhetoric had given him, so too Suetonius used those tools to write biography. The formal similarities that exist between Suetonius and Isocrates, Xenophon, Polybius, and Tacitus are the result of the pervasive influence that rhetorical training exercised on each of these authors.

In this sense, my argument is a rejection of Wallace-Hadrill's contention that Suetonius consciously sought to avoid the style and the formal techniques of Roman rhetoric in order to distinguish his biographies from works of history.¹⁹ My conclusion,

¹⁹ The problems with Wallace-Hadrill's argument have been noted by others. See, e.g., Lewis (1991) 3625 n.5a, who argues that, while Wallace Hadrill "expertly propounded" the view that Suetonius rejected formal rhetoric and adopted the plain 'encyclopaedic' language of the scholarly antiquarian handbook in order to write a work of "not history," "most would see at least some historical affinities in Suetonius, not to mention rhetorical technique (as Wallace-Hadrill himself has to concede), while one remembers that some historians, especially Greeks and notably Polybius, are often no less 'hypomnematic' (for want of a better term) in diction, and even the more stylish historians, Roman or Greek, are given to occasional learned digressions."

therefore, is that the biographies of Suetonius are as “rhetorical” as any Greek or Roman work of history — in the sense both that their formal structure reflects the division typical of a work of epideictic rhetoric between narrative and topical presentation and that the author employs the techniques that would ordinarily be used to persuade an audience that a man is worthy of praise or of blame.

Second, I argue that Suetonius consistently drew on the stock figure of the tyrant in order to create his biographies of the emperors. As portrayed by Suetonius, the emperors perform the types of public actions and implement the types of policies that are typically attributed to the tyrant by the historians and philosophers, orators and dramatists; they likewise exhibit the vices that are typical of the tyrant, and simulate those same virtues that tyrants seeking to render their reigns more palatable to their subjects pretend to possess. I intend to establish that the *Caesares* should be considered a rhetorical work, therefore, not only in their form, but in their substance as well. The portraits that Suetonius creates draw extensively on the traditional portrait of the tyrant that is found not only in works of invective and in declamatory exercises, but in a wide range of authors, both Greek and Latin, ranging from Aeschylus to Dio Chrysostom. It is, it cannot be stressed too strongly, the broad rhetorical education, rather than merely the practice of *laudatio* and *vituperatio*, from which Suetonius drew his inspiration.

This work is, in this second sense, a development and a departure from the position that Steidle had advocated. Where Steidle had concluded that Suetonius painted wholly Roman and strongly ethical portraits of the emperors, my contention is that Suetonius consistently depicts each of the Caesars in ways that reflect the Greco-Roman tradition of the tyrant. The *Caesares* are a work that makes consistent use of this stock

figure; the depiction of the emperors is not concerned so much with the ethical depiction of the man, but with the ways in which the man lived and ruled as a tyrant. The vices of the Caesars do not contribute to their characterization as bad men, in other words, so much as they do to their depiction as tyrants.

Overall, the explanation I seek to provide adds a coherence to our reading of the *Caesares* that has so far eluded the scholarly effort to identify the sources and influences that motivated Suetonius to write in the way that he did. One need not look to disconnected traditions and genres in order to construct an *ad hoc* understanding of a hybrid biographical form. The coherence of my explanation arises from its recognition that Suetonius' work is rhetorical and from its appreciation of the nature of that rhetorical influence. Suetonius wrote in the way that he did because he had learned from epideictic rhetoric not only that chronological narrative combined with topical presentation can create effective portraits but also that the ancestry, family, and early life of a man can be described in a way that adds considerably to the persuasive power of these portraits. Suetonius was also probably first introduced to the figure of the tyrant during his years as a student of rhetoric; the tyrant is a familiar stock figure in Roman invective and declamation. He would have become acquainted with its power to persuade and to move his reader, just as he would have become acquainted with the method of dividing his work into chronological and topical sections, from his rhetorical training.

I have divided my argument into five chapters. In chapter one, I consider the formal influences of epideictic rhetoric on the structure and method of the *Caesares*. I examine how, and in the service of what end, orators and authors writing under the influence of epideictic rhetoric have mixed chronological narrative and topically arranged

presentations of material to praise the great and censure the wicked. In this chapter, I will show that Suetonius took this characteristic division between temporal and topical presentations and adapted it to the task of highlighting the place of the reign of the emperor in the life of the man. I also trace the origins of the practice of grouping a collection of anecdotes under a unifying rubric back to the rhetorical precepts of Aristotle and the practices of Xenophon.

I turn in chapter two to the opening section of each biography in which Suetonius describes the ancestors, birth, education, and early life of the emperor up to his accession to the principate. I establish that Suetonius begins each of his imperial biographies as the orator would begin a work of praise or blame: namely, with the ancestors, the birth, and the education of the young man. Suetonius treats these topics, I also show, in the specific way that rhetoric advises. It is not merely that Suetonius here proceeds chronologically; one would hardly look to a rhetorical manual to understand why a biographer would set forth his facts in chronological order. It is rather that Suetonius presents precisely those details about the ancestors and early life of the man, and uses those details in precisely the way, that the rhetorical manuals advised.

In chapters three, four, and five, I examine the influence of the stock tyrant both on Suetonius' depiction of the life of the emperor during his reign and his narration of the death of the emperor. In chapter three, I first review how the stock figure of the tyrant evolved and how that figure has been used by Greek and Roman authors from Aeschylus to Suetonius. By tyrant, I mean a single ruler who alone holds the supreme power in the

state and exercises that power, unhindered by the rule of law, for his own benefit rather than for the common good.²⁰

In chapter four, I turn to consider how the traditional literary and philosophical depictions of the tyrant inform Suetonius' topical analysis of the lives each Caesar lived as emperor. I examine the range of ways in which Suetonius builds his portraits of the Caesars using rubrics that break down the traditional portrait of the tyrant into its component parts. I begin with the *saevitia*, *crudelitas*, *luxuria*, and *metus* that are the essential building blocks of the tyrant's personality. I then consider the ways in which

²⁰ My definition is a modified form of that found in Hyde (1944) 123-4: "There is hardly a type of government better known to the historian and political scientist, for whether we speak of a 'tyrant' in Greece, a 'dictator' in Rome, a 'despot' in Renaissance Italy or a 'leader' in our time, we mean the same thing – a man who in some way gains supreme power and wields it unconditionally for his own benefit for a season." This definition reflects, at root, the Aristotelian understanding of tyranny as a degenerate form of monarchy that aims at the advantage of the monarch rather than at the common good. See Arist. *Pol.* 3.7, 1279b6-7: ἡ μὲν γὰρ τυραννὶς ἐστὶ μοναρχία πρὸς τὸ συμφέρον τὸ τοῦ μοναρχοῦντος. For the distinction between tyranny and kingship in Aristotle, see Blomqvist (1998) 8-9. For the original connotation of the term "tyrant," see, e.g., Andrewes (1956) 20-30; Dunkle (1967) 152; Labarbe (1971) 471-504. Among the Greeks, the term originally referred to a ruler who had acquired power by means of fraud, deceit, or some other extra-legal means. This original connotation early on gave way to, and may in fact always have co-existed with, the understanding of a tyrant as a monarch who ruled malevolently. The Roman emperors could, of course, be considered tyrants in both of these senses. The manner in which Caesar and Augustus acquired power made them and their successors tyrants in the original sense; they were rulers who had acquired power by extra-constitutional means. An emperor who consistently behaved malevolently could also be considered a tyrant in the second sense. Suetonius, I will show, treats these rulers as tyrants in both senses.

Suetonius describes the rule of each emperor as the reign of a tyrant. The emperor's building program, sponsorship of public spectacles, religious observances, and awarding of honors and offices, as well as his relationship with the army and his conduct of military matters, are each shown to have been cast by Suetonius in a way that accords with the stereotypical practices and policies of the traditional tyrant.

Finally, in chapter five, I demonstrate that Suetonius used the same narrative to relate the deaths of the emperors that authors had traditionally used to recount the deaths of tyrants. Tyrants, in works of tragedy as much as in works of philosophy, are depicted as being the cause of their own deaths. The savage cruelty of the tyrant may arouse the type of fear that can motivate men even to murder in the attempt to free themselves from that fear. His *hubris* toward his subjects can inspire a desire for revenge. The tyrant must likewise beware of his wife, his children or his heir apparent, his chief aides, his generals, his people, and his army. The tyrant is safe neither at home nor abroad, neither in the public space of the forum nor in the privacy of his own bedroom. In the case of each emperor, Suetonius not only molds the facts of the emperor's death to fit the traditional narrative templates and philosophical explanations applied to the death of the tyrant, but draws from the assorted motifs, motives, and character types that each play their part in the narrative of the tyrant's demise.

My examination will reveal that Suetonius throughout this work employs the themes and the imagery, the tropes and the topoi, as well as the virtues and vices that were traditionally used to portray the person, life, and reign of the tyrant. Suetonius would in all probability have first become acquainted with the power of the stock figure of the tyrant during his rhetorical training. The substance of his biographies, as well as

their form, are therefore ultimately the product of the influence of Suetonius' education in Greco-Roman rhetoric. As will also become clear, however, there is more to the stock figure of the tyrant, in ancient literature generally and in Suetonius' *Caesares* in particular, than can be attributed to the declamatory exercises of the schools and the invective works of the orators. To understand fully the portrait of the Caesars that Suetonius creates, one must examine the portrait of the tyrant that is found not only in the orators, but also in the ancient historians, dramatists, and philosophers. It is the wide range of influences that contributed to the stock figure of the tyrant in antiquity, I conclude, that accounts for the wide range of Greek and Roman influences that seem to be at work in the *Caesares* and that has troubled scholars for well over a century.

Chapter 1 Rhetoric and the *Caesares*

This chapter seeks to provide an explanation of Suetonius' division of his *Caesares* into sections that chronologically narrate the life of the emperor and sections in which the actions and attributes of the emperor are collected and presented category by category under rubrics. Each of the biographies, almost without exception, begins by reviewing the subject's ancestors, then describes the parents and birth of the emperor, and finally narrates the growth of the young boy to adolescence and then adulthood, before finally turning to his accession to the principate. The discussion of the reign of the emperor is then described topically under rubrics, covering matters ranging from military affairs and public works to the emperor's physical appearance and drinking habits. Chronology then returns as the biographer turns to the task of narrating the emperor's death. This chapter will show that this formal structure, which has struck scholars and casual readers alike as the most distinctive, if not also the most peculiar, feature of the *Caesares*, in fact reflects the ancient rhetorical techniques employed in works of praise and blame.

In the first section, I review Suetonius' practice of dividing his biographies into sections that proceed topically and sections that analyze the *partes* of each emperor's life *singillatim* and under rubrics, proceeding "neque per tempora sed per species" (*Aug.* 9.1). I then examine the explanations that scholars have proposed for this structural division and the interpretations of the apparent programmatic statement in chapter nine of the *Augustus*, before reviewing the Greek and Roman rhetorical practices and precedents that likely influenced Suetonius' structuring of his biographies. This review establishes that Suetonius' practice of dividing his biographies into sections of narrative and sections of

rubrics reflects the long-settled practice of epideictic rhetoric. I conclude that Suetonius alternated between narrative and rubrics in order not only to focus the attention of his readers specifically onto the years that the emperor lived as the master of the Roman world but also to shed light on the character and actions of each man. Finally, I consider the specific ways in which Suetonius deployed and, when necessary, modified the rhetorical practices of *laudatio* and *vituperatio* regarding how to describe both the life and the character of an individual in order to achieve his aims as a biographer.

Augustus 9.1 and the Structure of a Suetonian Biography

Suetonius generally begins each biography by reviewing the ancestry, birth, and early life of the emperor chronologically; at that point in the story at which the man becomes emperor, the author then begins to analyze his life under rubrics that are organized without apparent regard for chronology. Suetonius does not identify his literary models or his theoretical justification for so dividing his biographies. He does, however, speak to how he understood this division and to his practical reason for doing so. After describing Octavian's ancestry and setting out the facts of his early life *per tempora* in the first eight chapters of the *Augustus*, Suetonius remarks that he will now continue through the *partes* of the emperor's life *singillatim* and *per species* (*Aug.* 9.1):

Proposita vitae eius velut summa, partes singillatim neque per tempora sed per species exsequar, quo distinctius demonstrari cognoscique possint.

Having presented his life in a summary of a sort, I shall go through parts one by one and not chronologically, but by topics so that they can be shown and understood more distinctly.

Suetonius seems here to have confronted the choice, at that point in the life of Octavian at which he became *princeps*, of whether to continue chronologically or topically. He chooses to abandon the chronological principle of organization that had guided his

arrangement of the material pertaining to the early life of the emperor and to proceed to describe the remainder of his life *per species*.

There are several reasons for concluding that this particular passage in the *Augustus* has programmatic significance. First, Suetonius has focused the attention of his reader onto this statement by placing it at a key point in the biography. He announces his intention to proceed *per species* at the moment Octavian becomes emperor; the statement in the text follows immediately after a prospective and lapidary summary of the phases through which this reign will ultimately progress (*Aug.* 8.7). The description of that reign using rubrics will, in turn, begin immediately after this statement. In sum, Suetonius has announced his decision to proceed *per species* at a pivotal moment in the biography of a key emperor: Augustus.

Second, the sentence itself is artfully crafted. Its basic structure is chiasmic (*proposita ... summa, partes ... exsequar*), while there is a balanced pairing of plosives and sibilants (*proposita ... summa, partes singillatim*) as well as a framing of the emperor himself between the alliterative *vita* and *velut*. This display of Suetonian artistry serves to draw the reader's attention to the sentence, all the more given the author's supposed tendency to eschew literary artistry.²¹

²¹ Suetonius, Wallace-Hadrill (1983) 19 contends, "is mundane: has no poetry, no pathos, no persuasion, no epigram. Stylistically he has no pretensions. No writer who sees himself as an artist, one of the elect, could tolerate the pervasive rubric; the repetitiveness of the headings, the monotony of the items that follow, the predictable ending "such he did; and such he did; and such he did." Suetonius is not sloppy or casual; he is clear and concise, but unadorned. His sentences seek to inform, with a minimum of extraneous detail. Ablative absolutes, present participles, subordinate clauses fill in the essential background, while the main verb conveys what the emperor did or said. The style is

Third, it is reasonable to conclude that the statement is programmatic because it does, in fact, seem to describe the pattern that Suetonius follows not only in the *Augustus*, but in nearly all of the *Caesares*. Each of the *Caesares* will generally contain a chronological section, in which material is set out *per tempora*, and a section of what has been called eidological analysis, in which material is presented *per species*.²² Most of the biographies begin and end with a section of chronological narration, while the middle chapters of each work are a dissection of the reign of the emperor that presents its material topically under rubrics.

The opening chronological section, and by extension the biography itself, will typically begin with a review of the ancestry of the emperor. Suetonius will usually focus on a handful of the more prominent ancestors from the more distant past, before then devoting a separate chapter or small number of chapters to the emperor's mother and father. Suetonius then reports the birth of the emperor, accompanying the birth-notice of the emperor with a catalogue of the omens and signs that surrounded the event. The

neither conversational nor elevated. It is the businesslike style of the ancient scholar. See also Mooney (1930) 18, who describes Suetonius' style as "plain and unadorned, and his diction as simple and unaffected. His writings exhibit no such remarkable peculiarities as characterize those of Seneca and Tacitus."

²² The term eidological is taken from Cizek (1977). For the distinctiveness of this feature of Suetonian biography, see, e.g., Wallace-Hadrill (1983) 10-5; Hurley (2001) 17-8; Hägg (2012) 221. Lewis (1991) 3641 postulates a tripartite division, consisting of the two chronological narratives at the beginning and end of the work and the central section of "scrutiny by more or less standard criteria of performance as emperor, for the most part essentially static and proceeding by rubrics or standardized headings." This tripartite division recognizes, however, the common features of the opening and concluding sections.

major events of the emperor's life are then chronologically reported up to the moment of his accession to the principate. There then follows a topic-by-topic description and analysis of the public reign, personal life, character and physical attributes of the emperor; each dimension of the emperor and of his reign is presented in a paragraph introduced by a rubric identifying the topic that is to be discussed. The paragraph devoted to describing the parsimony of Tiberius, for example, begins "pecuniae parcus ac tenax," a rubric that alerts the reader to the topic at issue (*Tib.* 46). Anecdotal evidence of the trait or behavior is introduced, in this case Tiberius' unwillingness to support financially his companions on campaign. Suetonius resumes chronological narration when he returns to describe the death of the emperor. He again records the omens and portents of the event; the review of the ancestors with which each work begins is paralleled by a discussion of the succession at the end of each work.

The *Caligula* is typical of the pattern. Suetonius begins the biography with the ancestors, birth, and early life of the emperor, then dissects the reign of the emperor eidologically, and then finally concludes with an account of the emperor's death. The work is divided into 60 chapters in the modern edition. The first fourteen of these tell of Gaius' ancestry and early life. A biography of his father Germanicus dominates this account, probably because the *Tiberius* had already provided a full account of the Claudii:

- | | |
|------|---|
| 1-6 | The life of Germanicus |
| 7 | Germanicus' other children by Agrippina |
| 8-12 | Birth and early life of Gaius up to accession |
| 8 | <i>C. Caesar natus est</i> |
| 9 | <i>Caligulae cognomen castrensi ioco traxit</i> |
| 10 | <i>Comitatus est patrem et Syriaca expeditione</i> |
| 11 | <i>Naturam tamen saevam atque probrosam</i> |
| 12 | <i>Non ita multo post Iuniam Claudillam M. Silani nobilissimi</i> |

- virī filiam duxit uxorem* — marriages and advance to power
- 13-14 Accession to principate
- 13 *Sic imperium adeptus*
- 14 *Ingressoque urbem*

The progression is chronological. Suetonius begins with the father, mother, and siblings of Gaius. He progresses to the birth of the future emperor, then describes his time as a young boy living with the legions, his military adventures, his savage nature as a young man, and his marriages and the other steps that immediately preceded his accession to the principate. It should be noted that, although this progression is chronological, Suetonius does not entirely eschew the use of rubrics; each chapter begins with a topic sentence that identifies the phase that is to be described in the chapter. After the reign begins, the rubrics remain, but their chronological arrangement has been abandoned:

- 15 *Incendebat et ipse studia hominum omni genere popularitatis*
- 16 *Spintrias monstrosarum libidinum aegre ne profundo mergeret exoratus, urbe submovit* (public policies)
- 17 *Consulatus quattuor gessit* (public offices and largesse)
- 18-20 *Munera gladiatoria* (games and spectacles)
- 21 *Opera sub Tiberio semiperfecta* (public building program)

In these seven chapters, Suetonius sets forth the positive aspects of the reign of Gaius. He then turns to the negative dimension of the man and his reign. The shift is not temporal, but ethical and biographical; it is a shift from considering Gaius as a *princeps* to considering Gaius as a monster: “hactenus quasi de principe, reliqua ut de monstro narranda sunt” (*Cal.* 22.1). The public and private acts that illustrated the virtuous side of the man in chapters 15-21 occur in the same time frame as the actions found in chapters 22-49 that establish his vicious dimension:

- 22 (the arrogance of the emperor)
- 23-26 (his behavior toward family (23-24), wives (25), friends, senate, knights, and people (26))
- 27-33 *saevitiam ingenii per haec maxime ostendit* (27)

- 34-35 *nec minore livore ac malignitate quam superbia saevitiaque paene
adversus omnis aevi hominum genus grassatus est* (34) (envy and spite)
36 *pudicitiae neque suae neque alienae pepercit*
37 *nepotatus sumptibus omnium prodigorum ingenia superavit*
38-42 *exhaustus igitur atque egens ad rapinas convertit* (38)
43-49 *militiam resque bellicas* (43) (“military” affairs, campaign in Germany)

After describing the monstrous aspects of Gaius’ reign, Suetonius turns to review the personal appearance and private habits of the emperor. The eidological dissection then concludes with his love of public games and spectacles:

- 50 *statura fuit eminenti* (appearance and health)
51 (fear and cowardice)
52 *vestitu calciatuque et cetero habitu neque patrio neque civili*
53-54 *ex disciplinis liberalibus minimum eruditioni, eloquentiae plurimum attendit*
55 (mad fervor for games and spectacles).

This static analysis of the emperor yields once again to chronology, as Suetonius then narrates the rise of the conspiracy against the emperor (57), his assassination (58), and his death-notice and burial (59). The biography concludes with the emperor’s post-mortem reputation (60):

- 56 *ita bacchantem atque grassantem non defuit plerisque animus adoriri*
57 *futurae caedis multa prodigia exstiterunt*
58 (assassination)
59 *vixit annis viginti novem* (burial)
60 *condicionem temporum illorum etiam per haec aestimare quivis possit*

The *Caligula* well illustrates the basic structural pattern of a Suetonian biography.

Although the author has a penchant for beginning each chapter with a sentence indicating the topic or period of life upon which he is about to focus, the element of chronology, although not completely absent from the eidological chapters,²³ nevertheless governs the

²³ Lewis (1991) 3664-5 observes that the division between “Suetonius’ chronologically based pre-imperial careers and his ‘static’ treatment of actual principates” is not absolute; indeed, “chronological signposts persist well after accession” in several of the lives.

order of the presentation only in those sections in which the man is not yet emperor or is about to be removed, by natural or unnatural causes, from his office. In discussing the reigning emperor, however, the treatment is by rubric.

All of the biographies follow this pattern to one degree or another. Some of the lives follow it quite closely; others do so only roughly:²⁴

Emperor	Chronological Chapters	Eidological Chapters	Death Chapters
Julius	1-39	40-79	80-89
Augustus	1-8	9-96	97-101
Tiberius	1-26	27-71	72-76
Caligula	1-14	15-55	56-60
Claudius	1-10	11-42	43-46
Nero	1-9	10-39, 51-56	40-50, 57
Galba	1-13, 23	14-16, 21-22	17-20
Otho	1-11	12.1-2	12.3-5
Vitellius	1-11, 15-17.2	12-14, 17.3	17.4-18
Vespasian	1-7	8-23	24-25
Titus	1-2, 4-6	3, 6.2-9	10-11
Domitian	1-3, 23	4-13, 18-22	14-17

With its balanced chronological sections framing its central eidological section, the *Caligula* is the almost perfect example of this symmetrical pattern.²⁵ The *Julius*, *Augustus*, *Tiberius*, *Claudius*, and *Vespasian* likewise all progress from a chronological narrative of the early life of the man, to an eidological section describing the reign of the

Lewis collects examples of such signposts at 3665 n.162. It is my opinion that Suetonius includes these signposts where, as in the case of Tiberius, he seeks to suggest a change or development in the character of the emperor and his reign.

²⁴ The table which follows is substantially in agreement with Cizek's (1977) 59-61 analysis of the *Caesares*.

²⁵ Cizek (1977) 60 refers to the *Caligula* as a "composition très équilibrée."

emperor, and finally to a chronological narrative of the death of the emperor.²⁶ In the *Nero*, however, the narrative of the emperor's suicide interrupts the rubrics; these then resume with a description of the emperor's appearance. In the *Titus*, a chapter detailing the emperor's appearance and his talents interrupts the chronological narrative of his infancy and youth.²⁷ The *Galba*, *Otho*, and *Vitellius* deviate more substantially. In the case of these three lives, the shortness of the reign, coupled in the case of Galba with the length of his life before he entered into office, seems to have militated against following the pattern.²⁸ By and large, however, all twelve lives adhere to the Suetonian template. Suetonius has announced at *Augustus* 9.1, therefore, that he will abandon chronological narration and begin an eidological dissection of each emperor's life at that point in the biography at which the man rises to the principate.

Two questions remain. First, while it is generally agreed that *Augustus* 9.1 is significant, the programmatic nature of that significance, if any, has nonetheless remained elusive. Wallace-Hadrill concluded that Suetonius here intended to make a claim to be

²⁶ For the composition and structure of a Suetonian imperial biography, see Funaioli (1927) 1-26. Cizek (1977) 66-102 provides comprehensive and detailed outlines of the biographies of the first three emperors.

²⁷ Cizek (1977) 61 observes that "pourtant le portrait tout en gardant une position excentrique, passe au début de la vita, où il fractionne la vie antérieure à l'avènement en deux secteurs initiaux, l'un consacré à l'enfance et l'autre à la jeunesse." Rather than fracture the narrative, however, I suggest that the content and arrangement of this description effectively leads the reader from the emperor's infancy to his maturity by following his developing talents and gifts.

²⁸ See, e.g., Syme (1980) 117, who observes that "the facts dictated: a brief space of time for three ephemeral emperors, and a continuous narration in civil war."

writing biography rather than history.²⁹ While Nepos and Plutarch wrote specifically about the nature of the difference between history and biography,³⁰ for Suetonius, this simple statement announcing his methodology sufficed, Wallace-Hadrill concluded, to establish that he is a biographer rather than a historian. There was no need for the imperial biographer to draw an explicit distinction between his lives and the works of the historians, Wallace-Hadrill continues, because his explicit abandonment of chronological narrative sufficed to make the point. By stating that he intended to proceed *per species*, in

²⁹ Wallace-Hadrill (1983) 13-5.

³⁰ Nepos speaks to the differences between history and biography in the introduction to his *Pelopidas* (1.1): “Pelopidas Thebanus, magis historicis quam vulgo notus. cuius de virtutibus dubito quem ad modum exponam, quod vereor, si res explicare incipiam, ne non vitam eius enarrare, sed historiam videar scribere, sin tantummodo summas attigero, ne rudibus Graecarum litterarum minus dilucide appareat, quantus fuerit ille vir. itaque utrique rei occurram, quantum potuero, et medebor cum satietati tum ignorantiae lectorum.” See also Nepos *Pref.*; *Epam.* 1; *Timoth.* 4.6. For the interpretation of *Pelopidas* 1.1, see Geiger (1985) 21-2 and 114-5, who recognizes the importance for the writer of political biography of avoiding the temptation to shift from writing biography to history. As Geiger notes, the risk would not have been felt by the writer of lives of literary men, but only by the biographer of the public political figure. Stem (2012) 134-5 focuses on the ethical dimension of biography as reflected in this passage; with respect to Suetonius, he observes (134 n.19) that “no programmatic moralizing statement can be found in Suetonius,” although “perhaps one appeared in the lost introduction to the *Divus Iulius*.” Plutarch offers comparable programmatic statements on the nature of biographical writing at *Alex.* 1.1-2; *Timol.* 1.1-4; *Nic.* 1.5. For programmatic statements in Plutarch, see generally Duff (1999) 13-51.

other words, Suetonius set his biographies apart from the *per tempora* narratives of the annalistic history.³¹

A second question now arises: Why, if his intention was to set his biographies apart from works of history, did Suetonius defer making his programmatic statement to the second work in the collection? The *Julius*, presumably, was as much a biography as the *Augustus*. If Suetonius' intention had been to establish the genre in which he was writing, it is difficult to see why that aim would have been better served at this point in the *Augustus* than in either the preface to the collection, the introduction to the *Julius*, or some other point in the first work in the collection.³²

³¹ Syme (1980) 111-2 maintains that Suetonius made a conscious decision, reflected in both the form and content of his work, to write in opposition to both annalistic history generally and specifically to Tacitus' *Historiae* and, probably, his *Annales* as well. Wallace-Hadrill (1983) 8-10 explains that Suetonius had neither the intention to write history nor a belief that history had become more biographical as the story of Rome became more and more the story of the emperor; his aim was rather to supplement, not to challenge, the historical writing of Tacitus. He concludes (13) that with this sentence Suetonius makes explicit his rejection of narrative in favor of rubrics and does so specifically in order to set his work apart from the work of the historians he hopes to supplement with his biographies. Beneker (2009) 120 n. 26 concludes that Suetonius "does not introduce into his text a genre-based argument for his method. Rather, his biographical method is reflected in the structure of his *Lives* and bluntly stated, without his predecessors' concern that his readers might quibble or be expecting more *res gestae* than he provides."

³² The introduction to the *Julius* and, by extension, to the collection is lost. Suetonius might well have made a programmatic statement at the opening of the work. The question would then become, and in a sense remain, why a programmatic statement would be needed at this later point in the *Caesares*? The objections would remain the same and, as

In my opinion, Suetonius' decision to proceed *per species* did not, as an initial matter, carry the strong generic connotation that has been attributed to it; a reader encountering a topical presentation or a statement of an intention to present material *per species* would not necessarily have concluded that the work in question could not have been a work of history. Although historians from Herodotus to Tacitus wrote *per tempora* narratives, they would also proceed *per species* when the subject matter so warranted. Herodotus frequently interrupts his narrative with topical descriptions of lands and peoples. The analysis of the Roman constitution in the sixth book of Polybius did not transform his work of history into a work of national biography. Among the Romans, Velleius declares his intention to depart from chronological narrative and treat his material *per species* at several points in his history.³³ Indeed, as Woodman has observed,

we will see, my solution would remain preferable to the generic explanation proposed by Wallace-Hadrill.

³³ See Vell. Pat. 2.129.1: "Sed proposita quasi universa principatus Ti. Caesaris forma singula recenseamus." Leo (1901) 241 distinguished Velleius from Suetonius by noting that "bei Sueton das *singillatim* den Sinn eines genauen Eingehens auf alles Einzelne hat, während Vell. nur das Einzelne herzählt." In my opinion, the distinction between Suetonius and Velleius is not simply that one author goes into detail while the other author merely enumerates detail, but rather that, while Velleius covers the same material once through before returning to review that material in detail, Suetonius treats the emperor's life chronologically in one section and eidologically in the other. In either case, however, as Woodman (1977) 264 has observed, Velleius is not the only historian to have followed such an approach: Tacitus did so as well. That Suetonius chose to use both chronological narrative and analysis under rubrics in the *Caesares* does not mark out that work as a work of biography, rather than history. Suetonius was not, in sum, the first

Tacitus also followed this practice in his *Annales*.³⁴ Because the historians had already exhibited and expressed their willingness to use the same formal method in their works of history, Suetonius' statement that he had chosen to follow this approach in his work would not have differentiated his biographies from their works of history in the forceful way this argument supposes.

Both history and biography could proceed *per tempora* and *per species* depending on the nature of the material being presented and the author's determination of how that material could be presented most effectively. Velleius no more strayed across a generic boundary between biography and history when he chose to describe Tiberius *per species* than Suetonius became a historian when he chose to narrate the early lives of the emperors *per tempora*. Instead, although writing in their respective literary genres, both authors are following the common rhetorical precepts governing how particular sorts of material should be presented. Suetonius describes the reigns of the emperors *per species* because it is in this way that this material can best be presented by the author and understood by the reader: "quo distinctius demonstrari cognoscique possint" (*Aug.* 9.1). While one consequence of his decision may be that he has set his work apart from the bulk of the work of the historians, this differentiation is purely accidental, not essential. His choice to write biography, in other words, did not compel Suetonius to structure his work in the way that he did. His choice was dictated by his judgment that this mode of writer to apply these categories to describing an individual's life beyond the boundaries of these rhetorical genres.

³⁴ See Woodman (1977) 264, who offers Tac. *Ann.* 4.4.3 as an example: "*percensuitque* (Tiberius) *cursim numerum legionum et quas provincias tutarentur. quod mihi quoque exsequendum reor ... [6.1] congruens crediderim recensere ceteras quoque r.p. partes ...*".

presentation best served the aims of presenting the life of each emperor clearly and persuasively.

Suetonius' decision to explain his methodology only at this point in the life of Augustus, rather than in the *Julius*, likewise reflects the author's desire to focus his reader's attention on each man's reign as emperor. The *Caesares* are biographies in the sense that they describe each Caesar's life from birth to death. They are, however, biographies of men who have in common the fact that they each held the supreme power at Rome. It is how they acquired and exercised that power that is of the greatest interest to their biographer. He uses narration *per tempora* to explore the steps on each man's path to power; he uses description *per species* to assess how the man then lived and ruled as emperor. The former aim is best served by a chronological narrative presentation, because this best captures the progressive advance of each man to power; the latter is best served by topical presentation, because this best serves to analyze aspects of the exercise of autocratic power.

Suetonius' reason for deferring his programmatic statement to the *Augustus*, and to that point in the *Augustus* at which Octavian becomes the *princeps*, should already now be apparent. The *Julius* is almost exclusively an account of a man's quest for the supreme power; Suetonius does assess the attributes of Julius *per species*, but the first Caesar had no imperial reign of any significance to describe and analyze. Augustus, however, most certainly did. Suetonius makes his programmatic statement about the way in which he intends to assess each man's performance as *princeps* using a *per species* analysis, therefore, at the very first point in the collection at which a man can be said to begin to perform, in fact, as *princeps*.

Ancient Rhetoric and the Structure of Suetonian Biography

This division of each of the twelve works into chronological and eidological sections is, to be sure, the most striking feature of the *Caesares*. The effort to explain why Suetonius himself concluded that this two-part analysis best served his aims, and to discover the literary antecedents and sources for this divided presentation, has now occupied scholars for well over 100 years. Macé was among the first, but by no means the last, to conclude that Suetonius had simply chosen to organize his material as a scholarly researcher or grammarian would have organized a collection of otherwise unrelated facts.³⁵ Leo's contention that Suetonius was part of an Alexandrian scholarly tradition essentially does no more than attribute this scholarly tendency to a tradition of Hellenistic biographers, while Wallace-Hadrill's conclusion that Suetonius wrote within the same scholarly antiquarian tradition as Varro and Valerius Maximus only shifts the focus from Greek to Roman sources.

Stuart sought to explain the Suetonian biographical form by looking to native Roman commemorative instincts and practices.³⁶ He affirmed that these instincts can most readily be discerned in the practice of displaying in the *atrium* of the Roman house the *imagines* of the ancestors, each of which in turn bore a *titulus* with the man's given name, *honores*, *res gestae*, and *mores*. This practice, he reasoned, reflected a common commemorative instinct that runs through Roman thought. Relying on Roman funerary memorials and on the suggestion in Cicero's *Laelius* that the eulogy of Scipio Aemilianus

³⁵ Macé (1900) 54.

³⁶ Stuart (1928) 189-220.

had included the *honores*, *res gestae*, and *mores* of the man, Stuart concluded that the *laudatio funebris* was the probable origin of Suetonius' form.³⁷

Steidle, in turn, saw the βασιλικὸς λόγος, the sort of occasional encomiastic oration delivered to an emperor, as the most probable model for a Suetonian life.³⁸ In light of the division between chronological narrative and static dissection, and given what he took to be a second standard structural division in the *Caesares* between military and civil affairs, he concluded that Suetonian biography most closely resembled the βασιλικὸς λόγος later described by Menander Rhetor.³⁹ He concluded that Suetonius had in all probability drawn the structure of his biographies from established Greek traditions of encomium and biography, exemplified by works such as the *Evagoras* of Isocrates and the *Agesilaus* of Xenophon. Suetonius had used a Greek form to structure his biographies; for the content of his biographies, Steidle concluded, his choices reflected

³⁷ For the *laudatio funebris*, see Pepe (2013) 247-8. For a basic review of the evidence for the form and practice of the *laudatio funebris*, see Crawford (1941) 17-27; Kierdorf (1980) 49-93. Steidle (1951) 110 minimizes the probable influence of the *laudatio funebris* on the ground that the form in all probability never developed a fixed form of composition. See also Lewis (1991) 3642-3, who observes that there are other difficulties with Stuart's theory, most notably that "[c]rucially, Suetonius' overall treatment of his 'Caesares' is simply not commemorative (nor even hortatory), but evaluative: if then the *laudatio funebris* was the model, we must suppose that he took a form intended for another purpose and radically altered its tone, treatment, and methods."

³⁸ Steidle (1951) 126-33.

³⁹ For the structure and content of a βασιλικὸς λόγος, see Men. Rhet. iii.368-77, and the commentary in Russell and Wilson (1981) 271-81.

specifically Roman influences.⁴⁰ While Steidle's reliance on the βασιλικὸς λόγος seems misplaced given the oscillation between praise and blame both within the *Caesares* and within the individual biographies, there is much to be said for his judgment that the *Caesares* bear the unmistakable imprint of rhetorical practice and in particular of the practices of epideictic rhetoric.⁴¹

I intend to show that Suetonius' decision to structure his work in this way reflects the insights of ancient rhetoric on how best to write about a man and his character. Confronting the task of describing the emperors in such a way as to reveal what these men and their reigns had been like, he used those tools that rhetoric had identified as suited to the task of bringing out the individual qualities of men. Suetonius, like Plutarch and Nepos, pursued the ends of the biographer, as much as Tacitus and Velleius pursued the ends of the historian. All of these authors, however, used the tools of rhetoric to achieve their respective ends. Suetonius' choices in this regard were not dictated by

⁴⁰ While advancing a theory that Suetonius was a scholarly antiquarian collector, Wallace-Hadrill (1983) 144 nevertheless does follow Steidle in acknowledging the influence of encomiastic works, and specifically of Xenophon's *Agésilas*, on the *Caesares*. Wallace-Hadrill does not reconcile the fact that the basic structure of the *Caesares* prominently and unmistakably bears this mark of the influence of ancient rhetorical practice with his theory that Suetonius had eschewed such rhetorical devices and practices in order to write "not history."

⁴¹ Lewis (1991) 3669-70 concludes that, while it is possible that the *Caesares* may reflect the *controversiae* of the rhetorical schools – although none survive concerned with an historical individual – "no single antecedent work or class of biographical writing can be reckoned Suetonius' prototype for either content or structure of the 'Caesares', and that in order to explain all their features it is necessary to postulate considerable inventiveness on his part in supplementing, adapting, abridging or conflating existing forms."

genre; all genres were, in this sense, equally rhetorical. Suetonius instead drew upon his rhetorical training when he took up the task of writing about the emperors as naturally as he would have drawn upon that training when writing a letter, oration, or rescript.

As we will now see, the masters of rhetoric, and of epideictic rhetoric in particular, had long recognized that the topical dissection of the life of a man can often bring the personality of that man into sharper focus than can a chronological narrative. Suetonius would have learned of the technique as part of his rhetorical education. By combining chronology and rubrics in the way that he did, he had simply created a form that took from rhetoric a combination of tools that he found well-suited to the writing of biography.

Among the rhetoricians, Aristotle observed in his *Rhetoric* that a speaker can often depict an individual's virtues and vices both more clearly and more effectively by proceeding *per species* than *per tempora* (Arist. *Rhet.* 3.16.2, 1416^b22-26). He explained that while bringing out the attributes of an individual through a chronological narrative is not impossible, this approach often results in the creation of a diffuse portrait because the character traits of the individual remain dispersed throughout the work. The attention of the audience is never allowed to come to rest for long on any particular dimension of the individual. Narrative, according to Aristotle, simply does not allow an author to highlight the attributes of an individual effectively. It is rather by collecting multiple anecdotal examples of an individual's character together and presenting them under an identifying rubric that a sharper portrait can be painted (Arist. *Rhet.*, 3.16.2, 1416^b22-26):

διὰ δὲ τοῦτ' ἐνίοτε οὐκ ἐφεξῆς δεῖ διηγεῖσθαι πάντα, ὅτι δυσμνημόνευτον τὸ δεικνύναι οὕτως. ἐκ μὲν οὖν τούτων ἀνδρεῖος, ἐκ δὲ τῶνδε σοφὸς ἢ δίκαιος. καὶ ἀπλούστερος ὁ λόγος οὕτος, ἐκεῖνος δὲ ποικίλος καὶ οὐ λιτός.

This is why it is sometimes right not to narrate all the facts consecutively, because a demonstration of this kind [i.e., a continuous chronological narration] is difficult to remember. From some facts a man may be shown to be courageous, from others wise or just. Besides, a speech of this kind is simpler, whereas the other is intricate and not plain.

The presentation of material *per species* allows the speaker to establish more effectively that a person possessed a particular virtue or vice.

Aristotle also described the way in which the orator should present this collected material under rubrics. Specific examples should be offered in order to supplement enthymemes, with the particular examples standing as witnesses to the truth of the general statement. These examples should follow rather than precede, confirm rather than lead to, the point that is being made (Arist. *Rhet.* 2.20.9, 1394^a9-16):

δεῖ δὲ χρῆσθαι τοῖς παραδείγμασι οὐκ ἔχοντα μὲν ἐνθυμήματα ὥς ἀποδείξεσιν ἢ γὰρ πίστις διὰ τούτων, ἔχοντα δὲ ὥς μαρτυρίοις, ἐπιλόγῳ χρώμενον τοῖς ἐνθυμήμασιν: προτιθέμενα μὲν γὰρ ἔοικεν ἐπαγωγῇ, τοῖς δὲ ῥητορικοῖς οὐκ οἰκεῖον ἐπαγωγὴ πλὴν ἐν ὀλίγοις, ἐπιλεγόμενα δὲ μαρτυρίοις, ὁ δὲ μάρτυς πανταχοῦ πιθανός: διὸ καὶ προτιθέντι μὲν ἀνάγκη πολλὰ λέγειν, ἐπιλέγοντι δὲ καὶ ἐν ἱκανόν: μάρτυς γὰρ χρηστὸς καὶ εἰς χρήσιμος.

For if they stand first, they resemble induction, and induction is not suitable to rhetorical speeches except in very few cases; if they stand last they resemble evidence, and a witness is in every case likely to induce belief. Wherefore also it is necessary to quote a number of examples if they are put first, but one is sufficient if put last; for even one good witness can be of use.

It is classical Aristotelian rhetoric, therefore, that would explain why Suetonius began each of the eidological chapters with a short rubric. An effective speaker should state his conclusion first and then proceed to offer the pieces of evidence that confirm that conclusion deductively. Just as material should be presented thematically, rather than chronologically, in order to bring each piece of the puzzle into sharper focus, so too, Aristotle has now explained, anecdotes should be grouped together under each rubric in

order to establish the highlights, shadings, and contours of that individual piece of the puzzle.

This is not to say that Suetonius is an Aristotelian or that he had even read the rhetorical works of Aristotle. He did not need to; his teachers would already have done so. Quintilian, in his discussion of epideictic rhetoric, presents the Aristotelian method to his Roman audience (Quint. 3.7.15):

Namque alias aetatis gradus gestarumque rerum ordinem sequi speciosius fuit, ut in primis annis laudaretur indoles, tum disciplinae, post hoc operum (id est factorum dictorumque) contextus, alias in species virtutum dividere laudem, fortitudinis iustitiae continentiae ceterarumque, ac singulis adsignare quae secundum quamque earum gesta erunt.

For at some times it has given a more pleasing effect to follow the stages of a man's life and the order of his deeds, so that innate abilities are praised in youth, then education, and after this the whole of his actions, that is his words and deeds. At other times, it has proven more pleasing to divide the praise into categories of virtues, such as fortitude, justice, continence, and the others, and to assign to each of these the deeds which were done pursuant to each of these virtues.

Quintilian advised the orator to divide the praise of an individual *in species virtutum*.

Suetonius follows suit, presenting the *partes* of the Caesars *per species*. The rhetorical technique developed to demonstrate persuasively the virtues and vices of an individual served equally well to bring into sharper focus not only the character of each emperor but also his political successes and failures in the governing of the empire as well.

Suetonius likewise follows Quintilian's advice, also offered as part of his discussion of how best to praise or blame an individual, to include in his work the "firsts" and the exceptional acts of public beneficence performed by his subject. Quintilian advises that the orator select that material which will delight the listener; he should include things that his subject is said to have been the only one to do, or been the first to

do, or his extraordinary accomplishments, especially those things that he did for the good of others (Quint. 3.7.16):

Utra sit autem harum via utilior, cum materia deliberabimus, dum sciamus gratiora esse audientibus, quae solus quis aut primus aut certe cum paucis fecisse dicetur, si quid praeterea supra spem aut expectationem, praecipue quod aliena potius causa quam sua.

We must decide based upon the nature of the material which of these ways would be the more useful to make our presentation, provided we know that those things which our subject alone is said to have been the first or, certainly, one of only a few, to have done will be pleasing to our audience, as well as anything that he accomplished beyond hope or expectation, and especially what he did for the benefit of others rather than for his own benefit.

There has been a tendency to attribute Suetonius' interest in the innovations that each emperor introduced into Roman political, public, and administrative life to the author's antiquarianism.⁴² This interest in the innovative, the unique, and the unusual might, however, be attributed just as easily to the lasting influence of the rhetorical training that Suetonius had received at school and seen in practice from his post in the imperial bureaucracy.⁴³

⁴² For the argument that Suetonius' interest in imperial innovations reflects the antiquarian interests of the author, see Wallace-Hadrill (1983) 126-34. Suetonius, it should be noted, is as quick to observe imperial acts done "aliena potius causa quam sua." See, e.g., Suet. *Tit.* 8.4: "Urbis incendio nihil publice nisi periisse testatus, cuncta praetiorum suorum ornamenta operibus ac templis destinavit praeposuitque complures ex equestri ordine, quo quaeque maturius peragerentur."

⁴³ This interest was shared, of course, by the historians. See, e.g., Woodman and Martin (1996) 500, s.v. "first". The rhetorical training received by both Tacitus and Suetonius, rather than an antiquarianism particular to Suetonius, best explains this common interest.

Suetonius not only would have received theoretical instruction from rhetorical handbooks but could also have found models of this method in action in the form of encomiastic works such as the *Agésilas* of Xenophon. This work written in praise of the Spartan king is divided into two halves: the first chronicles Agesilaus' deeds; the second catalogues his virtues.⁴⁴ After a short proem, the work first sets forth the genealogy of the Spartan king (1.2-5). The account of Agesilaus' deeds then follows (1.6-3.1a). Xenophon narrates these deeds chronologically. The work then turns to the king's virtues (Xen.

Agés. 3.1a):

καὶ ταῦτα μὲν δὴ εἴρηται ὅσα τῶν ἐκείνου ἔργων μετὰ πλείστων μαρτύρων ἐπράχθη. τὰ γὰρ τοιαῦτα οὐ τεκμηρίων προσδεῖται, ἀλλ' ἀναμνησαὶ μόνον ἀρκεῖ καὶ εὐθὺς πιστεύεται. νῦν δὲ τὴν ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ αὐτοῦ ἀρετὴν πειράσομαι δηλοῦν, δι' ἣν ταῦτα ἔπραττε καὶ πάντων τῶν καλῶν ἦρα καὶ πάντα τὰ αἰσχρὰ ἐξεδίωκεν.

Such, then, is the record of that man's deeds (τῶν ἐκείνου ἔργων), so far as they were done before a crowd of witnesses. Actions like these need no proofs; the mere mention of them is enough and they command belief immediately. But now I will attempt to show the virtue that was in his soul (τὴν ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ αὐτοῦ ἀρετὴν), the virtue through which he wrought those deeds and loved all that is honorable and put away all that is base.

Xenophon now sets out the virtues of the king topically (3.1b-9.7). He identifies the virtue and then offers a series of anecdotes to support the attribution of that virtue to Agesilaus. The work closes with an epilogue (10.1-4) that is then followed by a brief recapitulation of the king's virtues (11.1-16).

Xenophon uses a structure in the *Agésilas* that is similar to, albeit not identical with, that which Suetonius employs in his imperial biographies. Both works concern the lives of monarchs. Both make use of a mix of chronological and eidological sections to

⁴⁴ For the structure of the *Agésilas*, see Leo (1901) 90-1; Hägg (2010) 42-3.

create their portraits of these rulers. Both authors begin with the ancestors of their subjects. Xenophon, however, discusses deeds, narrated chronologically, and virtues, presented eidologically, while Suetonius presents not only virtues and vices, but also deeds and behavior, in the eidological sections of his biographies. The Roman biographer also does not narrate any of the deeds of the emperor before turning to dissect the reign of the emperor under rubrics. Compared to the *Agesilaus*, a work that reviews the entire life of the king chronologically and only then reviews his virtues eidologically, the *Caesares* are something of a hybrid work, partially chronological and partially eidological; the life of the emperor is narrated chronologically up to the moment of his accession and leading up to the moment of his death, but the emperor and his reign are presented under rubrics.

Xenophon also provides a concrete example of the method of presenting thematically coherent anecdotes gathered together under a topical rubric. The discussion of the temperance of Agesilaus provides one example of this practice. Xenophon begins by stating the topic, in this case, the king's ability to resist pleasure. He then reviews the pleasures that Agesilaus was able to resist (Xen. *Ages.* 5.1-2):

ἀλλὰ μὴν καὶ ὅσαι γε ἡδοναὶ πολλῶν κρατοῦσιν ἀνθρώπων, ποίας οἶδέ τις Ἀγησίλαον ἡττηθέντα; ὃς μέθης μὲν ἀποσχέσθαι ὁμοίως ᾧετο χρῆναι καὶ λαιμαργίας, σίτων δ' ὑπὲρ καιρὸν ὁμοίως ὥς καὶ ἀμαρτίας. διμοιρίαν γε μὴν λαμβάνων ἐν ταῖς θοίναις οὐχ ὅπως ἀμφοτέραις ἐχρῆτο, ἀλλὰ διαπέμπων οὐδετέραν αὐτῷ κατέλειπε, νομίζων βασιλεῖ τοῦτο διπλασιασθῆναι οὐχὶ πλησμονῆς ἕνεκα, ἀλλ' ὅπως ἔχοι καὶ τούτῳ τιμᾶν εἶ τινα βούλοιτο. οὐ μὴν ὕπνῳ γε δεσπότη ἀλλ' ἀρχομένῳ ὑπὸ τῶν πράξεων ἐχρῆτο, καὶ εὐνήν γε εἰ μὴ τῶν συνόντων φαυλοτάτην ἔχοι, αἰδούμενος οὐκ ἄδηλος ἦν: ἡγεῖτο γὰρ ἄρχοντι προσήκειν οὐ μαλακίᾳ ἀλλὰ καρτερίᾳ τῶν ἰδιωτῶν περιεῖναι.

Again, among all the pleasures that prove too strong for many men, who can mention one to which Agesilaus yielded? Drunkenness, he thought, should be avoided like madness, overeating like idleness. Moreover, he received a double ration at the public meals, but instead of consuming both portions himself, he distributed both and left neither for himself,

holding that the purpose of this double allowance to the king was not to provide him with a heavy meal, but to give him the opportunity of honoring whomsoever he would. As for sleep, it was not his master, but the servant of his activities; and unless he occupied the humblest bed among his comrades, he could not conceal his shame: for he thought that a ruler's superiority over ordinary men should be shown not by weakness but by endurance.

Once he has established the power of the king to deny himself pleasures as the theme of this chapter, Xenophon proceeds through the specific categories of drink, food, and finally sleep. One by one, Agesilaus is shown to be the master of his appetites for each of these pleasures.

Suetonius follows essentially the same procedure in the *Caesares*. Indeed, the discussion of Claudius' lack of control over his appetites for food and drink uses the same pattern that Xenophon had used to discuss the temperance of Agesilaus (*Claud.* 33.1):

Cibi uinique quocumque et tempore et loco appetentissimus. Cognoscens quondam in Augusti foro ictusque nidore prandii quod in proxima Martis aede Saliis apparabatur, deserto tribunali ascendit ad sacerdotes unaque decubuit. nec temere umquam triclinio abscessit nisi distentus ac madens, et ut statim supino ac per somnum hianti pinna in os inderetur ad exonerandum stomachum.

For food and for drink he was exceedingly appetitive everywhere and at all times. Once when he was holding court in the Forum of Augustus and was struck by the smell of a meal which was being prepared for the Salii in the nearby temple of Mars, he left the tribunal, went up to where the priests were, and reclined with them. He hardly ever left the dining-room until he was stuffed and besotted; then he went to sleep at once, lying on his back with his mouth open, and a feather was put down his throat to relieve his stomach.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Suetonius also discusses the drinking and eating habits of Augustus (*Aug.* 76-7), Tiberius (*Tib.* 42.1), Galba (*Galba* 22) and Vitellius (*Vit.* 13).

The rubric – *cibi uinique quocumque et tempore et loco appetentissimus* – first identifies the dimension of the emperor's personality that is to be described. Illustrative anecdotes then follow, serving to illustrate and confirm the assertion of the rubric. As soon as the rubric has been so illustrated and its assertion so confirmed, Suetonius moves to another facet of the emperor's personality. The *Claudius* again follows the *Agesilaus* and continues with the emperor's sleeping habits (*Claud.* 33.2):

Somni breuissimi erat. nam ante mediam noctem plerumque uigilabat, ut tamen interdiu nonnumquam in iure dicendo obdormisceret uixque ab aduocatis de industria uocem augentibus excitaretur. libidinis in feminas profusissimae, marum omnino expers. aleam studiosissime lusit, de cuius arte librum quoque emisit, solitus etiam in gestatione ludere, ita essedo alueoque adaptatis ne lusus confunderetur.

He slept only a very little, for he was often awake before midnight, so that he would sometimes drop off in the daytime while holding court and could hardly be roused when the advocates raised their voices. His lust for women knew no bounds, but he was wholly uninterested in men. He dined with great fervor, even publishing a book on the art, and he actually used to play while driving, having the board so fitted to his carriage as to prevent his game from being disturbed.⁴⁶

There is no chronology, narrative, or plot under the rubric; the portrait emerges out of the sheer mass of anecdotal detail. There is often, however, both in Suetonius and in Xenophon, a definite thematic coherence and consistency to these grouping of traits. An emperor who cannot control his appetite for food and wine lacks the virtue of temperance and would be expected, therefore, to be unable to regulate his desire for sleep, his lusts, and his passions. It is this ethical coherence and consistency, I submit, that contributes to the creation of a believable and memorable portrait of each emperor.

⁴⁶ The description of Augustus' sleeplessness likewise follows the discussion of his eating and drinking (*Aug.* 78).

At a basic level, therefore, both the structure and the rubrics of a Suetonian biography reflect what a teacher of rhetoric would have counseled using in a work of praise or blame. The division of each imperial biography into chronological and eidological sections, with the early life and the death of the emperor being narrated *per tempora* and the reign of the emperor being dissected and catalogued *per species*, parallels the rhetorical practice of sometimes proceeding chronologically and sometimes breaking up a speech “in species virtutum.” Although Suetonius divides his work differently than Xenophon does his *Agésilas*, both authors make use of a mix of chronology and rubrics in a work about an individual. Xenophon first runs through the whole life chronologically to its end and then starts over and reviews that life a second time topically; Suetonius breaks off his chronological narrative at the moment the man becomes emperor, and then reviews the reign of the emperor synchronically. Xenophon uses a strategy that provides him with two opportunities to praise Agesilaus; Suetonius’ approach instead focuses his reader’s attention on the analysis of the reign of the emperor.

The Diverse Ends and Means of Biography and of *Laudatio* and *Vituperatio*

While Suetonius uses the forms and the tools of epideictic rhetoric to write his works of biography, there are significant differences between his works of biography and an encomiastic work such as the *Agésilas*. The first difference lies in the end toward which these works aim. Xenophon’s stated aim was to praise the Spartan king for his virtues (Xen. *Ages.* 1.1):

οἶδα μὲν ὅτι τῆς Ἀγησιλάου ἀρετῆς τε καὶ δόξης οὐ ῥάδιον ἄξιον ἔπαινον γράψαι, ὅμως δ’ ἐγχειρητέον. οὐ γὰρ ἂν καλῶς ἔχοι εἰ ὅτι τελέως ἀνὴρ ἀγαθὸς ἐγένετο, διὰ τοῦτο οὐδὲ μειόνων ἂν τυγχάνοι ἐπαίνων.

I know that it is no easy feat to write praise worthy of the virtue and reputation of Agesilaus, but nevertheless I must set my hand to the task. For it would be a bad thing indeed, if because he was ultimately a good man, on account of this very fact, he should wind up with not even inadequate praise.

Demonstrating that a person is worthy of praise or worthy of blame are the aims of the epideictic genres of *laudatio* and *vituperatio*.⁴⁷ A work in either of these genres does not aim to present an impartial catalogue of virtues and vices. It does not seek to present a balanced and realistic “warts and all” portrait of the subject. They do not create, in other words, portraits that resemble those that are found in the *Caesares*.

Suetonius does not, at the very least, seem to pursue the same ends in the *Caesares* as do works of *laudatio* and *vituperatio*. The uninterrupted parade of virtues that one encounters in encomiastic works such as the *Agesilaus* is nowhere to be found in Suetonius. As portrayed by the Roman biographer, even Nero and Gaius have their good sides, while Vespasian and Augustus have their very dark sides. Titus, whom Suetonius describes as the *amor ac deliciae humani generis*, is compared to Nero to a degree that none would expect in a work of panegyric. It is not merely that a mild seasoning of virtue or vice has been added to make an otherwise negative or positive portrait more credible.

⁴⁷ Cic. *Inv.* 1.7: “Demonstrativum est quod tribuitur in alicuius certae personae laudem aut vituperationem”; Cic. *de Orat.* 1.31.141: “esse etiam genus tertium, quod in laudandis aut vituperandis hominibus poneretur”; Quint. 3.7.1: “Ac potissimum incipiam ab ea quae constat laude ac vituperatione.”

The portraits seem genuinely impartial, aiming not to praise or blame or persuade, but to leave it to the reader to draw his own conclusions.⁴⁸

For example, Suetonius devotes the first nine chapters of the eidological section of the *Caligula* to recording the laudable actions of the emperor. Not only is Gaius described at the outset of his reign as the most desired *princeps* in the eyes of both provincials and soldiers as well the fulfillment of the hopes of the whole human race, but his actions are also described as uniformly commendable throughout the topical chapters devoted to the beginning of his reign.⁴⁹ Only after discussing Gaius' admirable performance in the role of *princeps*, does Suetonius then turn to describing the monster he finally revealed himself to be ("hactenus quasi de principe, reliqua ut de monstro narranda sunt," *Cal.* 22.1). While the portrait that emerges is negative, the work does not seem persuasive or vituperative, but evaluative and impartial. The same can be said of the lives of Nero and Tiberius. In the case of Julius Caesar, Suetonius makes explicit that he has presented evidence both favorable and unfavorable to the emperor in order to pass an evaluative judgment of his reign ("praegravant tamen cetera facta dictaque eius, ut et abusus dominatione et iure caesus existimetur," *Jul.* 76.1). Even in the case of Titus, the

⁴⁸ Indeed, it is this apparent lack of any apparent aim to praise or censure individual emperors that has inclined historians to accept the Roman biographer as a reliable source. Paratore (1958) 341, for example, found that Suetonius was a reliable source for this reason. For a comprehensive assessment of the value of the *Caesares* for the historian, see Gasco (1984).

⁴⁹ *Cal.* 13.1: "Sic imperium adeptus, populum Romanum, vel dicam hominum genus, voti compotem fecit, exoptatissimus princeps maximae parti provincialium ac militum, quod infantem plerique cognoverant, sed et universae plebi urbanae ob memoriam Germanici patris miserationemque prope afflictae domus."

reader learns that the emperor did not lack public hatred and vituperation before he became emperor (“ne odio quidem, nedum vituperatione publica caruit,” *Tit.* 1.1), and had indeed acquired a reputation in his youth that led the people to expect that he would become another Nero (“denique propalam alium Neronem et opinabantur et praedicabant,” *Tit.* 7.1).

Suetonius, in addition to writing biographies that do not share the aims of either *laudatio* or *vituperatio*, also does not limit the subject matter of his eidological analyses of the emperors to their virtues and vices. Aristotle and Quintilian both presume that virtue will form the basis for praise, and vice the basis for blame. The actions of Agesilaus are offered into evidence in order to establish that the king is virtuous and worthy of praise. Suetonius, however, ranges far beyond the virtues and vices of the emperors, as well as the sorts of actions that would flow from those virtues and vices, to consider matters of imperial administration, foreign policy, and the emperor’s marriages and relationships with the members of his family. Suetonius is not merely seeking to evaluate the emperors rather than praise them, but is seeking to evaluate them using categories far beyond the traditional ethical categories of epideictic.

Third, the accession to the principate plays a pivotal role in the *Caesares* different from that played by Agesilaus’ election to the kingship of Sparta.⁵⁰ Agesilaus’ election is

⁵⁰ Paratore (1959) 338 identifies the accession to the principate as the *Wendepunkt* in the ethical development of the emperor, and in particular of the emperor Claudius. I concur that the accession is a moment of crisis in the biography; I take the transition to be one more concerned with the focus of the biography, however, than with the character of the man. Suetonius shifts his analysis at the accession precisely in order to focus the reader’s attention on the reign itself.

just one more proof, albeit a quite powerful proof, of his virtue and character (καίτοι τὸ ἐν τῇ κρατίστῃ πόλει ὑπὸ τῶν ἀρίστων κριθέντα τοῦ καλλίστου γέρωσ ἀξιωθῆναι ποίων ἔτι τεκμηρίων προσδεῖται τῆς γε πρὶν ἄρξαι αὐτὸν ἀρετῆς, Xen. *Ages.*, 1.5). It is not a turning point either in the work overall or even in the narrative section of the *Agesilaus* itself. The narrative of his deeds does not end here; indeed, Xenophon states explicitly that he will continue with this narration (ὅσα γε μὴν ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ διεπράξατο νῦν ἤδη δηγήσομαι, Xen., *Ages.*, 1.6).

In the *Caesares*, the eidological sections interrupt the chronological narrative at that point in each life at which the man becomes emperor. Suetonius begins to use rubrics in the *Augustus*, for example, after the assassination of Julius. He observes that Augustus, upon learning that he was Caesar's heir (*heredem se comperit*, 8.2), returned to Rome, raised his armies, and entered into his inheritance (*hereditatem adiit*, 8.6). For Suetonius, it is at this moment that Augustus became the second Roman emperor,⁵¹ from the moment he controlled the state (*Aug.* 8.7):

Atque ab eo tempore exercitibus comparatis primum cum Marco Antonio Marcoque Lepido, deinde tantum cum Antonio per duodecim fere annos, novissime per quattuor et quadraginta solus rem publicam tenuit.

And from that time having raised his armies, first with Marcus Antonius and Marcus Lepidus, then only with Antonius for nearly 12 years, and at last for 44 years alone, he ruled the state.

⁵¹ Neither the course and outcome of the coming civil war nor the titles and powers later conferred on Augustus by the Senate changed his status as far as the author was concerned. Louis (2010) 120-1, observes that Suetonius has, in this passage, revealed his opinion that Augustus was emperor in each phase of his reign. Shuckburgh (1896) 17 likewise observes that it is the possession of *imperium* that characterizes Augustus' position throughout all of the phases of his life and reign that follow.

This marks the point at which Suetonius stops narrating the life of the man *per tempora*, and begins to describes the *partes* of the emperor *per species*. The transition from chronology to rubrics coincides with the transition from private life to principate in the other lives as well. In the *Julius*, for example, the transition to rubrics occurs after Caesar has returned to Rome and celebrated his four triumphs (*Jul.* 37-39). The eidological section begins with a discussion of his reform of the calendar (*Jul.* 40); it is, Suetonius is suggesting, as if the progression of time itself has been affected, if not suspended, by the accession.⁵² Suetonius likewise treats the period from Caesar's defeat of the sons of Pompey to the Ides of March as equivalent to an imperial reign. Indeed, the eidological section begins immediately after the emperor's accession in the *Tiberius*,⁵³ *Caligula*,⁵⁴

⁵² Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* and its treatment of the ancestry, birth, and education of the king may likewise shed some light on Suetonius' division of his biographies into section of narrative and sections of rubrics. It should come as no surprise that Xenophon devotes 280 pages of the Teubner edition of a work entitled *Cyropaedia* to describing the birth, education, accession and first year of the reign of Cyrus, and but a single page to the remainder of his life and reign. For Xenophon, Cyrus evolves and develops as a man as he moves toward his reign; once his reign has begun, this development over time essentially ceases. When the man becomes the monarch, it is the static portrait of the ruler, rather than his progress and growth as a man, that becomes the focus of the biographer's interest and attention. In the *Caesares*, it is the emperor's early life and his path to power that Suetonius narrates chronologically; the emperor's character and his reign are then described statically under rubrics. For Suetonius, no less than for Xenophon, time seems almost to stop once the man becomes the monarch.

⁵³ The eidological section of the *Tiberius* follows four chapters (*Tib.* 22-5) devoted to the accession of Tiberius; it begins in chapter 26 with a rubric devoted to the *civilitas* of the emperor. Scholars have observed that Suetonius follows a chronological progression within the eidological section, with the earlier rubrics describing the feigned clemency of

Claudius,⁵⁵ *Nero*,⁵⁶ *Vespasian*,⁵⁷ *Titus*,⁵⁸ and *Domitian*.⁵⁹ That the transition to rubrics occurs at that point in the narrative when the man becomes the emperor results in the

his reign and the later rubrics describing his descent into viciousness after his withdrawal to Capri. See, e.g., Lindsay (1995) 112-3, who draws comparisons with the corresponding sections in Tacitus' *Annals*.

⁵⁴ In the case of Gaius, Suetonius announces that, like Augustus, he first entered the city ("ingressoque urbem," *Cal.* 14) and then received *ius arbitriumque omnium rerum*; the eidological section begins in the following chapter.

⁵⁵ Suetonius clearly marks out the (unexpected) accession of Claudius in his text ("per haec ac talia maxima aetatis parte transacta quinquagesimo anno imperium cepit quantumvis mirabili casu," *Claud.* 10); the eidological treatment then begins in the following chapter, preceded by the observation that his rule had been established and confirmed beyond question ("imperio stabilito nihil antiquius duxit quam id biduum, quo de mutando rei p. statu haesitatum erat, memoriae eximere," *Claud.* 11). The transition to rubrics again accompanies the transition to the principate.

⁵⁶ Nero's acclamation and establishment in the office is described in chapters eight and nine; again, the eidological section begins immediately in chapter 10.

⁵⁷ Vespasian becomes emperor, suddenly and almost by default, upon the death of Vitellius; authority and dignity must first be added to his office, therefore, before the account of the reign may begin ("auctoritas et quasi maiestas quaedam ut scilicet inopinato et adhuc novo principi deerat; haec quoque accessit," *Vesp.* 7.2). The transition to the account of his reign, and to the use of rubrics, occurs upon his reentry into Rome and, as in the case of Julius Caesar, after his celebration of a triumph ("in urbem reversus acto de Iudaeis triumpho," *Vesp.* 8.1). Given the focus placed on the need for *auctoritas* in chapter seven, it is logical that Suetonius begins his account of Vespasian's reign by recounting the offices he held and the powers he exercised.

⁵⁸ The transition from private/chronological sections to principate/topical sections is clearly marked, but there is an intrusion of a topical section into the chronological

focus of the biographical evaluation of the life of the man being directed to his years in the principate. Suetonius writes biographies of men, in other words, but his attention, as the structure of his biographies demonstrates, is focused always on the period in the life of each of those men when they held the supreme power at Rome.

The rubrics in a Suetonian life focus on the period in each man's life after his accession to the principate. Many of the topics Suetonius addresses are topics that one would expect to find addressed in the biography of a monarch. A private Roman citizen would not have had a building program, used tax policy to meet his own needs and fulfill his personal desires, established policy for Italy and the provinces, or awarded offices and honors to the senators and *equites*. Even in the case of virtues, vices, behavior, and habits that one would find in the biography of an ordinary citizen, Suetonius illustrates these actions and characteristics using anecdotal material selected primarily, if not exclusively, from that period when he ruled. In the case of Tiberius' drinking habits, for example, the focus is overwhelmingly on his consumption during his reign. Suetonius begins his discussion of the emperor's love of wine by noting that he will, in this case, proceed through the topic in order: "de quibus singillatim ab exordio referam" (*Tib.* 42.1). He first describes the name, Biberius Caldius Mero, that Tiberius had earned "in castris ... propter

account of his youth and adolescence; Suetonius enumerates these traits after remarking that the gifts of body and mind that Titus had as a boy, shown forth more and more as he came of age. See *Tit.* 3.1: "In puero statim corporis animique dotes exsplenduerunt, magisque ac magis deinceps per aetatis gradus."

⁵⁹ The accession is clearly marked in chapter 3 ("inter initia principatus," *Dom.* 3.1) and the rubrics begin with a discussion of public entertainments ("spectacula assidue magnifica et sumptuosa edidit non in amphitheatro modo, verum et in circo," *Dom.* 4.1).

nimiam vini aviditatem” (*Tib.* 42.1). The rest of the chapter is then devoted to reporting five extended anecdotes about Tiberius’ drinking “postea princeps” (*Tib.* 42.1).

In sum, the rhetorical method that Suetonius has adopted for writing his biographies of the Caesars reveals his intention to focus on that period in the life of each man when he ruled at Rome as *princeps*. Chronology is followed in the opening chapters of each biography in order to narrate each man’s rise to power and at the end of each work in the account of the emperor’s death. Suetonius uses topical rubrics to describe the life of the emperor during his reign. By following this method, Suetonius is able first to show to the reader how the man came to be the emperor that he was and then to concentrate the attention of that reader on the static portrait of the emperor in office. The young Caesar grows to manhood and progresses toward the principate; chronological narrative captures this evolution through time. When the man reaches maturity and holds the supreme power, the portrait becomes fixed in the rubrics of the eidological section of the life. Suetonius is here using the practice followed by Xenophon in his *Agésilas*, and described and explained in the rhetorical handbooks. That it is from rhetoric, rather than some other source, that Suetonius drew his method of presentation is confirmed, as I will now show, by his continuing to follow the prescriptions of ancient rhetoric in his presentation of the ancestry, early life, and accession of each emperor to the principate.

Chapter 2

From Ancestry to Empire

This chapter argues that Suetonius when he wrote about the early life of each of the emperors followed the precepts of epideictic rhetoric concerning how to describe the early life of any great man. Suetonius begins each biography by describing the ancestry, birth, and upbringing of the future ruler of the Roman world; he then traces the path by which each man came to the principate. In this chapter, I will show that the techniques and precepts of the rhetoric of praise and blame play a readily discernible role in these early chapters of the *Caesares*. The Roman biographer described the ancestors, parents, births, and early lives of these men in the way in which Roman rhetoricians counseled orators and writers to describe the early lives of all great men. The portrait of each Caesar as a young man, in other words, is the type of portrait that a Roman author would have written about any great man; the portrait becomes specifically that of a tyrant from the moment when the man becomes emperor.

In this chapter, I first consider the ways in which Suetonius describes the ancestry and parentage of the emperors. I show that, in describing their origins and birth, Suetonius adheres most closely to the general precepts of epideictic rhetoric. Suetonius will focus on the antiquity and nobility of the future emperors. He will use their nobility to highlight the qualities of the emperor, again following quite closely the recommendations of the rhetoricians. Good ancestors either explain the virtues of a good emperor, or highlight by way of contrast the vices of a bad emperor; a mixed ancestry, likewise, can even foreshadow an ambivalent nature in the *princeps*.

I then turn to consider the early life and upbringing of the emperor. In this section, we see that the elements of the tyrannical personality begin to emerge even in these

narrative sections of the imperial biographies. For the most part, the adult characteristics of the emperor are possessed and manifested incompletely in the life of the young man. There are several reasons why this might be the case. First, an emperor who reigns over the Roman world as a tyrant need not reign over the schoolyard in the same way. Second, a virtuous boy may grow to be a tyrant as he progresses toward becoming the *princeps*; the acquisition of absolute power might also change a man more abruptly. Third, one man cannot live as a tyrant while another man reigns as emperor; whatever his character might have been, for example, the young Gaius had to be cautious for as long as Tiberius lived. Finally, the portrait of the stock figure of the tyrant rarely included details about his birth and upbringing. The figure of the tyrant attracted the interest of dramatists, historians, philosophers, and orators only when he began his rise to power; authors paid far less attention to the ancestry, birth, and education of the future despot. Suetonius, therefore, simply would have found little in the way of a traditional portrait of the young tyrant when he turned to drawing his own portraits of the young Caesars. There are, however, some activities in which those who are going to grow up to be tyrants typically engage as young men. The tradition may have little to say about the nature of the tyrant before his tyranny, but it does have *something* to say. Plato, for example, describes the ways in which a tyrannical personality manifests itself in youth, and some of this tyrannical behavior, I will show, is discernible in the actions Suetonius attributes to the young Caesars.

Finally, Suetonius displays much the same interest in how these men acquire autocratic power that historians and philosophers, from Herodotus to Seneca, have shown in how tyrants, from Gyges and Peisistratus to Sulla and Caesar, acquired the supreme

power. This interest is naturally most evident in the *Julius*, the biography of the first man to acquire autocratic power at Rome. Almost half of his biography is devoted to telling how Caesar became the first *princeps*, making this by far the longest narrative section in the *Caesares*. Its relative and absolute length reflects the complexity, and the innate interest, of the story Suetonius here tells. Although how each of his eleven successors first came to be emperor and then established himself securely in power is a matter of less interest than Caesar's first march to power, Suetonius nevertheless makes each emperor's succession to power the focal point in the initial narrative of his life.

***Patria ac parentes maioresque:*
Suetonius and the Ancestors of the Caesars.**

Although Suetonius describes the emperors as tyrants during those periods of their lives when they held the principate, he describes their ancestry and their early lives in the way Roman rhetoric counseled describing the early life of any great man. In this section in particular, I will explain how Suetonius reviews the ancestors and parentage of each of the Caesars in the way these topics would be presented in a work of *laudatio* or *vituperatio*.

As a general rule, historians and philosophers include little to no information concerning the ancestors and parentage in their portraits of the archaic and classical Greek tyrants.⁶⁰ For the most part, the ancestry would have been unknown or unreported

⁶⁰ As Pelling (1990) 213 observes, “[e]verybody notices when a great man dies; it is more difficult to notice when one is born, or when one is growing up.” For how the ancient Greek biography constructed childhood narratives, see Pelling (1990) 213-44. The stories of the births of great men, from Cambyses (Hdt. 3.2.1) to Christ, are often accompanied with an extended account of the dreams, signs, and omens that announced the coming into the world of a child destined for greatness. Isocrates’ paralipsis announcing that he

in the case of a first-generation Greek tyrant, while the parents of the second-generation tyrant would have been readily apparent. Herodotus, Thucydides, and Aristotle had little to say about the genealogy of Peisistratus and no need to discuss the family of Hippias and Hipparchus. The same holds for Dionysius and Gelon. The political philosophers, in turn, would have been primarily interested in the way tyrants came to power, ruled, and were deposed. They had little interest in the more purely biographical details regarding his parents, family, and ancestors.

Matters are different in the case of barbarian kings and, in particular, of the Persian king. The consistent identification in these autocracies of the state with its ruler perhaps gave an early and powerful impetus to the development of a tradition of royal biography in Egypt and Persia. Whatever the reason might be, the fact remains that the ancestry and birth of the barbarian kings were recorded and reported. This tradition is reflected in the accounts of the life of Cyrus that are found in the works of Herodotus and Xenophon.⁶¹ Before turning to the accession narrative and the account of Cyrus' revolt

will not include τὰς μὲν φήμας καὶ τὰς μαντείας καὶ τὰς ὄψεις τὰς ἐν τοῖς ὕπνοις γενομένας in his *Evagoras* confirms that these were already *topoi* in the genre. Isoc. *Evag.* 21. For the birth-narrative in the *Evagoras*, see Hägg (2012) 35.

⁶¹ Although they have attracted less academic attention than the ethnographic material in the *History*, Herodotus' biographical interests have not gone unnoticed. Homeyer (1962) 76-85 was the first to argue for Herodotus being the Father of Biography. See also Gammie (1986) 171-95. For a brief survey of Greek biography before Plutarch, see Osley (1946) 7-20. Although most, if not all, of the constitutive elements of a proper biography are found in Herodotus, they are, as Hägg (2012) 16 observes, "integrated parts of an historical narrative and justified by its topic, the succession of power in a hereditary system." Indeed, the argument runs, it is precisely because Herodotus is interested in political constitutions and monarchy, and not because he was a biographer, that it is the

against Astyages (Hdt.1.123-30), for example, Herodotus describes the ancestry, birth, and early life of the future king (Hdt. 1.107-22).⁶² In a hereditary monarchy of long standing, birth and ancestry matter and are known to matter at the time the future monarch is born. Any man can become a tyrant; the world does not know to take note of his birth. The same cannot be said of the Great King.

The principate will come to occupy a middle ground between Greek tyranny and eastern monarchy in terms of the treatment Suetonius affords to the ancestry, family, and birth of each of the emperors. The principate was not a traditional hereditary monarchy. It could not have been said with certainty, at the time of their birth, that any of the twelve men who came to be emperor were destined to rule the Roman world. Either the child was not the son of the emperor or, in the case of Titus and Domitian, the father was not yet the emperor or in a position from which he was likely to become emperor. No emperor, however, was born in a manger. They were from established families whose lineage would have been known. Several grew up in the imperial household. Even if Gaius, Claudius, and Nero were not “in line” for the principate, their births and their early years would not have been shrouded in the fog of total obscurity. Suetonius had material with which to work. It was only because earlier tyrants had not left their “biographers”

lives of monarchs, rather than of Greeks, which are afforded this extensive treatment. Hägg (2012) 16: “Herodotus shows no similar interest in the pre- or post-political life of the Greek leaders.” For a recent discussion of Xenophon’s *Cyropaedia* and its contribution to biography, see Hägg (2012) 51-66.

⁶² For a discussion of the dreams and signs surrounding the birth of Cyrus, see Fehling (1988) 200-2; Pelling (1996) 68-77; Asheri, Lloyd, and Corcella (2007) 157. An extensive account of the life and reign of Cambyses is found in book 3 of the *Histories*.

with access to information about their ancestry and birth that Suetonius had no traditional portrait of the tyrant in infancy upon which to base his presentation, not because he himself suffered from a lack of information about the young Caesars.

The treatment of birth and ancestry is practically formalized in the encomiastic writings of Isocrates and Xenophon before it is given its theoretical expression in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and the *Rhetoric to Alexander*. The *Evagoras* of Isocrates devotes ten percent of its total length to describing the ancestry (12-18) and birth (19-21) of the Cypriot ruler.⁶³ Isocrates explains that he has included this information about the ancestry and family of Evagoras so that all may know to what a degree the king had surpassed the examples of excellence that were offered by his ancestors (Isoc. *Evag.* 12):

πρῶτον μὲν οὖν περὶ τῆς φύσεως τῆς Εὐαγόρου, καὶ τίνων ἦν ἀπόγονος, εἰ καὶ πολλοὶ προεπίστανται, δοκεῖ μοι πρέπειν καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἔνεκα διελεῖν περὶ αὐτῶν, ἵνα πάντες εἰδῶσιν ὅτι καλλίστων αὐτῷ καὶ μεγίστων

⁶³ Isocrates composed his encomium of Evagoras in the 360s BC. Although the speech must have been written after the death of Evagoras in 374/3 BC and before the Antidosis in 354/3, with its mention of the death of the addressee of the *Evagoras*, the precise date of its delivery remains uncertain. For the arguments regarding its dating, see Mason (1975) 1-17. The work is relatively brief, its 81 chapters running to just 21 pages in the Teubner edition. The first 11 of these chapters explain the purpose of the work and establish its generic relationship with earlier works. Chapters 12-20 discuss the ancestors (12-18) and birth (19-21) of Evagoras. His youth and his assumption of power (22-40) occupy more space than the discussion of his rule (41-50), while his wars with Sparta (51-57a) and with Persia (57b-64) receive only slightly more attention than his rule. There follows a recapitulation of his reign (65-9), an analysis of the blessedness and happiness that characterized the life of Evagoras from beginning to end (70-72), and an epilogue summarizing a second time Isocrates' reasons for writing the encomium (73-81).

παραδειγμάτων καταλειφθέντων οὐδὲν καταδεέστερον αὐτὸν ἐκείνων
παρέσχευ.

In the first place, with respect to the birth and ancestry of Evagoras, even if many are already familiar with the facts, I believe it is fitting that I also should recount them for the sake of the others, that all may know that he proved himself not inferior to the noblest and greatest examples of excellence which were of his inheritance.

This genealogy is unlike the Egyptian king lists and the genealogies that are found in Scripture. Evagoras' ancestors are not included to establish his right of succession. They are described in order to provide the reader with a point of comparison against which to measure the greatness and excellence of Evagoras. Ancestors are included because they provide a background against which the quality of Evagoras can shine forth more brightly.

In contrast to Xenophon's use of the ruler's family in the *Agésilas*, Isocrates does not even mention the parents of Evagoras, but instead focuses exclusively on the mythical ancestors of the king. This reflects a tendency in Greek thought to look back to the mythical and to the remote in order to enhance the understanding of the present, to juxtapose the remote and the recent in a search for meaning. Isocrates uses these ancestors, therefore, in much the same ways that Herodotus and Thucydides use the Trojan War, i.e., to establish the continuity between the past and the present and to affirm the greatness of the present compared with that past. Isocrates uses genealogy differently than Xenophon does, therefore, but ultimately uses it in service of the same aim: to demonstrate the greatness of the product of that genealogy.

In the *Agésilas*, Xenophon also uses the ancestry of the Spartan king to highlight those virtues that he shared with his ancestors. While Isocrates focuses on a small number of named ancestors – Aeacus, Telamon, Peleus – who had themselves offered outstanding

examples of the virtues of their descendant, Xenophon instead uses the lineage of the Spartan king considered as a whole. Xenophon also begins by rooting Agesilaus' regal genealogy in the mythical past, observing that his lineage could be traced back to Herakles, but then records only that Agesilaus was the descendant of generations of kings born from kings (ἐκ βασιλέων βασιλεῦσιν, 1.2). None of the intervening kings is identified by name.

The anonymity of Agesilaus' ancestors comports with Xenophon's aim of demonstrating that the king, like his ancestors, had subordinated his own personal interests to those of his city. Xenophon elaborates on this theme of the subordination of individual and family to the state by juxtaposing the primary virtue of the Spartan state – that it has never been moved by envy (φθονήσασα) to overthrow the rule of Agesilaus and his ancestors – and the primary virtue of the family of Agesilaus – that its members have never tried to take more than their proper share of constitutional power (Xen. *Ages.* 1.4):

τῇδὲ γε μὴν καὶ κοινῇ ἄξιον ἐπαινέσαι τὴν τε πατρίδα καὶ τὸ γένος αὐτοῦ:
ἥ τε γὰρ πόλις οὐδεπώποτε φθονήσασα τοῦ προτετιμῆσθαι αὐτοὺς
ἐπεχείρησε καταλῦσαι τὴν ἀρχὴν αὐτῶν, οἳ τε βασιλεῖς οὐδεπώποτε
μειζόνων ὠρέχθησαν ἢ ἐφ' οἷσπερ ἐξ ἀρχῆς τὴν βασιλείαν παρέλαβον.

On one account his fatherland and his family are worthy to be praised together, for never at any time has the state been moved by jealousy of their pre-eminence to attempt the overthrow of their government, and never at any time have the kings striven to obtain greater powers than were conferred on them originally at their succession to the throne.

The ancestors of Agesilaus derive their greatness from their anonymity and their self-abnegation *vis-à-vis* the state. It is their submission to the state over which they ruled that is their virtue, that is the *fons et origo* of their praise. This submission of the individual Spartan kings to the Spartan state and its laws becomes thematic in the work and its

description of Agesilaus. He will share the political virtue of his ancestors, showing himself subservient to the Spartan constitution on at least two occasions.

The attributes of the families and ancestors of kings and rulers upon which these authors focus in their encomiastic works are the same as those upon which Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and the *Rhetoric to Alexander* advise the orator to concentrate his attention when composing a work of praise or blame. In the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle describes noble birth (εὐγένεια) as a quality that flows, in the case of a city or a race, from the earliest ancestors being autochthonous or ancient (τὸ αὐτόχθονας ἢ ἀρχαίους εἶναι, Arist. *Rhet.* 1.5, 1360^b31-32), from those ancestors being prominent as leaders (καὶ ἡγεμόνας τοὺς πρώτους ἐπιφανεῖς, Arist. *Rhet.* 1.5, 1360^b32-33), and from their descendants being outstanding in things worthy of emulation (καὶ πολλοὺς ἐπιφανεῖς γεγονέναι ἐξ αὐτῶν ἐπὶ τοῖς ζηλουμένοις, Arist. *Rhet.* 1.5, 1360^b33-34). In the case of an individual, noble birth can be inherited from either the maternal or paternal ancestors, with the proviso that all marriages be legitimate. These ancestors should in turn be distinguished for either their virtue or their wealth (Arist. *Rhet.* 1.5, 1360^b35-38):⁶⁴

καί, ὥσπερ ἐπὶ πόλεως, τὸ τοὺς τε πρώτους γνωρίμους ἢ ἐπ' ἀρετῇ ἢ πλούτῳ ἢ ἄλλῳ τῷ τῶν τιμωμένων εἶναι, καὶ πολλοὺς ἐπιφανεῖς ἐκ τοῦ γένους καὶ ἄνδρας καὶ γυναῖκας καὶ νέους καὶ πρεσβυτέρους.

And, as in the case of a city, the first men are notable either for virtue or for wealth or for some other honorable thing, and that many of the family be famous, both men and women, young and old.

⁶⁴ This treatment of nobility is consistent with the briefer discussions of εὐγένεια which are found in the *Politics*, where Aristotle again emphasizes the role of wealth and virtue in establishing the nobility of an old family. See Arist. *Pol.* 4.8, 1294^a21, ἡ γὰρ εὐγένειά ἐστιν ἀρχαῖος πλοῦτος καὶ ἀρετῇ, and 5.1, 1301^b2, εὐγενεῖς εἶναι δοκοῦσιν οἷς ὑπάρχει προγόνων ἀρετῇ καὶ πλοῦτος.

The rhetoricians had not only recognized that noble ancestry could contribute to the depiction of a descendant as himself noble and worthy of praise, but also specified the ways in which this ancestry could best be presented to achieve that aim.

The *Rhetoric to Alexander*, now generally attributed to Anaximenes of Lampsacus, is the work in which the principles and precepts of Greek epideictic are given their clearest expression. The author affirms that a man's ancestry is a principal ground for praising or blaming that individual. He then offers practical advice for dealing with ancestors, both good and bad, noble and low. If the ancestors are noble (σπουδαῖοι), then the speaker should mention all of them, beginning with the first and continuing straight through to the present, identifying something notable (ἐνδοξόν τι) about each. If only some are noble, then make mention only of those ancestors and omit the rest; these omissions should be excused by pleading first that it would be tedious to go through a long list of ancestors and then that it is readily apparent that a good man will have come from a good stock.⁶⁵ If he has no noble ancestors, then he should concentrate on the man himself. Genealogy can also be used in invective in order to discredit a man, provided his ancestors were men of bad repute.

Ancestors become a fixed topic among the external circumstances that should be included in works of praise and blame. Although panegyric had been a suspect genre of rhetoric at Rome, reserved for sycophants, flatterers, and, of course, Greeks, the rules for

⁶⁵ [Arist.], *Rhet. ad Alex.* 35, 1440b33-39: ἐὰν δὲ οἱ πρῶτοι μὲν ᾧσι σπουδαῖοι, τοὺς δὲ λοιποὺς συμβεβήκη μηδὲν ἀξιόλογον πρᾶξαι, τοὺς δὲ φαύλους παραλιπεῖν, προφασισάμενος ὅτι διὰ πλῆθος τῶν προγόνων οὐ θέλεις λέγων αὐτοὺς μακρολογεῖν, ἔτι δὲ οὐκ ἄδηλον εἶναι πᾶσιν ὅτι τοὺς ἐξ ἀγαθῶν γενομένους εἰκός ἐστι τοῖς προγόνοις ὁμοιοῦσθαι.

constructing a panegyric were not unknown to the Roman rhetoricians and would be put to use more and more under the principate.⁶⁶ The handbooks and manuals advise the encomiast to use ancestry in whatever way will put their subject in the best light: if he is from a good family, then it should be stressed that he equaled or surpassed those ancestors; if he is of low birth, then a speaker should claim that he succeeded on his own merits, not by means of the virtue of his ancestors.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ For the idea that epideictic rhetoric was more a Greek than Roman genre, see, e.g., Cic., *de Orat.* 2.341: “sed et quia multa sunt orationum genera et graviora et maioris copiae de quibus nemo fere praeciperet, et quod nos laudationibus non ita multum uti soleremus, totum hunc segregabam locum; ipsi enim Graeci magis legendi et delectationis aut hominis alicuius ornandi quam utilitatis huius forensis causa laudationes scriptitaverunt”; Quint. 3.7.1-2, explains that while the Greeks derived delectation from epideictic rhetoric, the Romans had been able to put this form of speech to more practical uses: “Sed mos Romanus etiam negotiis hoc munus inserit.” This was attributed, on the one hand, to the Romans being more concerned with speech suited for the practical purposes of public life and, on the other hand, to speaking in praise of people with *nuda brevis* in the forum or without rhetoric display in the cast of funeral orations. Rees (2007) 137 concludes it was the “unease about the ethics of praise that encouraged the earliest Latin rhetorical theoreticians to identify the form as essentially Greek.” Lucian (*Hist. Conscr.* 7) concludes that there is a vast gulf between panegyric, which will tolerate considerable misrepresentation provided that it serves the purpose of commending and gratifying the subject, and history, which abhors even the slightest falsehood.

⁶⁷ See Cic. *Part. Orat.* 74: “Sed quoniam tribus in generibus bona malave versantur, externis, corporis, animi, prima sunt externa, quae ducuntur a genere: quo breviter modiceque laudato aut si erit infame praetermisso, si humile, vel praeterito vel ad augendam eius quem laudes gloriam tracto.” See also *Rhet. ad Her.* 3.13: “si bono

In the generation before Suetonius, Quintilian counseled the orator to begin his speeches of praise and blame with that period of time that preceded the birth of the individual.⁶⁸ He should make mention of the homeland, parents, and ancestors of his subject; noble and low origins can again both be used in a way that accentuates virtue and success (Quint. 3.7.10-11):

Ante hominem patria ac parentes maioresque erunt, quorum duplex tractatus est: aut enim respondisse nobilitati pulchrum erit aut humiliter genus inlustrasse factis. Illa quoque interim ex eo quod ante ipsum fuit tempore trahentur quae responsis vel auguriis futuram claritatem promiserint, ut eum qui ex Thetide natus esset maiorem patre suo futurum cecinisse dicuntur oracula.

Before the birth of the man, there will be his homeland, his parents, and his ancestors. These can be handled in one of two ways. For he can be praised either for having measured up to the nobility of his ancestors or for having added luster to his humble origins by his deeds. Those things moreover are to be drawn from that period of time which preceded his birth which promised future glory by means of prophecies or omens, such as the oracles are said to have sung that the man, who was born from Thetis, would grow to be greater than his father.

Quintilian well summarizes the doctrine of the rhetoricians regarding how a man's ancestry is best used to praise or blame him. His Roman rhetorical education would, therefore, have introduced Suetonius to the tools traditionally used to describe the family and ancestors of a man, and the uses to which such genealogical data can be put in praising or blaming that man. Quintilian recommends that signs and portents be offered to confirm that the gods and fate both ordained and predicted the greatness of the man.

genere, parem aut excelsiorem fuisse; si humili genere, ipsum in suis, non in maiorum virtutibus habuisse praesidium.”

⁶⁸ For the use of ancestry in Quintilian, with cross references to the parallel passages in rhetoricians before and after Quintilian, see Adamietz (1966) 159-60.

Although, as we saw in the preceding chapter, all of the chronological sections in the *Caesares* end with the emperor's accession to the principate, there is some variety in both the type of material Suetonius chooses to include and on which he chooses to focus. The treatment of the emperor's family and ancestry is typical. Ordinarily, Suetonius will first provide information about the *gens*, individual ancestors, and parents of the emperor, and then report his birth. Of the Julio-Claudian biographies, the *Augustus* ("gentem Octaviam Velitris praecipuam olim fuisse," 1.1), *Tiberius* ("patricia gens Claudia," 1.1), and *Nero* ("ex gente Domitia," 1.1) all begin with the emperor's *gens*. The *Caligula* and *Claudius* depart from this pattern. The *Caligula* begins with a biography of Gaius' father, Germanicus (*Cal.* 1.1-6.2), which is followed by a single chapter on Agrippina and Gaius' siblings (*Cal.* 7). The *Claudius* begins with a short biography of the emperor's father, Drusus (*Claud.* 1). The opening chapters of the *Julius* are lost.

The biography of the emperor Galba begins, not with the ancestry of Galba, but with a notice that the family of the Caesars had come to an end: "progenies Caesarum in Nerone defecit" (*Galba* 1.1). Just as Suetonius will use signs and omens to emphasize the significance of the emperor's birth, so too he here offers a sign to confirm that the Julio-Claudian dynasty has ended. Only after so marking the end of the first dynastic line in Roman imperial history does Suetonius take note of the beginning of the new reign. He does so by remarking on the politico-genealogical fact that Galba had succeeded Nero even though he was unrelated to the house of Caesars: "Neroni Galba successit nullo gradu contingens Caesarum domum" (*Galba* 2). Suetonius has carefully structured this sentence. On the one hand, he begins by placing "Galba" immediately after "Neroni." On the other hand, the word "Galba" is the furthest in the sentence from *Caesarum domum*.

The sentence illustrates by its own structure, therefore, both the succession of Nero by Galba and the separation of Galba from the house of the Caesars.⁶⁹ Suetonius has here created, if not a beginning in the middle, then at least a clear indication that a change has taken place in the empire. He then returns to the pattern established in the first six biographies and describes Galba's ancestry, including the origins of the family name (*Galba* 3.1). The first chapter of the *Otho* is given over to the ancestors ("maiores Othonis," *Otho* 1.1) and to the father of Otho (*Otho* 1.2-3). Otho's ancestry is mixed. The emperor is descended from the nobility of Ferentium, but his great-grandmother may not even have been freeborn. Vitellius' ancestors and father receive a somewhat longer treatment; Suetonius emphasizes his father's bad reputation (*Vit.* 1.1-3.1).

The *Vespasian* begins with another notice marking a transition, not from one dynasty to another, but from a period of civil war and unrest to a period of peace and stability under the rule of the Flavians. Suetonius had noted in the *Galba* that the new emperor was from a noble family, albeit not one that was connected to the house of the Caesars. In the case of Vespasian, Suetonius reports that the new emperor is from a family that was both obscure and without *imagines* (*Vesp.* 1.1):

Rebellionem trium principum et caede incertum diu et quasi vagum
imperium suscepit firmavitque tandem gens Flavia, obscura illa quidem ac
sine ullis maiorum imaginibus, sed tamen rei p. nequaquam paenitenda,
constet licet Domitianum cupiditatis ac saevitiae merito poenas luisse.

The empire, long unstable and as it were adrift on account of the rebellion and slaughter of the three emperors, was at last taken up and stabilized by the Flavian *gens*, an obscure family, to be sure, and without any ancestral *imagines*, but nevertheless not one of which our polity had cause to be

⁶⁹ For the phenomenon of mimetic syntax, in which word-order may simulate a physical order or arrangement, see generally Lateiner (1990).

ashamed, although it is agreed that Domitian duly paid the penalty for his avarice and savagery.

The origin and end of the dynasty are both revealed in this discussion of the family's social standing. Suetonius seems almost to suggest that the low origins of the Flavians will ultimately reassert itself in the *cupiditas* and *saevitia* of the last member of the family to rise to the principate. In the absence of a collection of *maiorum imagines*, Suetonius instead turns immediately to the paternal grandfather of Vespasian, Titus Flavius Petro (1.2). Being the only emperors who were born to a man who also rose to the principate, anything of note that could have been reported regarding the ancestry of Titus and Domitian would have been included in the biography of their father. The biographies of both Titus and Domitian begin immediately, therefore, with the births of the emperors. They are the only two lives that do so.

This comparison of the ancestry sections of the *Caesares* reveals, first, that Suetonius does not repeat himself. Once the Octavii, Claudii, Domitii, and Flavii have been introduced in the life of one emperor, these clans and their histories are not revisited in the biographies of the later emperors. It is because the Claudii have been described in the *Tiberius*, for example, that Suetonius is free to center his attention on Germanicus and Drusus in the opening chapters of the *Caligula* and the *Claudius*. Likewise, because Titus and Domitian were the sons of the previous emperor, there is no need for any discussion of their ancestry. Scholars have long observed a decline in the length (and, many have argued, quality) of the *Caesares*.⁷⁰ At least part of this decline would seem, however, simply to be the result of the author's desire to avoid repetition.

⁷⁰ Wallace-Hadrill (1983) 61 gives voice to the scholarly consensus when he asserts that "one feature of the Caesars is, to our sorrow, only too palpable. The quality falls off

Second, when discussing the ancestry of the emperors, Suetonius tends to provide information about both the emperor's immediate ancestors and the distant, if not indeed semi-mythical, past. In those lives in which the *gens* of the emperor is described, Suetonius seeks to establish the antiquity of the family. He traces the Octavii back to Rome's regal period.⁷¹ The Claudii are said to have migrated to Rome either at the urging of Titus Tatius or, as Suetonius acknowledged to have been the more widely held belief,

sharply as the work progresses. The Julius and Augustus are in a class apart for length, minuteness of focus, abundance of documentation and liberal citation of authorities.” Several explanations have been proposed for this apparent decline. The first is that Suetonius simply lost interest in the writing of the *Caesares*. He was more eager and energetic when he began the project than when it came to bringing that project to an end. The second, first advanced by Townend (1959) 285-93, holds that the progressive decline more probably reflects not a loss of interest, but a loss of access. The *Historia Augusta* reports that Suetonius had a falling out with the emperor Hadrian. Presumably, when the scholar lost his office, he also lost access to the imperial archives and to the correspondence of the emperors. Bowersock (1969) 1.119-25 advanced the argument that Suetonius wrote the later lives first, developing his technique as he wrote the lives from the *Galba* to the *Domitian*, and then applying his perfected technique to the Julio-Claudian emperors. For further discussion of the question of the composition of the *Caesares* and this apparent decline in the lives, see Syme (1980) 116-21 and 127-8; Wallace-Hadrill (1983) 61-2; and Shotter (1993) 7-10.

⁷¹ Suetonius begins the *Augustus* by reporting that much evidence tells (*multa declarant, Aug. 1.1*) that the Octavian gens was distinguished from of old (*olim, Aug. 1.1*); a street named for the family, a dedicated altar, and a story of an Octavius who tore entrails being offered to Mars half-cooked from the fire is evidence of this ancient nobility. The family was admitted to the senate by Tarquinius Priscus and transferred to the patrician order by Servius Tullius (2.1).

at the instigation of Atta Claudius six years after the expulsion of the kings.⁷² The Ahenobarbi, one of the distinguished branches of the Domitii, trace their origin and their name to Lucius Domitius, whose beard had been turned red by the touch of the Dioscuri following the battle of Lake Regillus in 498 B.C. (*Nero* 1.1). Galba's ancestry is on par with that of the first emperors. Suetonius reports that Galba's family was both grand and old ("magnaue et vetere prosapia," *Galba* 2). Indeed, the seventh Caesar traced his ancestry to Jupiter, on his father's side, and to Pasiphae, on his mother's side. Otho was from an old and distinguished family, albeit one that was from Ferentium and descended from the princes of Etruria.⁷³ The origins of the Vitellii are disputed, with some contending that the family was "veterem et nobilem" (*Vit.* 1.1) and some that it was "novam et obscuram atque etiam sordidam" (*Vit.* 1.1). Vespasian, finally, is the descendant of a tax collector on the Flavian side, although the Vespasii are reported to have been a local family of some repute from the country near Norcia.⁷⁴

Suetonius puts the best face possible on the ancestry of each emperor.⁷⁵ If his family was noble or wealthy, then Suetonius unfailingly reports that fact. He never

⁷² Lindsay (1995) 53 observes that Suetonius alone reports the alternative tradition about the migration of the Claudii to Rome during the reign of Titus Tatius.

⁷³ *Otho* 1.1: "Maiores Othonis orti sunt oppido Ferentio, familia vetere et honorata atque ex principibus Etruriae."

⁷⁴ *Vit.* 1.3: "Locus etiam ad sextum miliarium a Nursia Spoletium euntibus in monte summo appellatur Vespasiae, ubi Vespasiorum complura monumenta exstant, magnum indicium splendoris familiae et vetustatis."

⁷⁵ Suetonius does not ignore allegations of low birth. Augustus is said to have claimed that he was born of an old and wealthy (*vetere ac locuplete*) equestrian family, but Suetonius records that Antony taunted him for his low birth, claiming that his great-

presents an emperor's ancestry in a way that diminishes its antiquity, its wealth, or its nobility. If there is doubt, he takes care to report both versions; in the case of the Octavii, the Vitellii, and the Flavii, for example, he weighs the competing reports regarding the wealth and social class of the family and unfailingly favors the case for more noble origins. He never concludes that an emperor was from a poor family or one that lacked social standing. Some emperors are bad, even monsters, but they are all the offspring of noble families. They are never bad because they come from low families.

The ancestry of the emperors does decline, growing less ancient, less patrician, and less Roman as the principate passes from Augustus down to Vespasian. This is, however, the result of the historical reality. Suetonius always makes the most of what that historical reality gave him. The student of rhetoric would, in fact, have recognized that the author is following the standard techniques for dealing with ancestors. In the case of Galba, for example, he follows the prescriptions for describing ancestors only some of whom are noble and distinguished. He begins by noting that it would be difficult to go through the *imagines et elogia* of all of Galba's noble ancestors and then explains that he

grandfather had in fact been a freedman and a rope-maker and his grandfather a money-changer. See *Aug.* 2.3: "ipse Augustus nihil amplius quam equestri familia ortum se scribit vetere ac locuplete, et in qua primus senator pater suus fuerit. M. Antonius libertinum ei proavum exprobrat, restionem e pago Thurino, avum argentarium." The ancestors of Vespasian are acknowledged to have been associated with commercial activity, albeit tax-collecting rather than money-changing. In contrast, even the plebeian branch of the Claudii was no less powerful nor dignified ("nec potentia minor nec dignitate," *Tib.* 1.1) than the patrician wing of the family.

will therefore touch briefly only on those of his family.⁷⁶ The orator is advised by the handbooks to follow precisely this strategy when only some of a man's ancestors are noble.⁷⁷

Suetonius also seeks to establish that the early members of each family are, if not autochthonous, then ancient. This is the strategy that Aristotle had advised in his *Rhetoric*.⁷⁸ Suetonius affirms that the Octavii were admitted to the Senate by Tarquinius Priscus. He reports that the Claudii came to Rome shortly after the founding of the city, a tradition that other writers ignore, before he offers the more widely accepted version according to which they had arrived at Rome several years after the fall of the kings. The Ahenobarbi are old, but not as old as the city, tracing their origins to the time of the battle of Lake Regillus, six years following the arrival of the Claudii at Rome. The opening chapters of the *Julius* are lost, but Suetonius might well have connected the arrival at Rome of the Julii to Romulus and Aeneas. As the principate effectively resets with Galba, the emperor's ancestry is once again traced back to the mythical, indeed mythological, past.

Suetonius also focuses on the leadership roles assumed by the early members of each of the imperial families. Aristotle in his *Rhetoric* had counseled the orator to rely on

⁷⁶ *Galba* 3.1: "Imagines et elogia universi generis exsequi longum est, familiae breviter attingam."

⁷⁷ [Arist.], *Rhet. ad Alex.* 35, 1440b37-39: προφασισάμενος ὅτι διὰ πλῆθος τῶν προγόνων οὐ θέλεις λέγων αὐτοὺς μακρολογεῖν, ἔτι δὲ οὐκ ἄδηλον εἶναι πᾶσιν ὅτι τοὺς ἐξ ἀγαθῶν γενομένους εἰκός ἐστι τοῖς προγόνοις ὁμοιοῦσθαι.

⁷⁸ Arist. *Rhet.* 1.5.5: "τὸ αὐτόχθονας ἢ ἀρχαίους εἶναι."

just such evidence in order to establish the nobility of a man's ancestry.⁷⁹ Suetonius describes the first named ancestor of Augustus, for example, as a leader in a war with one of the neighbors of Velitrae ("bello dux finitimo," 1.1). The review of the ancestry of Tiberius includes discussions of the exploits of Appius Claudius, Claudius Caudex, and Tiberius Nero. The *Galba* describes the career of Servius Galba, a consul known not only for his eloquence, but also for being responsible for the war with Viriathus in the second century B.C.

From this initial assessment of the antiquity, reputation, and wealth of the *gens*, Suetonius moves quickly through the intervening centuries to arrive at the more recent ancestors — the great-grandparents,⁸⁰ grandparents,⁸¹ and parents — of the emperor. Considerably more attention, however, indeed often as much attention as is paid to all of each emperor's other ancestors, is paid to the father of the emperor. Suetonius devotes a full chapter to the father of Augustus, Gaius Octavius, a man both wealthy and of good reputation ("et re et existimatione magna fuit," *Aug.* 3.1). Suetonius begins the *Caligula*

⁷⁹ Arist. *Rhet.* 1.5.5: "ἡγεμόνας τοὺς πρώτους ἐπιφανεῖς".

⁸⁰ Suetonius provides information about the great-grandparents of Augustus (*Aug.* 2.2). The great-grandfather of Nero receives an entire chapter, in which his ambiguous role in the fighting between Antony and Octavian is emphasized (*Nero* 3).

⁸¹ Suetonius briefly mentions the grandparents of Augustus (*Aug.* 2.2) and Gaius (albeit, as the father of Germanicus: "Germanicus, C. Caesaris pater, Drusi et minoris Antoniae filius," *Cal.* 1.1). The grandfather of Claudius, Suetonius insinuates, may have been Augustus (*Claud.* 1.1). The grandfather of Nero, like his great-grandfather, merits an entire chapter in the biography. The grandfather of Galba is described as a "clarior studiis quam dignitate," having never advanced beyond the rank of praetor, but having published a "multiplicem nec incuriosam historiam" (*Nero* 3.3).

with an account of the life of Germanicus that is more extensive than the entire discussion of ancestry found in the lives of most of the other emperors.

Suetonius is not seeking, therefore, to provide a comprehensive history of the emperor's family or a complete catalogue of his ancestors. Following the counsels of epideictic rhetoric, he is again seeking to highlight those aspects of the ancestry that, and those particular ancestors of the emperors who, best serve the aims that he is pursuing in each of the *Caesares*. This purpose will vary from biography to biography. In the case of some of the emperors, ancestry will confirm that the fruit has not fallen far from the tree. In the case of others, the emperor will either surpass the expectations that his undistinguished ancestry has created or prove a disgrace, or at least a disappointment, to his noble ancestors. Suetonius is following the rhetorical strategies prescribed in the *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum*.

Suetonius uses the same techniques prescribed by the rhetoricians to foreshadow, and in some cases to highlight by way of contrast, the characteristic attributes of the reign that is to come. In the case of Tiberius, for example, Suetonius offers a diverse range of ancestors, both good and bad, virtuous and vicious, in order to presage the variable and often contradictory character of Tiberius and his reign. There are many distinguished and meritorious deeds that the Claudii performed for the Republic, but there are many disgraceful and vicious deeds as well: "Multa multorum Claudiorum egregia merita, multa etiam seuius admissa in rem publicam extant" (*Tib.* 2.1). Suetonius first catalogues chronologically the mixed behavior of the Claudian men, after which he shows that the Claudian women exhibited the same mix of virtues and vices: "extant et feminarum exempla diuersa aequae, siquidem gentis eiusdem utraque Claudia fuit" (*Tib.*

2.3). By reviewing in order both Tiberius' male and female ancestors, Suetonius is able to emphasize the variability of the emperor's ancestry. This review of the Claudii serves not only to explain, therefore, but also to place the emphasis at the outset of the biography squarely on the mixed and often contradictory character of the emperor himself.⁸²

This same technique can be observed in the *Caligula*. The family and ancestors of the emperor had, of course, been fully described in the *Tiberius*, the *Augustus*, and quite probably the *Julius* as well. None of Gaius's ancestors need to be, or in fact are, described in the biography, therefore, save his father. Suetonius opens the work with a mini-biography of Germanicus that occupies six chapters, more space than is devoted to all of the ancestors even of Tiberius. From the standpoint of the historian, of course, Germanicus would certainly have deserved such an extensive treatment.⁸³ Suetonius' account of Germanicus is more encomiastic, however, than historical.⁸⁴ This short

⁸² Lindsay (1979) 56 asserts that Suetonius' discussion of the ancestry of Tiberius both "shows that heredity did play a part in the Roman conception of characterization" and provides "one of our strongest Suetonian statements about the contradictory nature of Tiberius," which can be understood as "an amalgam of these diverging strands of the family."

⁸³ For a historical commentary on the mini-biography of Germanicus, see Hurley (1993) 1-16. Hurley notes that, from the standpoint of the historian, Germanicus was an "important player in the Julio-Claudian saga in his own right" and warranted such an extensive treatment in the biography of Gaius because the latter came to power in substantial part because of the reputation of his father.

⁸⁴ The mini-biography of Germanicus adheres to the specific pattern that is used in works such as Xenophon's *Agesilaus*. The account of Germanicus begins with his deeds (1), then records his death and reports the rumors surrounding his death (2), and then provides a description of his virtues ("omnes Germanico corporis animique virtutes," 3.1),

encomium creates an ethical contrast to Gaius. That Suetonius intended for his reader to draw this comparison between Gaius and Germanicus is first suggested by the strong juxtaposition of the two men in the opening line of the work: “Germanicus, C. Caesaris pater” (*Cal.* 1.1). Suetonius’ subsequent observation, that Germanicus was generally agreed to possess all of the virtues of body and mind to a degree that no one else had (“omnes Germanico corporis animique virtutes, et quantas nemini cuiquam, contigisse satis constat,” *Cal.* 3.1), is likewise recalled toward the end of the work when Gaius is stated to be lacking in both of these respects: “valitudo ei neque corporis neque animi constitit” (*Cal.* 50.2). Suetonius is inviting his reader to compare the virtues of the father and the vices of his son.

It is in the *Nero*, however, that Suetonius makes explicit the uses to which he intends to put the ancestry of the emperor. He will use Nero’s ancestors to highlight the ways in which the emperor degenerated from their virtues, and yet inherited all of their vices (*Nero* 1.2):

Pluris e familia cognosci referre arbitror, quo facilius appareat ita degenerasse a suorum virtutibus Nero ut tamen vitia cuiusque quasi tradita et ingenita rettulerit.

I think it to be worthwhile to report more members of his family in order so that it may be more readily apparent how Nero degenerated from the virtues of his ancestors, although he reproduced the vices of each of them as if they were handed down and innate in him.

The discussion of Nero’s ancestry should help the reader of his biography discern more clearly the virtues and vices of the emperor himself. The notion of heredity (*quasi*

including the reputation and rewards that flowed from those virtues (4-6). When he was not writing a biography of a Roman emperor, Suetonius follows the traditional practice used to praise great men.

tradita) is here present. Nero can be understood as the product of a long line of vicious degenerates. It is the rhetorical power that these examples have to bring the character of the emperor into sharper focus, however, that is primary. Nero's descent into vice will emerge in high relief, Suetonius has announced, when viewed against the background of his family's virtues and vices.

For example, the description of Nero's grandfather, Domitius Ahenobarbus, could apply equally well to the emperor himself. Domitius is reported to have been famous in his youth for his chariot-driving. Suetonius describes him as *arrogans*, *profusus*, and *immitis* (*Nero* 4). When Domitius reached the height of his power and became praetor and consul, he exhibited the same sort of vicious behavior that his grandson will later exhibit as emperor (*Nero* 4):

praeturae consulatusque honore equites R. matronasque ad agendum
mimum produxit in scaenam. Venationes et in Circo et in omnibus urbis
regionibus dedit, munus etiam gladiatorium, sed tanta saevitia ut necesse
fuerit Augusto clam frustra monitum edicto coercere.

While he was praetor and consul, he brought Roman knights and matrons onto the stage to act in mimes. He put on fights with wild animals both in the Circus and in every region of the city, and also a gladiatorial game, but characterized by such savagery that it was necessary for Augustus to restrain him by an edict when his private warning went unheeded.

During his reign, Nero too will force both men and women, of both equestrian and senatorial rank, to play parts on the Roman stage (*Nero* 11.2). Nero too will put on gladiatorial displays and *venationes*. The emperor, however, will go one step further than his ancestor went. Nero will force both senators and knights, not only to act, but to fight in the arena. Domitius had put on savage gladiatorial games and *venationes*; Nero will now force senators and knights to fight both against each other and against wild beasts.

As Suetonius had promised, Nero is being shown not only to have degenerated from the virtues of his ancestors, but also to have amplified their vices.

The father of Nero was a man *omni parte vitae detestabilem*. He murdered a freedman for refusing to drink as much as he had been ordered (*Nero* 5.1), exhibiting the same confusion of public/military office with private debauchery that will characterize not only Nero's artistic campaign through Greece, but the entirety of his reign as emperor. He is accused of acts of incest with his sister Lepida (5.2); Nero will follow his example and sleep with his mother. Domitius was exceedingly stingy when it came to the distribution of prizes; Nero will show himself unwilling not only to pay the prizes awarded to others, but even to see prizes awarded to any but himself.

These passages from the *Tiberius*, *Caligula*, and *Nero* well illustrate the ways in which Suetonius uses the ancestors of the Caesars to create his portraits of their descendants. According to the precepts of epideictic rhetoric, both noble and ignoble ancestry can contribute to creating a portrait of a virtuous or a vicious individual. A vicious man can be presented either as the product of a vicious family tree or as a degeneration from a virtuous one; a virtuous man can be presented as the confirmation of a long line of virtuous ancestors or as a man who overcame the handicap of his more modest birth. Suetonius follows these counsels and is able to use the material at his disposal to create the portrait of the emperor he desired. Gaius is the disappointing son of Germanicus. Tiberius is the confused product of a morally ambiguous and varied ancestry. Nero is the bad fruit of a bad tree. Like an effective orator, Suetonius used whatever background the emperor may have had to create a portrait that seems not merely plausible, but inevitable.

**The Portrait of the Emperor as a Young Tyrant:
The Depiction of the Tyrannical Personality
in the Narrative Sections of the *Caesares*.**

In this Section, I will consider the ways in which Suetonius begins to reveal the influence of the traditional portrait of the tyrant on his imperial lives in the way that he narrates the birth, early life, and education of each emperor. The classical literary and philosophical traditions had little to say about how the tyrannical personality revealed itself in the tyrant's youth. The Greek and Roman historians, tragedians, orators, and philosophers, as we have already mentioned, by and large ignored the childhood of the tyrant. The tragedians naturally had little to say about the life of any character outside of the frame of the drama. The historians exhibited an interest in the tyrant only from that moment when he began to move against the state. Suetonius, on the whole, therefore, was left to follow a strategy of constructing a youth that anticipates and accords with the adult personality and behavior of the emperor. Suetonius accordingly will often follow the course of attributing to the emperors the same set of tyrannical vices — fear, lust, avarice, cruelty, luxury, and violence — that he would attribute to the tyrant in adulthood. The good emperors will depart from these, to one degree or another, in adulthood, while the bad emperors will embrace them wholeheartedly.

Nevertheless, while the ancient authors did not say much about the tyrant as a young man, they did say something. Historians, such as Herodotus, wrote about the early lives of the eastern kings. Plato addressed the young tyrant and described the manifestations of the tyrannical personality in early life. His description of the tyrannical personality in the *Republic* sheds some light on the youthful behavior that Suetonius attributes to several of the Caesars. Much of the drunken carousing, petty criminality, and

simple thuggery of the young Caesars reflects this tyrannical personality asserting itself in the way identified by the Greek philosopher. The young tyrant, Plato explains, lives under the control of his erotic passions. The appetites that afflict most men only in their dreams govern the tyrant in his waking hours (Pl. *Rep.* 571c-d):

τάς περὶ τὸν ὕπνον, ἣν δ' ἐγώ, ἐγειρομένης, ὅταν τὸ μὲν ἄλλο τῆς ψυχῆς εὖδῃ, ὅσον λογιστικὸν καὶ ἡμερον καὶ ἄρχον ἐκείνου, τὸ δὲ θηριῶδες τε καὶ ἄγριον, ἢ σίτων ἢ μέθης πλησθέν, σκιρτᾷ τε καὶ ἀπωσάμενον τὸν ὕπνον ζητῇ ἰέναι καὶ ἀποπιμπλάναι τὰ αὐτοῦ ἥθη: οἶσθ' ὅτι πάντα ἐν τῷ τοιοῦτῳ τολμᾷ ποιεῖν, ὥς ἀπὸ πάσης λελυμένον τε καὶ ἀπηλλαγμένον αἰσχύνῃς καὶ φρονήσεως. μητρὶ τε γὰρ ἐπιχειρεῖν μείγνυσθαι, ὥς οἴεται, οὐδὲν ὀκνεῖ, ἄλλω τε ὁτρωῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ θεῶν καὶ θηρίων, μαιφονεῖν τε ὁτιοῦν, βρώματός τε ἀπέχεσθαι μηδενός: καὶ ἐνὶ λόγῳ οὔτε ἀνοίας οὐδὲν ἐλλείπει οὔτ' ἀναισχυντίας.

I mean those which are awake when the reasoning and human and ruling power is asleep; then the wild beast within us, gorged with meat or drink, starts up and, having shaken off sleep, goes forth to satisfy his desires; and there is no conceivable folly or crime—not excepting incest or any other unnatural union, or parricide, or the eating of forbidden food—which at such a time, when he has parted company with all shame and sense, a man may not be ready to commit.

This dangerous, wild, and lawless form of passion is present in everyone,⁸⁵ but comes to rule in the personality of a future tyrant. It removes all the restraints on his actions and appetites and drives him to dare anything (Pl. *Rep.* 574c-575a). The future tyrant's soul is soon besieged by a band of other desires. He soon grows mad and frenzied (Pl. *Rep.* 573a). He will attempt to rule not just human beings, but the very gods themselves.

Once his soul has succumbed to these tyrannical passions, the young man begins to live like a tyrant. He enjoys feasts, revels, luxury, women, all such things (Pl. *Rep.* 573d). He soon has need for money to support his rich lifestyle and begins to take

⁸⁵ Pl. *Rep.* 572b: “ὥς ἄρα δεινόν τι καὶ ἄγριον καὶ ἄνομον ἐπιθυμιῶν εἶδος ἐκάστῳ ἔνεστι.”

what is not his, either by treachery or by force (Pl. *Rep.* 573e). He will take and spend his father's wealth when he has exhausted his own, seizing it by force if necessary, even murdering his own parents if that should prove necessary (Pl. *Rep.* 574b).

The young tyrant will associate with like-minded men. If his own city is moderate, he will lead this band of tyrannical men abroad to act as a bodyguard for some other tyrant or to serve as mercenaries in times of war. In times of peace, however, he will go about his own city doing mischief with his band of followers. They will behave like thugs (Pl. *Rep.* 575b):

οἷα κλέπτουσι, τοιχωρυχοῦσι, βαλλαντιοτομοῦσι, λωποδυτοῦσιν,
 ἱεροσυλοῦσιν, ἀνδραποδίζονται: ἔστι δ' ὅτε συκοφαντοῦσιν, ἐὰν δυνατοὶ
 ᾧσι λέγειν, καὶ ψευδομαρτυροῦσι καὶ δωροδοκοῦσιν.

For example, they steal, they break into houses, they cut purses, they steal clothes, they rob temples, they are kidnappers; or if they are able to speak they turn informers, and offer false testimony, and receive bribes.

If these men remain few in number, they will harm the city only slightly, at least in comparison to the harm they would cause were they to become a tyrant. The private citizen with a tyrannical personality will live his whole life associating with flatterers who are ready to obey him, will act as a friend in order to get what he wants but never make any man a genuine friend, will be untrustworthy and unjust in all of his doing.

We turn now to Suetonius' depictions of the young Caesars. With one notable exception, the description of each emperor's upbringing and education is limited to the opening chapters of his biography. Nero came to power at the age of seventeen, however, and his unfinished youth presented Suetonius with an opportunity, if not a challenge, to show the tyrannical personality both in its inchoate form and in the possession and exercise of autocratic power. Given the practice of ending the narrative account of the

emperor's early life at that point at which he comes to hold the supreme power and Nero's precipitate entry into office, the growth of the new emperor into adulthood inevitably extended from the narrative of his life before the principate into the eidological dissection of his reign. The narrative of the early life of the emperor Nero is an account of how the young man not only received all of the vices but also fell away from the virtues of his ancestors. Suetonius will set the stage for his portrait of the degenerate artist-in-the-making with the ill-omens of his birth, and then show how his circumstances, family life, and education all contributed to the corruption of the emperor. The portrait of Nero as a young man is a portrait of a monster in the making.

Suetonius begins the account by reporting that Nero's birth was ill-omened. The light of the rising sun fell upon the newly born Nero before it struck the earth. His father remarked that any child born to himself and Agrippina would be both detestable and to the detriment of the public good.⁸⁶ Just as Nero's vicious ancestors foreshadowed the vicious personality of their descendant, so too the omens surrounding his birth predict the ill-omened reign to come. Suetonius begins the life of Nero, therefore, by casting the biography more as a *vituperatio* than a *laudatio*. Although there will be a mix of good and bad traits and actions attributed to the Roman ruler, Suetonius has created the expectation that his judgment of Nero will ultimately be negative.

⁸⁶ *Nero* 6.1: "inter gratulationes amicorum negantis quicquam ex se et Agrippina nisi detestabile et malo publico nasci potuisse." The remark reinforces and confirms the tone that Suetonius established during the discussion of the emperor's ancestors: Nero is the bad fruit of a bad tree. The emphasis on the vicious Nero being the son of a vicious mother and a vicious father parallels the description of the variable Tiberius being the descendant of a morally varied mix of male and female ancestors.

The early years of Nero's life are characterized by a rapid transition from good to bad to worse. He loses his father at the age of three. Gaius confiscates Nero's share of the inheritance (*Nero* 6.3). His mother falls from favor and is exiled. As a result, he is raised by his aunt. She, in turn, entrusts his education to a dancer and a barber. Nero's early education is put in the hands of men who are patently unfit for the task. This rapid decline in Nero's circumstances parallels, and helps to explain, the later moral degeneration and decline that will characterize his reign. It has already been amply demonstrated, by this early point in the biography, that both nature and nurture contribute to the creation of the monster that Nero came to be.

Suetonius must explain not only the moral degeneration of the child, however, but also the ascent of that child to power. His mother is soon recalled from exile and his position has soon improved to such a degree that Messalina, fearing that Nero now poses a threat and an obstacle to her own son's rise to the principate, orders his assassination. Court intrigue has now entered into the portrait of Nero. The life of the future emperor is saved when a snake emerges from his pillow and drives away the would-be assassins (*Nero* 6.4).⁸⁷ The story is reminiscent of the infancy narratives of Hercules, putting Nero

⁸⁷ Dawson (1969) 262 suggests that the anecdote is probably reminiscent of a stage performance of Nero, taking on the role of Hercules in swaddling clothes strangling the serpents, "transferred to reality, with Messalina substituted for Juno as the Wicked Queen." I agree that an association with Hercules is intended, but am less inclined, although not entirely averse, to find here a reference to a specific stage role; my inclination is to see in this anecdote an explanation of Nero's later associations with Hercules and, in his attachment to the medallion his mother had made of the snakeskin found on the scene, of his idiosyncratic and variable superstitions.

in the position of the son of the king of the gods whose life is threatened unsuccessfully by Juno. Nero survives the attempt.

This miraculous sign of divine favor is followed by a youthful demonstration of the future emperor's ability. While still a young man of tender years ("tener adhuc necdum matura pueritia," *Nero* 7.1), Nero performs well ("constantissime favorabiliterque," *Nero* 7.1) at the Trojan games. The young man destined for greatness here offers a public sign of his greatness to come. Suetonius will follow this practice throughout the *Caesares*.⁸⁸

The emperor Claudius now adopts Nero and entrusts his education to Seneca. That Nero was educated by a philosopher invites a parallel with Alexander and his education by Aristotle. By having earlier included the detail that Nero's education was initially entrusted to a dancer and a barber, moreover, Suetonius uses the rise in the young man's educational fortunes to illustrate and confirm the rise of his political fortunes. Suetonius makes no mention, however, of the instruction the future emperor received from the Stoic philosopher, orator, and tragedian. He reports only that Seneca dreamed that his pupil was really Gaius, a dream which Nero soon fulfilled (*Nero* 7.1). This continues Suetonius' development of the theme, which began in the discussion of

⁸⁸ For example, Augustus delivered the funeral oration for his grandmother at the age of 12 and years later made a daring journey to his uncle in Spain "per infestas hostibus vias paucissimis comitibus naufragio etiam facto." *Aug.* 8.1. For the precocity of Augustus, see Louis (2010) 114, who compares the Suetonian account of the early activity of the future emperor with the story of Jesus discoursing in the temple: "La légende d'Auguste était déjà construite quand la tradition scriptuaire a donné de Jésus une image conforme à celle du roi-dieu. Le rapprochement d'Octave avec Jésus, discutant avec les Docteurs du Temple. (cf. Luc 2, 46)."

Nero's ancestry and continued with the ominous remarks made by Nero's father at his son's birth: the nature that Nero has received from his ancestors is bad. That nature will only reveal and assert itself more and more as the emperor grows into adulthood.

Although this is the only mention that Suetonius makes of Seneca in this narrative section of the *Nero*, Suetonius does offer some insight into the content of Nero's educational curriculum late in the eidological section of the biography.⁸⁹ Agrippina allowed Nero to study rhetoric, but not philosophy.⁹⁰ Suetonius suggests with this detail that it was Agrippina who ensured that Seneca would not educate Nero to be another Alexander. The historical examples of Plato and Aristotle would have created an expectation in the learned reader that the influence of Seneca could have turned Nero away from tyranny and toward monarchy. Suetonius has here explained why that did not happen. Agrippina's prohibition on the study of philosophy resulted in a partial education that made Nero not a monarch, but a tyrant.

Agrippina is not alone in limiting the education of the future emperor: Seneca had his part to play as well. He did not allow Nero to read the older orators, Suetonius explains, since these writers would have diminished his admiration for his teacher:

⁸⁹ Suetonius records in another eidological chapter that Seneca was among the intimates of Nero whom the emperor killed. Nero compelled him to commit suicide even though the old man had asked to be allowed to retire, was willing to convey all of his property to the emperor, and had sworn that he would rather die than harm the emperor. *Nero* 35.5: "Senecam praeceptorem ad necem compulit, quamvis saepe commeatum petenti bonisque cedenti persancte iurasset suspectum se frustra peritumque potius quam nocitum ei."

⁹⁰ *Nero* 52.1: "sed a philosophia eum mater avertit monens imperaturo contrariam esse." The Romans had an aversion to the study of philosophy in adulthood, for which see Woodman's commentary on *Agricola* 4.3 [forthcoming 2014].

“avertit ... a cognitione veterum oratorum Seneca praeceptor, quo diutius in admiratione sui detineret” (*Nero* 52.1). Suetonius attached an invidious motive to Seneca’s actions because doing so contributes to the portrait of a distorted education that the author began to create earlier in the biography. On the one hand, the omission of these *veteres oratores* from the curriculum would have deprived Nero of any exposure to the lively political oratory of the late Republic. On the other hand, by presenting Seneca as a self-serving teacher concerned more with winning the admiration of his student than with educating him, and as more of a sophist than a philosopher, Suetonius offers some explanation of why Nero becomes a tyrant rather than a philosopher king. Aristotle formed an Alexander; Seneca will shape only a monster. The emperor’s partial and distorted education, in other words, contributes to his de-formation as a ruler and, by extension, to his formation as a tyrant.

Suetonius makes no mention of the role that Seneca played in the rise or reign of Nero.⁹¹ Upon his accession, Nero first appears before the praetorians and then the Senate; he then gives the funeral oration for Claudius (*Nero* 8-9). Tacitus reports that this oration was written by Seneca, observing that the elders who had been present had observed that Nero was the first emperor to make use of *aliena facundia* (*Ann.* 13.3.2). Dio likewise affirms that Nero delivered two speeches on his accession, again penned by Seneca, before both the Senate and the praetorians (Dio 61.3.1). Suetonius mentions neither these speeches nor Seneca’s authorship. He instead reports only that Nero, “ut certiores adhuc indolem ostenderet,” affirmed at the outset of his reign that he intended to model his principate on that of Augustus (*Nero* 10.1).

⁹¹ For Seneca’s role in the reign of Nero, see Braund (2009) 2-4.

The young emperor initially enacts wise and prudent policies, gives an immense variety of entertainments, administers justice prudently and diligently, enacts a program of public works, and adopts on a policy of protecting the settled borders of the empire (*Nero* 10-18). Suetonius attributes these policies to Nero himself; he even describes at some length the way in which the emperor would personally hear legal cases, arrive at a verdict, and draft his own opinions (*Nero* 15.1). For Tacitus, by contrast, Seneca and Burrus in these early years restrained Nero's inclination toward slaughter and violence.⁹² For Suetonius, Nero's early reign is restrained, but is restrained by the emperor himself. For Tacitus, the reign of Nero will be the story of a man who shakes off the restraining influence of his advisers; for Suetonius, it will be the account of a boy who reveals his true nature as he grows bolder in office and older in years. Suetonius omits the restraining role of Seneca and Burrus, therefore, in order to focus on the tyrannical personality emerging and coming into its own. The removal of Seneca and Burrus from the story creates a narrative that is more in line with that of the traditional tyrant as depicted by Plato: his nature does not change, but emerges.

The narrative of Nero's youth and the rubrics that Suetonius devotes to the emperor's vices are interrupted by rubrics in which the author describes the early years of the reign in which Nero ruled as a good king. Suetonius insinuates that this early virtuous period was one of simulated virtue by casting the transition to Nero's wicked deeds and

⁹² See Tac. *Ann.* 13.2: "Ibaturque in caedes, nisi Afranius Burrus et Annaeus Seneca obviam issent. hi rectores imperatoriae iuventae et, rarum in societate potentiae, concordēs, diversa arte ex aequo pollebant, Burrus militaribus curis et severitate morum, Seneca praeceptis eloquentiae et comitate honesta, iuvantes in vicem, quo facilius lubricam principis aetatem, si virtutem aspernaretur, voluptatibus concessis retinerent."

crimes (“a probris ac sceleribus eius,” *Nero* 19.3) as a return to his youthful nature. Both the emperor’s love of chariot racing and his passion for music are said to be holdovers from the emperor’s boyhood. Music is reported to have been among the studies he undertook in his boyhood (“inter ceteras disciplinas pueritiae tempore,” *Nero* 20.1), while his passion for horses likewise began in his early years (“equorum studio vel praecipue ab ineunte aetate flagravat,” *Nero* 22.1). By beginning with these youthful pleasures, rather than with his vicious crimes, Suetonius is able simultaneously to associate Nero’s adult imperial vices with the young Nero and to suggest that his descent into vice was simply a gradual return to the nature he had exhibited as a young man.

Suetonius then states explicitly that while they were concealed in Nero’s early years, his *petulantia*, *libido*, *luxuria*, *avaritia*, and *crudelitas* should all be attributed to Nero’s nature and not to his youth (*Nero* 26.1). These five vices are, as we will see in the following chapter, among those which are traditionally most often associated with the tyrant. As evidence of these vices, Suetonius offers examples of behavior familiar from Plato’s depiction of the young man possessed of a tyrannical personality (*Pl. Rep.* 575b). He reports that Nero wandered the streets of Rome, attacking and robbing wayfarers, and burgling public buildings (*Nero* 26.1):

Post crepusculum statim adrepto pilleo vel galero popinas inibat
circumque vicos vagabatur ludibundus nec sine pernicie tamen, siquidem
redeuntis a cena verberare ac repugnantes vulnerare cloacisque demergere
assuerat, tabernas etiam effringere et expilare; quintana domi constituta,
ubi partae et ad licitationem dividendae praedae pretium absumeretur.

Immediately after sunset, he would disguise himself in a cap or a wig and enter cookshops and wander the streets set on pranks that were nevertheless not harmless; for he would beat men returning from dinner, wounding any who fought back and throwing them into the sewers. He would break into taverns and rob them, setting up a market place at home,

where he divided up the loot, sold it off to the highest bidder, and then squandered his profits.

The emperor's *libido*, *avaritia*, *luxuria*, and *crudelitas* are all here on display. All that is lacking from the Plato portrait are the band of followers whom the young tyrant leads on his mischievous errands. These soon follow (*Nero* 26.2):

Ac saepe in eius modi rixis oculorum et vitae periculum adiit, a quodam laticlavio, cuius uxorem adtrexaverat, prope ad necem caesus. Quare numquam postea publico se illud horae sine tribunis commisit procul et occulte subsequentibus.

And often in scuffles of this sort he found himself at risk of losing his eyes or even his life, nearly being cut down by a certain member of the senatorial order whose wife he had groped. On which account he thereafter never appeared alone in public at that hour without tribunes following him secretly at a distance.

Nero has adopted the practical measures of the young tyrant, gathering together a group of young men and leading them around the city as he goes about his business. The tyrant has enlisted his bodyguard. Nero also perpetrates the sort of sexually insulting assaults that are typical of the tyrant. Finally, he even comes perilously close to becoming a tyrant killed in revenge for hubris.

The adult Nero and the traditional tyrant are, therefore, the sources from which Suetonius has drawn most of his portrait of the early life of the emperor. For the most part, Suetonius has reconstructed the education and upbringing of the young Nero with one eye to the historical facts — we have no reason to doubt, for example, that Seneca was, in fact, the tutor of the young Nero — and one eye to the character and behavior of the adult emperor; the emperor's love of horses and passion for music are, I would suggest, the most likely reason these form a part of his education and the objects of his youthful passions. As a young man, Nero displays all of the tyrannical vices that he will

later exhibit as emperor. Suetonius also incorporates elements of the traditional portrait of the young tyrant into the *Nero*. The thuggish behavior of the young emperor, roving the streets beating and robbing those upon whom he happens to chance, reflect the behavior of the stock tyrant.

Tacitus uses Nero's nocturnal wanderings to establish that while there was *otium* abroad, *foeda lascivia* was the order of the day at Rome. In the *Annales*, Nero is reported to have roamed the city at night engaging in the same type of behavior that Suetonius describes. Tacitus emphasizes elements in the story that suggest Nero's activity is more a mix of *foeda lascivia* and *nostalgie de la boue* than it is reflective of a young tyrant roving the city in search of prey. First, Nero does not turn to cookshops and taverns, but to *lupanaria et deverticula* (*Ann.* 13.25.1); there is an element of sexual indulgence and carousing added to the portrait of thuggery. Second, Tacitus states explicitly that Nero disguised himself as a slave ("veste servili in dissimulationem sui compositus," *Ann.* 13.25.1). Tacitus also omits the detail of Nero himself stealing and auctioning off the goods in the palace; the stealing, and the *avaritia*, are instead attributed by Tacitus to a group of imperial companions. Finally, it is in the way these authors introduce the story of Nero's nocturnal adventures that we can most clearly discern the difference between their accounts. Tacitus draws a contrast between *otium* abroad and *foeda lascivia* at Rome.⁹³ Suetonius places Nero's behavior within a catalogue of vices -- *petulantia*, *libido*, *luxuria*, *avaritia*, and *crudelitas* -- that are all characteristic attributes of the

⁹³ Tac. *Ann.* 13.25.1: "Q. Volusio P. Scipione consulibus otium foris, foeda domi lascivia, qua Nero itinera urbis et lupanaria et deverticula veste servili in dissimulationem sui compositus pererrabat"

tyrant.⁹⁴ Tacitus uses this material to depict a lascivious emperor. Suetonius uses it to create a portrait of the tyrant as a young man. Suetonius is painting a full portrait of a tyrant as a young man, one who displays all of the typical tyrannical vices – vices, it should be noted, that Suetonius identifies. Tacitus uses the same material, but to depict a merely lascivious emperor.

In the *Caesares*, Suetonius uses the youth of the emperor in much the same way that the rhetoricians advised using the ancestry of the subject. A bad youth can be used either to explain why an emperor became a cruel tyrant or show that the emperor surmounted his bad beginnings to become a beneficent ruler. Likewise, a privileged youth can explain why the emperor ruled well or be offered to condemn the emperor for failing to meet expectations. Suetonius uses both a strategy of confirmation, therefore, and a strategy of contradiction. The adult behavior of some emperors confirms the expectations that they created by the way they were educated and the way they acted as young men.

Nero is the bad boy who grew up to be the bad emperor toward which his ancestry and his early life were leading, but other emperors defeat the expectations that they create as young men. The young Octavian exhibits in his youth a level of savage and unforgiving ferocity typical of the tyrant. He takes vengeance on the inhabitants of Perugia, condemning to death all of those who sought his pardon (*Aug.* 15.1). He sacrifices 300 prisoners of equestrian and senatorial rank at the altar of the divine Julius

⁹⁴ *Nero* 26.1: “Petulantiam, libidinem, luxuriam, avaritiam, crudelitatem sensim quidem primo et occulte et velut iuvenili errore exercuit, sed ut tunc quoque dubium nemini foret naturae illa vitia, non aetatis esse.”

on the Ides of March. It is improbable that Augustus had turned to human sacrifice.⁹⁵

Suetonius is rather creating a portrait of Octavian as a young tyrant who is a wrath-filled cause of fear among his subjects.⁹⁶ Augustus, as depicted by Suetonius, will later become the emperor whose rule was characterized by a *clementia* made all the more striking by the contrast provided by this youthful behavior.

Some of the emperors, however, will exhibit in their youth the same vices that will later come to characterize their reigns. Gaius exhibits not only the same cruelty and lust as Nero, for example, but also the same passion for singing and dancing (*Cal.* 11.1):

Naturam tamen saevam atque probrosam ne tunc quidem inhibere poterat, quin et animadversionibus poenisque ad supplicium datorum cupidissime interesset et ganeas atque adulteria capillamento celatus et veste longa noctibus obiret ac scaenicas saltandi canendique artes studiosissime appeteret, facile id sane Tiberio patiente, si per has mansue fieri posset ferum eius ingenium.

Yet even at that time he could not control his natural cruelty and viciousness, but he was a most eager witness of the tortures and executions of those who suffered punishment, reveling at night in gluttony and adultery, disguised in a wig and a long robe, passionately devoted besides to the theatrical arts of dancing and singing, in which Tiberius very willingly indulged him, in the hope that through these his savage nature might be softened.

⁹⁵ For the *clementia* that the other accounts of the battle of Perugia attribute to Octavian, and the improbability of Octavian having turned to human sacrifice, see Louis (2010) 151. In my opinion, Suetonius has created an example that, in accord with the high opinion that Suetonius will have of the reign of the emperor Augustus, associates even the youthful vices of the emperor with the wrath, not of a common tyrant, but of the hero Achilles.

⁹⁶ That the young Octavian is inspiring fear among the people is clear from the very next line in the biography: “Exstiterunt qui traderent conpecto eum ad arma isse, ut occulti adversarii et quos metus magis quam voluntas contineret, facultate L. Antoni ducis praebita, detegerentur” (*Aug.* 15).

Tiberius, the *sagacissimus senex*, predicts that this nature, grown to adulthood, will produce an emperor who is a viper for the Roman people and a Phaethon for the world.⁹⁷ Gaius does not disappoint these expectations and predictions.

The *Titus* and *Domitian* provide examples of these competing strategies in the case of emperors with identical ancestry and parentage. On the one hand, Titus creates expectations in his youth that he decisively defeated when he became emperor. His ill-spent youth brings the goodness of his reign into high relief in much the same way that ignoble ancestors can emphasize the achievements of their descendants. On the other hand, there is Domitian, an emperor who, like Nero, reveals in youth precisely the sort of tyrant that he will be in his reign. His tyrannical youth foreshadows the tyrannical reign to come in the way an ignoble ancestry can create an expectation of an ignoble descendant.

Suetonius begins the *Titus* by explaining that it was no easy task for the emperor to become the “*amor ac deliciae generis humani*” because he had been an object of hatred and vituperation both as a private citizen and as a colleague of his father (*Tit.* 1.1). In the first line of the biography, therefore, Suetonius has made clear that he intends to follow the rhetorical strategy of contrasting the man with his origins; of highlighting his adult virtues by emphasizing his youthful vices. Titus’ youth, in sum, provides a sharp contrast with his reign. Titus when young exhibits the vices of a tyrant and, by so doing, creates the expectation that he will become a new Nero: “*denique propalam alium Neronem et opinabantur et praedicabant*” (*Tit.* 7.1).

⁹⁷ Suet. *Cal.* 11: “*ut aliquotiens praedicaret exitio suo omniumque Gaium vivere et se natricem populo Romano, Phaethontem orbi terrarum educare.*”

Suetonius starts to create this expectation as soon as he begins to relate Titus' upbringing. The future emperor is brought up at court with Britannicus, "paribus disciplinis et apud eosdem magistros" (*Tit.* 2.1). Given Vespasian's more modest birth and social status, it is unlikely that Titus was educated alongside the son of the emperor. Suetonius has placed Titus at court with Britannicus because this places him in the same position at court as Nero and continues to develop the theme of Titus as the boy who is expected to become another Nero. Just as in the case of the human sacrifices attributed to Octavian at Perugia, Suetonius will engage in acts of *inventio* that add to the biographical portrait he is seeking to create.

The association with Nero is further developed when a physiognomist is summoned by Narcissus to examine Britannicus (*Tit.* 2.1). He predicts that Titus, not Britannicus, will one day become emperor. The boy who will in fact succeed Claudius and become emperor is not his son Britannicus, of course, but his adopted son Nero. Titus has assumed the part in this anecdote, therefore, that one would expect to have been played by Nero. Titus is seated next to Britannicus when he dies, and himself falls ill from the same poison (*Tit.* 2.1). In sharp contrast with the corresponding account in Tacitus, Nero is not even named in Suetonius' account of the death of Britannicus. If anything, Nero is conspicuous precisely by his absence from these anecdotes. By removing Nero from the scene, Suetonius subtly allows Titus to assume his role.

Although this discussion of Britannicus not only puts the reader in mind of Nero but even invites the reader to associate Titus and Nero, it is the way in which Titus is educated and lives his life as a young man that demands this association. Like Nero, Titus sings and dances *iucunde scienterque* (*Tit.* 3.1). Like Nero, he composes verses (*Tit.* 3.2).

Like Nero, he is reported to have been skilled at horsemanship (*Tit.* 3.2). He is even said to have been able to imitate anyone's handwriting "ac saepe profiteri maximum falsarium esse potuisse" (*Tit.* 3.2), a fact that calls to mind Nero's having been credited with having first devised a way to thwart such forgery (*Nero* 17.1: "adversus falsarios tunc primum repertum ..."). The future emperor is shown to be in training to resume the reign of the last of the Julio-Claudians and, perhaps, to surpass him in lawlessness.

The young Titus is a tyrant in his own right, however, and not merely in his emulation of Nero. He exhibits the *saevitia*, *luxuria*, *libido*, and *rapacitas* that are typical of the tyrant. Put in charge of the praetorians by his father, he commands them "incivilius et violentius" (*Tit.* 6.1). He invites Aulus Caecina, who was suspected of conspiring against the regime, to dinner and stabs him before he has left the dining room (*Tit.* 6.2). He throws parties into the middle of the night of precisely the sort that are attributed to tyrants.⁹⁸ His *libido* is revealed by his troops of eunuchs and rent boys, as well as his devotion to Queen Berenice, his *rapacitas*, finally, by his willingness to sell judicial judgments to the highest bidder (*Tit.* 7.1). This youthful behavior contrasts sharply with the behavior of the good king that Titus will exhibit when he becomes emperor.

In the case of Domitian, the future emperor exhibits the same fear, violence, envy, and vicious sexuality that are typical not only of the stock tyrant, but also of his own reign to come. His youth is characterized by sexual degradation; he soon comes to confuse sexuality and power, submitting to the lusts of others when weak and forcing others to submit to his *libido* when strong. The very first anecdotes in the biography

⁹⁸ *Tit.* 7.1: "praeter saevitiam suspecta in eo etiam luxuria erat, quod ad mediam noctem comissiones cum profusissimo quoque familiarium extenderet."

concern his sexually degrading relationships with Clodius Pollio and with the man who will succeed him, Nerva.⁹⁹ When Domitian acquires tyrannical power (*vim dominationis*), he begins to take the same liberties that he had earlier granted to others (*Dom.* 1.3):

ceterum omnem vim dominationis tam licenter exercuit ut iam tum qualis
futurus esset ostenderet. Ne exsequar singula, contractatis multorum
uxoribus Domitiam Longinam Aelio Lamiae nuptam etiam in
matrimonium abduxit.

Then again, he exercised the full force of tyranny (*dominatio*) with such license that he already revealed what sort of ruler he was going to be. I shall not linger on the details; suffice it to say that he made arrangements with the wives of many men and even abducted and married Longina Domitia, the wife of Aelius Lamia.

Having been debased by those more powerful than himself, he later debases others, showing his power and his domination by taking the wives of other men and treating them as his own.¹⁰⁰

Domitian's rise from powerlessness to power is characterized by behavior indicative of the dominant emotion of the tyrant: fear. Domitian is frequently in flight from danger. During the war with Vitellius, he first flees to the Capitol (*Dom.* 1.2: "confugit in Capitolium"). When his enemies have seized the hill and burned its temples, he passed the night in hiding (*Dom.* 1.2: "clam pernoctavit") and then disguised himself

⁹⁹ *Dom.* 1.1: "Satisque constat Clodium Pollionem praetorium virum, in quem est poema Neronis quod inscribitur "Luscio," chirographum eius conservasse et nonnumquam protulisse noctem sibi pollicentis; nec defuerunt qui affirmarent, corruptum Domitianum et a Nerva successore mox suo."

¹⁰⁰ The sexuality of the young Domitian also recalls the sexual antics of the adult Gaius. See *Cal.* 25, where the emperor makes a habit of taking the wives of other men and treating them as his own, divorcing those whom he had not married, and forbidding them to marry again.

as a priest of Isis (*Dom.* 1.2: “ac mane Isiaci celatus habitu interque sacrificulos variae superstitionis”). He next fled across the Tiber to the house of the mother of a fellow student, where he hid himself away so that no trace of him could be found by his pursuers (*Dom.* 1.2: “ita latuit, ut scrutantibus qui vestigia subsecuti erant, deprehendi non potuerit”). The youth of Domitian is marked by fear and by flight. The fear that will characterize his reign is already predominant in this portrait of his youth.¹⁰¹

Domitian also envies his father and brother. His desire for power equal to theirs drives him to plan an expedition to Gaul and Germany.¹⁰² He never stops plotting, both secretly and openly, to overthrow his brother from office: “neque cessavit ex eo insidias struere fratri clam palamque,” (*Dom.* 2.3). Envy, it might be countered, is a human vice not exhibited only by tyrants and those who aspire to tyranny; the acquisition of glory through military adventurism is a common feature of Roman life; Domitian and Titus are neither the first nor the most famous Roman brothers to have been in conflict over political power at Rome. The fact remains, however, that envy has been a central attribute of the tyrant since at least the time of Herodotus; perpetual and unnecessary wars have been recognized as paths to acquiring and means of retaining tyrannical power since Plato (*Rep.* 566e); and the risk that brother will be overthrown by brother had been a commonplace of the literature of tyranny since Aristotle. In the portrait of the young Domitian that Suetonius has created in these two short chapters, therefore, the future

¹⁰¹ Suetonius also often depicts the emperor Tiberius as being in flight from danger in his childhood. See *Tib.* 6.

¹⁰² *Dom.* 2.1: “Expeditionem quoque in Galliam Germaniasque neque necessariam et dissuadentibus paternis amicis incohavit, tantum ut fratri se et opibus et dignatione adaequaret.”

emperor exhibits the fear, the sexual degeneracy, the violence, the envy, and the family conflicts that are hallmarks of the traditional portrait of a tyrant.

The Emperor's Path to Power

The chronological sections with which each of the *Caesares* begins describe not only the family, ancestry, birth, and upbringing of the emperor, but also his path to the principate. The length of these sections, both in absolute and relative terms, reflects not merely how old the man was when he came to power, but also how complicated and unusual that emperor's path to power was.¹⁰³ Suetonius' narratives of the emperors' acquisition of power exhibit an interest not only in how the principate was first established by Julius Caesar and then defined by his successors, but also the political machinations by which each emperor succeeded his predecessor.

These interests are comparable to those which both ancient historians and philosophers had in how monarchs, and in particular tyrants, acquired and passed on their autocratic power. Indeed, the writings of these authors exhibit a consistent interest in, if not outright fascination with, the ways in which the tyrant can seize power. The term tyrant had originally referred to a ruler who acquired power through some unconstitutional means. Oedipus had been a tyrant, for example, because of the way in which he came to rule at Thebes. Polycrates was a tyrant because he had first seized

¹⁰³ The comparative length of the narrative sections with which the *Julius* and the *Augustus* begin reflect the age at which the emperor came to power; that 39 of the 89 surviving chapters of the *Julius* describe his 55-year march to power, but only eight of 101 chapters are devoted to the 19 years of Octavian's private life is not hard to explain. It is the interest of Suetonius in how a man becomes emperor, however, that best explains why the same amount of narrative is devoted to describing the 72 years of Galba's life and the 37 years of Otho's.

control of Samos with his two brothers and then set himself up as sole tyrant by executing the one and exiling the other. The often dramatic ways in which these men acquired power offered historians and dramatists grist for the literary mill and invited political thinkers to catalogue and analyze the full range of ways in which a ruler can acquire power. It should come as no surprise that the scheme by which Peisistratus was, literally, carried into power has always attracted more attention than any aspect of his day-to-day governance at Athens.

The varying relative and absolute lengths of the narrative sections in the *Caesares* reflect the varied ways in which these men succeeded to the principate. Understanding the life and the rise to power of the first-generation tyrant is a task that is not only more complicated but also essential for understanding both the origin and the nature of the dynastic regime. It is not hard to divine why the narrative of Julius' life and rise to power warrants substantially more attention than any subsequent emperor's. To understand the Caesars, one must first understand Caesar. The narrative in the *Julius* is not a simple record of his march through the major and minor offices that make up a Roman political career. Although his attainment of each of the major offices is noted,¹⁰⁴ the focus is on his progressive accumulation of power. The rubric that begins chapter 11 in the modern edition, for example, makes clear that Caesar's aedileship served primarily to win him the goodwill of the masses. This goodwill, in turn, allowed him to seek, even if unsuccessfully, the province of Egypt: "conciliato populi favore temptavit per partem tribunorum ut sibi Aegyptus provincia plebiscito daretur" (*Jul.* 11). It is not the passage

¹⁰⁴ See, e.g., *Jul.* 6 (quaestor), 10 (aedile), 15 (praetor) and 20 (consul). See also 4 (military tribune), 13 (his service as pontifex maximus). No similar march through the offices is observed in the other lives.

through the office that is significant, but Caesar's acquisition of power that will, in turn, permit him to obtain still more power.

Caesar is depicted as a political operator, responding to situations as they unfold, learning from his experiences, and taking steps for the future. After the praetors Gaius Memmius and Lucius Domitius had attempted to initiate a proceeding against him, for example, Caesar immediately took steps to prevent this from happening again in the future (*Jul.* 23.2):

Ad securitatem ergo posterius temporis in magno negotio habuit obligare semper annuos magistratus et e petitoribus non alios adiuuare aut ad honorem pati pervenire, quam qui sibi recepissent propugnatos absentiam suam; cuius pacti non dubitavit a quibusdam ius iurandum atque etiam syngrapham exigere.

For the sake of his future safety, then, he went to great pains to put the annual magistrates under obligation and neither to aid nor to allow any candidates to win office except those who promised to fight for him in his absence; for which promise he did not hesitate to exact from certain ones of them an oath and even a written contract.

Suetonius offers several other practical examples of Caesar's tactics. He used loans and gifts to win over all of Pompey's allies and the greater part of the senate (*Jul.* 27.1). He encouraged those whom he could not help with money to believe that civil war was what they needed (*Jul.* 27.2). He used the vetoes of the tribunes and bribery to block and thwart consuls who opposed him (*Jul.* 29.1). He used marriages to cement his alliances, offering Octavia, his sister Julia's granddaughter, in marriage to his fellow triumvir "ad retinendam autem Pompei necessitudinem ac voluntatem" (*Jul.* 27.1).

Caesar also buys power outright. Suetonius reports that Caesar spent money in order to secure the support of the public, of the gladiators, and of the soldiers. He won the favor of the people with a program of public building and by offering a series of games

and spectacles. He undertook the first of two building programs when he was aedile, repairing the Comitium, the Forum, several basilicas, and even the Capitol; he built a temporary colonnade, moreover, “in quibus abundante rerum copia pars apparatus exponeretur” (*Jul.* 10.1). Like the traditional tyrant described by Aristotle, Caesar must not only act, but be seen to be doing what he does and seen, ultimately, to be powerful.¹⁰⁵

He followed the same steps while he was allied with Pompey. He began the construction of a forum (*Jul.* 26.2). In memory of his daughter, moreover, he gave an unprecedented feast and put on yet another gladiatorial display (*Jul.* 26.2). He seems to have circumvented the restrictions that had limited the size of these gladiatorial shows during his aedileship both by having those gladiators who had not pleased the crowd rescued from the arena by force and by arranging for novices to be trained in the houses of knights and even of senators who had experience of arms (*Jul.* 26.3). He also, according to Suetonius, doubled the pay of the soldiers in perpetuity and distributed extra allotments of grain to them whenever it was available (*Jul.* 26.3).

In addition to winning the support of the powerful through bribes and promises of bribes to come, conciliating the masses through a program of public building and entertainment, and securing the support of the army with pay, bonuses, and grain, Caesar also placates provincials and foreign potentates (*Jul.* 28.1):

Nec minore studio reges atque provincias per terrarum orbem adliciebat,
aliis captivorum milia dono offerens, aliis citra senatus populi
auctoritatem, quo vellent et quotiens vellent, auxilia submittens, superque

¹⁰⁵ In addition to this program of public building, Caesar put on both combats with wild beasts and stage plays. He does so both in cooperation with his colleague and individually (*Jul.* 10.1). He exhibits gladiatorial combats, albeit with fewer participants than he had wanted. (*Jul.* 10.2).

Italiae Galliarumque et Hispaniarum, Asiae quoque et Graeciae potentissimas urbes praecipuis operibus exornans.

He took no less pains to win the devotion of princes and provinces all over the world, offering prisoners to some by the thousand as a gift, and sending auxiliary troops to the aid of others whenever they wished, and as often as they wished, without the sanction of the senate or people, besides adorning the principal cities of Asia and Greece with magnificent public works, as well as those of Italy and the provinces of Gaul and Spain.

The reliance that the tyrant places on foreign support cannot be dismissed as an influence on the creation of this portrait. Caesar makes the same effort, especially in terms of public works, to win the support of foreigners as he does to win the support of Romans. The first emperor did all that he had to do, therefore, to set himself up as a tyrant.

Caesar, the first man to become emperor, was different from his successors. He created a path along which he alone had to advance. Each of the other eleven lives explains how that man became a successor of Caesar. None of these biographies must explain the creation of the position in the Roman government toward which the man is advancing. None of them needed to do so, any more than they needed to set forth the ancestry of the Julii (presumably) a second time, because they each told of a man who lived in a world in which the principate already existed and, after Augustus, in which the principate had been by and large defined. Caesar's advance to power is, quite simply, more politically significant, more worthy of study, and more novel than that of any of the emperors who followed him. Nuances will be added in the case of each emperor. Some steps on each man's path to power will warrant more attention.

The *Augustus* is not so much the story of a tyrant's rise to power as an analysis of how a second-generation tyrant consolidates, legitimizes, and defines the power that he has received. Octavian came to the principate at a young age and did so by accepting it as

an inheritance from Julius Caesar. That there are a mere eight chapters of narrative in the *Augustus* reflects this short and direct path to power. Chapters 10 to 25 describe *per species* the wars waged, battles fought, and military policies adopted by the new emperor. These chapters show how Augustus used the army to consolidate his power, both by defeating his enemies outright on the battlefield and by establishing a relationship with the legions that would serve as a foundation for his regime.¹⁰⁶ That 15 chapters are devoted to this task, while only eight were needed to describe his ancestry, education, upbringing, and path to power, reflect the greater difficulty Augustus faced holding on to power than he had in obtaining it from Julius.¹⁰⁷ If the *Julius* was concerned with the getting of it all, the *Augustus* now turns to the holding on to it all.

The *Caligula* reports both how the future emperor survived at court and then rose to the principate. Gaius exhibits the ability of the tyrant to dissimulate and of the young tyrant to flatter and bear tales to those in power.¹⁰⁸ After making only a brief mention of the time that Gaius spent with Livia and Antonia, Suetonius turns to describing how he

¹⁰⁶ Suetonius is alert to the emperor's relationship with the army and his rapport with the soldiery for maintaining power. Suetonius explains the origins of the name Caligula, and in so doing takes the opportunity to describe the affection of the common soldiers for the future emperor. See *Cal.* 9: "Apud quos quantum praeterea per hanc nutrimentorum consuetudinem amore et gratia valuerit, maxime cognitum est, cum post excessum Augusti tumultuantis et in furorem usque praecipites solus haud dubie ex conspectu suo flexit." The alienating of the soldiers will, as we will see below in chapter five, lead to the overthrow of Galba.

¹⁰⁷ As we will see in chapter four, moreover, chapters 10-25 of the *Augustus* are another example of how Suetonius brings chronology into the eidological sections.

¹⁰⁸ For these characteristics of the tyrant on the make, see *Pl. Rep.* 575b, who remarks on the young tyrant's tendency to take bribes and bear false witness.

survived in the court on Capri. Others, the reader learns, would seek to draw the future emperor into quarrels or provoke him to speak ill of Tiberius. Gaius avoided these traps by means of his *incredibili dissimulatione*. He also acts in an obsequious manner toward Tiberius and his attendants (“quae vero ipse pateretur incredibili dissimulatione transmittens tantique in avum et qui iuxta erant obsequii,” *Cal.* 10.2). In a statement reminiscent of the longstanding equation of the relationship between tyrant and his people with that between a master and his slaves, Suetonius concludes that it was not without merit that people had said that there was no better slave but no worse master than Gaius (“ut non immerito sit dictum nec servum meliorem ullum nec deteriorem dominum fuisse,” *Cal.* 10.2).

In order to obtain the principate, Gaius exhibits not only the confusion of sex and power, but also the willingness to use poison and to murder, that are typical of the would-be tyrant on the make. Before he acts, however, favorable circumstances must present themselves. The fall of Sejanus and the subsequent purge removed many potential competitors, and Gaius stepped into the vacuum. He was appointed first as an augur and then, even before he has assumed this responsibility, to serve as a pontiff. It is the decimation of the court and his appointments to these religious roles that encourage Gaius to begin to hope for the succession (“ad spem successionis paulatim admoveretur,” *Cal.* 12.1). His ability to hide his character brings about his appointment to these offices “insigni testimonio pietatis atque indolis” (*Cal.* 12.1). He next uses adultery and a promise of marriage (“sollicitavit ad stuprum, pollicitus et matrimonium suum,” *Cal.* 12.2) to gain the support of the Praetorian Guard. Finally, he uses poison and the pillow to become emperor (*Cal.* 12.2).

The *Claudius* narrates the ups and downs of an unexpected emperor's surprising path to power. Suetonius analyzes the life of Claudius during the reigns of Augustus (*Claud.* 4), Tiberius (*Claud.* 5-6) and Gaius (*Claud.* 7). Suetonius allows Augustus to speak about Claudius through three of his letters. Suetonius then concludes that, whatever Augustus might have said in these letters, the best evidence of the emperor's judgment of Claudius can be found in the fact that he entrusted the future emperor with no public role save a seat in the college of augurs and made him an heir in only the third degree. Claudius then seeks power under Tiberius. He receives only a titular consulship. He then makes a request for genuine power. This is rebuffed by the emperor (*Claud.* 5), but Claudius is now favored by both the senate and, to an even greater degree, the *equites* (*Claud.* 6). He also fares better in Tiberius' will. He then begins to receive real power during the reign of Gaius, who makes him his colleague in the consulship and allows him to preside at the games in his place (*Claud.* 7).

As Claudius draws closer to power, the dangers increase. Suetonius catalogues both the insults (*contumeliis*, 8) and then the actual dangers (*discriminibus*, 9) that Claudius endured in order to reach the principate. There is no mention of any strategy by which Claudius survived. This reflects, in part, the author's judgment that Claudius' rise to power was miraculous ("imperium cepit quantumvis mirabili casu," *Claud.* 10.1). The consistent passivity of Claudius, however, also serves in the *Claudius* to emphasize the active, indeed decisive, role played the army in the appointment of the emperor. After the assassination of Gaius, Claudius hides. He is discovered, Suetonius reports, by a common soldier ("gregarius miles," *Claud.* 10.2). Claudius is then raised to the principate, Suetonius emphasizes by a careful juxtaposition, as he falls to the ground: "prae metu ad

genua sibi accidentem imperatorem salutavit” *Claud.* 10.2). The army is solely responsible for his rise to power. The emperor’s sole emotion as he becomes emperor is, naturally, the fear characteristic of a tyrant.

Claudius, however, does then take steps to secure his power. The senate is dilatory in asserting its authority “per taedium ac dissensionem” (*Claud.* 10.4). The masses clamor for a single ruler and, *nominatim*, for Claudius. At this point, Claudius permits the soldiers to swear allegiance to him. He promises each of the senators 15,000 sesterces, becoming the first emperor to secure his power at a price: “primus Caesarum fidem militis etiam praemio pigneratus” (*Claud.* 10.4). At this point, the emperor is secure in his power and moves to blot out all memory of that brief period in which this was in question: “imperio stabilito nihil antiquius duxit quam id biduum, quo de mutando rei p. statu haesitatum erat, memoriae eximere” (*Claud.* 11.1). Suetonius has depicted Claudius as the accidental emperor, chosen by the soldiers, whose loyalty is then bought and paid for, but an emperor nevertheless who quickly begins to rule as an emperor.

The *Galba* shows the same interests in how the early life of the emperor foreshadows not only the reign to come but also how a man will come to power. His association with Livia Augusta (*Galba* 5.2), his exhibition of tight-rope walking elephants (*Galba* 6.1), his good relationship with the soldiers under his command (*Galba* 6.2-3), his period of seeming retirement (*in secessu plurimum vixit*, 8.1), and his feigned indolence during the reign of Nero (*Galba* 9.1) are all the means by which he survived and advanced to the principate. His severe discipline as a military commander (*Galba* 6.2, and especially *Galba* 7.1-2) foreshadow the martinet who would one day become emperor (see *Galba* 12).

The relative complexity of the path that each individual emperor followed to arrive at the principate explains the relative length of the narrative sections of the *Caesares*. The varied, and seemingly declining, level of detail in the *Caesares* reflects not declining interest on the author's part or loss of access to archival material, but rather the mix of similarity and diversity in the lives and reigns of the emperors combined with the author's desire to avoid repetition. It is natural that the *Julius*, in which a man first follows the path to the principate, and the *Augustus*, in which both the consolidation and the functioning of the principate was first fully described, would both be significantly longer than the later lives. There was no need to reinvent the principate with each emperor. Suetonius' focus is on delimiting the precisions that each emperor added to the path to power and to the ways in which that power could be consolidated and exercised.

Conclusion

In these early chapters, Suetonius balances and mixes material that reflects the means generally employed by epideictic rhetoric and the specific features of the traditional portrait of the tyrant in antiquity. These are portraits of men in motion toward their office. Some of them move deliberately toward the supreme office; some seem almost to stumble into the principate. All must establish themselves in power, but not all are able to do so. All of them exhibit elements of the nascent imperial personality that Suetonius will dissect in the eidological chapters of the biography. In sum, Suetonius has crafted portraits of the tyrannical personality in its formative years that not only draw on but also, and to a much greater degree, contribute to the settled depiction of the ancient tyrant.

Chapter 3 The Stock Figure of the Tyrant

This chapter surveys the traditional portrait of the tyrant in Greek and Roman literature. While the standard techniques, forms, and practices of epideictic rhetoric serve to explain much of the form and method of the *Caesares*, it is the stock figure of the tyrant that underlies much of the substance of the biographical portraits that Suetonius creates. As with his formal choices, however, Suetonius' decision to cast the emperors as tyrants is a probable consequence of his rhetorical training. Just as the structure of his biographies reflects the structure of a rhetorical work of praise or blame, so too his descriptions and characterizations of the Roman emperors bear the mark of Roman rhetoric and, in particular, of the stock figure of the tyrant found not only in Roman invective and declamation, but also in ancient literature generally. I will now show how Suetonius used the attributes and actions traditionally ascribed to this figure of the tyrant to construct his biographies of the Caesars. This chapter sets forth, in rough outline, some of the more notable surviving examples of how Greek and Roman authors conceived of the figure of the tyrant and of the uses to which they put that figure in their works. I cannot establish with certainty that Suetonius knew of all, or indeed any, of these individual works; the survey reflects rather the tradition of which Suetonius in the *Caesares* unmistakably evinced his awareness.

Although Suetonius' rhetorical training probably provided the initial impetus for his decision to cast his biographies of the emperors in terms of the stock figure of the tyrant, his portrait, as we will see, reflects the stock figure of the tyrant as it was developed not only in Roman oratory, but throughout a broad range of ancient literary genres. The power of the image of the tyrant to move and persuade a Roman audience

had been both recognized and exploited by Cicero, who cast not only Verres, but also Caesar and Antony, as traditional tyrants; in Suetonius' own day, the tyrant remained a familiar figure in the declamatory exercises of the schools. The stock figure of the tyrant that forms the basis for Suetonius' portraits of the emperors is not merely a figure of invective and declamation, however, but a creation of the tragedians, historians, and philosophers as well. I will make clear that Suetonius' understanding and conception of the tyrant reflects a wide range of literary and intellectual influences. I consider, therefore, not only how Cicero uses the stock figure of the tyrant, but also the tyrants that Greek and Roman dramatists, historians, and philosophers described.

Finally, I note that my intention is only to review the assortment of attributes traditionally ascribed to tyrants in the ancient world and to show both the continuity and the persistence of the portrait to which these attributes contributed. I have no intention of documenting each and every instance in which an individual is characterized as a tyrant, nor do I aim to survey the historical instances of tyranny in the ancient world. Any gaps that I have allowed to remain in this survey remain because that particular author or work does not add to our picture of the literary tyrant. My aim is to create a sketch of the stock figure of the tyrant, not a comprehensive review of the uses made of that type in ancient literature.

* * *

Because my interest is ultimately in the place of the stock figure of the tyrant in ancient literature, I will pass over the historical reality of Greek tyranny entirely and linger only briefly on the etymology and original significance of the Greek term

τύρρανος.¹⁰⁹ It will here suffice to note that, according to the fourth-century sophist Hippias, τύρρανος was first found in the works of Archilochus, whose extant poetry does by a happy chance contain the earliest extant use of the term applied to a man.¹¹⁰ Archilochus uses the term specifically in reference to the Lydian king, Gyges, whose wealth and tyranny he purports not to envy. The association with wealth may be significant, a sign of the later depiction of the tyrant as a ruler out to promote his own interests over those of his subjects; that the term is first applied to Gyges, however, a ruler who came to power by assassinating his predecessor, reflects the traditional understanding of the tyrant as a ruler who acquired power through some unconstitutional means.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Studies of Greek tyranny include Berve (1967), McGlew (1993), Luraghi (1994), and Lewis (2006). The ancient scholiasts and lexicographers offered four etymologies for the term, for which see LaBarbe (1971) 471-7. For what little is known of the etymology of τύρρανος, see Parker (1998) 145-9, who observes that the word's origin remains something of a mystery, with few clear cognates in the languages of Asia Minor from which it is supposed to have been imported into Greek. Parker (149) n.12 observes that the original connotations of the word cannot have been negative, given its frequent use as an epithet for a divinity; its original connotation was something akin to "almighty ruler." See also Leigh (1996) 191 n.24 and the sources there cited for additional discussion of the origins of the word.

¹¹⁰ As Giorgini (1993) 70-2 observes, the tyrant, as a literary figure associated specifically with violence, anomia, and hubris, can already be discerned in outline in the *Theogony* and, albeit to a lesser degree, the *Works and Days*. For the evolution of the concept of the tyrant in the writings of Tyrtaeus, Alcaeus, Solon, and Pindar, see Giorgini (1993) 72-105.

¹¹¹ See Archilochus fr. 25; Hippias FGrH 6F6. For the story of Gyges, see Hdt. 1.8-14. I follow Giorgini (1993) 73-5 in concluding that Archilochus applied the term to Gyges

At Athens, as at Rome, the tragedians made an early and lasting contribution to the development of the portrait of the tyrant. The tyrant often takes center stage in the work of the tragedians. The words τύραννος, τυραννίς, and τυραννικός do not inevitably carry negative connotations, although the pride of the Athenians in their democracy would likely have created a bias against the figure of the tyrant in the tragedians.¹¹² He is depicted, as Zeus in the *Prometheus Bound*, as a violent, proud, and selfish despot, “who rules by force rather than by law, angrily crushes all opposition without mercy, suppresses freedom of speech, mistrusts and mistreats his supporters,” threatens the annihilation of his subjects, and indulges his lusts without regard for the harm he causes.¹¹³ He has no respect for the laws of the gods, subordinating divine law to his own

because he was a usurper who had acquired his power unconstitutionally rather than because he exhibited the negative qualities that later came to be associated with the rule of a tyrant; the traditional story of his accession to power, with its emphasis on the way Gyges broke the natural chain of succession, leads me to believe that this was a predominant characteristic of his reign that would have led Archilochus to deem the term a condign epithet. McGlew (1993) 52-86 stresses the relationship between the early understanding of tyranny and the concept of δίκη.

¹¹² For the connotations, both negative and positive, of the tyrant in Greek tragedy, see Page (1938) 98; Dawe (1982) 74, 110; Bond (1988) 70; Mastronarde (2002) 185. As Page (99) observes, the absolute use in the negative sense is found only in the fourth century. For the depiction of tyranny in Athenian tragedy and the implications of this depiction for our understanding of the relationship between tyranny and democracy in classical Athens, see McGlew (1993) 190-206. For the connotations of τύραννος, see O’Neal (1986) 26-40.

¹¹³ Griffith (1983) 7 (citations omitted), observing that Zeus “displays all the traditional characteristics of the ‘bad tyrant’.”

decrees; Creon's high-handed assertion of his own authority in the *Antigone* and his subordination of divine law to the laws of his regime are typical of the tyrant.¹¹⁴ The tyrant, Theseus explains in the *Suppliants*, is himself the master of the law; that being the case, equality dies under a tyranny.¹¹⁵ Finally, the relationship between tyranny and hubris, which will characterize practically all subsequent depictions of the tyrant, is already well established in the dramas of the tragedians.¹¹⁶ It is with the tragic depictions of Zeus, Agamemnon, Oedipus, Creon, and Pentheus, therefore, that the autocrats receive their earliest extended depictions.

¹¹⁴ See Griffith (1999) 33: "In Kreon's case, not only does he offend against the sacred laws of family and the underworld gods, but his increasingly tyrannical conduct (esp. his identification of the 'city' with himself; his obsession with his own authority; his harsh and high-handed threats; his unreasonable suspicion of others)) contributes directly to his downfall"

¹¹⁵ Eur. *Supp.* 429-32: οὐδὲν τυράννου δυσμενέστερον πόλει, / ὅπου τὸ μὲν πρώτιστον οὐκ εἰσὶν νόμοι / κοινοί, κρατεῖ δ' εἷς τὸν νόμον κεκτημένος / αὐτὸς παρ' αὐτῷ: καὶ τόδ' οὐκέτ' ἔστ' ἴσον. Theseus continues in this vein, eventually arriving at the risk that the tyrant poses to the virgin daughters of the inhabitants of his city. See Eur. *Supp.* 452-4: ἢ παρθενεύειν παῖδας ἐν δόμοις καλῶς, / τερπνὰς τυράννοις ἡδονάς, ὅταν θέλῃ, / δάκρυα δ' ἐτοιμάζουσι;

¹¹⁶ See Soph. *O.T.* 873: ὕβριν φυτεύει τυραννίς. I accept Dawe's emendation of the reading in the mss, ὕβρις φυτεύει τυραννίν, for the reasons he provides. See Dawe (1982) 147-8.

Herodotus uses many of the traditional traits of the tyrant in his depictions of both eastern monarchs and Greek autocrats¹¹⁷ He does not categorically condemn monarchy among the barbarians, but pharaohs and kings do not rule over free people. Autocratic rule was necessary for servile peoples, even though it was unfit for free Greeks. Nevertheless, although tyranny may have been less offensive when exercised over Medes, Persians, Lydians, and Egyptians, these eastern potentates exhibit the familiar traits of the Greek tyrant. They are deceptive, lustful, proud, and violent, and are free to do whatever they please.¹¹⁸

The speech that Herodotus has Otanes make in favor of democratic government in the constitutional debate in the third book of his history summarizes well the personality of the stock tyrant. Otanes argues that monarchy should be rejected because even the best men are quickly corrupted when they become monarchs (Hdt. 3.80.3-5):

¹¹⁷ For the tyrant in Herodotus, see How and Wells (1912) 338-47; Waters (1971); Lateiner (1984) 257-84; Forsdyke (2006) 236-7. For Herodotus' presentation of the tyrants of Corinth, which is found at Hdt. 3.48-53, 5.92, see Gray (1996) 361-89.

¹¹⁸ Lateiner (1989) 172-9 sets out in tabular form how the attributes of the tyrant are applied to individual tyrants and autocrats in Persia, Lydia, Media, Egypt, Corinth, and elsewhere in Greece. The specific attributes of the tyrant that he identifies include: 1) he is ruled by arrogant pride; 2) he equates his will or fancy with the law; 3) he exhibits rapacious greed and unchecked aggression; 4) He fears for his own life and shows jealousy of others; 5) he commits atrocities; 6) he perpetrates outrages; 7) he forces his will on women, often confusing sex with politics; 8) he executes subjects without trial; 9) he is not accountable; 10) he shows hostility to virtue and takes pleasure in wickedness in his subjects; 11) his behavior promotes flattery and leads to treachery; 12) he inhibits free speech; 13) he errs seriously on account of his isolation; 14) he disturbs ancestral laws and customs.

καὶ γὰρ ἂν τὸν ἄριστον ἀνδρῶν πάντων σπάντα ἐς ταύτην ἐκτὸς τῶν
 ἐωθότων νοημάτων στήσειε. ἐγγίνεται μὲν γὰρ οἱ ὕβρις ὑπὸ τῶν
 παρεόντων ἀγαθῶν, φθόνος δὲ ἀρχῇθεν ἐμφύεται ἀνθρώπῳ. δύο δ' ἔχων
 ταῦτα ἔχει πᾶσαν κακότητα: τὰ μὲν γὰρ ὕβρι κεκορημένος ἔρδει πολλὰ
 καὶ ἀτάσθαλα, τὰ δὲ φθόνῳ. καίτοι ἄνδρα γε τύραννον ἄφθονον ἔδει εἶναι,
 ἔχοντά γε πάντα τὰ ἀγαθὰ. τὸ δὲ ὑπεναντίον τούτου ἐς τοὺς πολίτας
 πέφυκε: φθονέει γὰρ τοῖσι ἀρίστοισι περιεοῦσί τε καὶ ζώουσι, χαίρει δὲ
 τοῖσι κακίστοις τῶν ἀστῶν, διαβολὰς δὲ ἄριστος ἐνδέκεσθαι.
 ἀναρμοστότατον δὲ πάντων: ἦν τε γὰρ αὐτὸν μετρίως θωμάζης, ἄχθεται
 ὅτι οὐ κάρτα θεραπεύεται, ἦν τε θεραπεύῃ τις κάρτα, ἄχθεται ἅτε θωπί. τὰ
 δὲ δὴ μέγιστα ἔρχομαι ἐρέων: νόμαιά τε κινέει πάτρια καὶ βιάται γυναῖκας
 κτείνει τε ἀκρίτους.

For even the best of all men placed in such a position would come to think
 unwonted thoughts. For hubris is born from his present goods; and envy is
 innate to man from birth. From these two evils one comes to have every
 breed of evil. Sated, the king does many reckless deeds, some from hubris,
 some from envy. The man who possesses absolute rule ought to be free
 from envy, having as he does all good things; but the opposite of this
 comes to be the case in his dealings with the citizens: for he begrudges
 those who at present are best among the living, and he delights in the
 worst of the citizens; he is the first to give ear to slanders and
 denunciations. He is the most incongruous and ill tempered of all: if you
 honor him in a measured way, he is vexed that you do not serve him with
 your whole heart; if someone serves him excessively, he is vexed as if by
 a flatterer. But I am coming to the telling of the greatest of these things:
 He disturbs the laws of his country, he forces himself upon women, and he
 puts men to death without trial.

Monarchs, according to Otanes, typically suffer from hubris, feel envy toward the best,
 shower favor upon the worst, expect flattery while condemning flatterers, act contrary to
 law, violate women, and put men to death indiscriminately. The vices to which Otanes
 here refers are on display in the lives of many of the autocrats whom Herodotus
 describes.¹¹⁹ Polycrates, the tyrant of Samos, for example, is associated with fratricide
 (Hdt. 3.39.2), foreign wars and piracy (Hdt. 3.39.3), deceitful executions (Hdt. 3.44.2),
 and a threat to burn the women and children of his city (Hdt. 3.45.4). The perverted

¹¹⁹ See Gammie (1986) 171-95; Lateiner (1989) 172-9.

sexuality of the tyrant — the marriage of Cambyses to his sister is one such example (Hdt. 3.3.34) — and their repeated “confusion of sex and power has a ubiquitously serious intent, to illustrate graphically the hubris of the autocrats.”¹²⁰

Herodotus, perhaps reflecting the influence of Ionian philosophy, is also the first author whom we have encountered to consider the question, albeit somewhat obliquely, of whether the tyrant is happy. Croesus and Solon conduct a discussion in which the ethical implications of monarchy figure large.¹²¹ Croesus was confident that his position as absolute ruler, and the wealth and power that accrued to him because of that position, made him happy. Croesus thought that he was the happiest of men and expected that Solon would confirm him in his opinion. Solon did not agree. His reason for doing so — that no man should be deemed happy before he has died — is not unique to a monarch. The question of whether those who exercise absolute power are happier than those over whom they exercise that power, which will receive extensive treatment in the writings of Plato and Xenophon, has already been raised by the Father of History.

Although Periander, Polycrates, and Thrasybulus all appear in Herodotus, the account of the advent, reign, and deposition of the Peisistratids is perhaps the most memorable portrait of tyrants and tyranny in the work.¹²² The ways in which the

¹²⁰ Lateiner (1984) 204.

¹²¹ This encounter between Solon and Croesus is, of course, one example of a wise adviser appearing to counsel a monarch in Herodotus. For the wise adviser in Herodotus, see Lattimore (1939) 24-35. My concern here, however, is with the subject of their conversation, rather than with the motif of the wise adviser itself.

¹²² See Hdt. 1.59-64. For the deception involving the girl Phye, see 1.60. For an analysis of the ways in which the advent of Peisistratus is depicted in the literature, with an

character and the personal life of the tyrant, and the character and personal lives of his family and intimates, can have a decisive effect on the course of the reign, are in evidence in the account of the attack of Harmodius and Aristogeiton (Hdt. 5.55-56). In the tale of the Peisistratids, one can discern, moreover, a pattern of moderate beginnings degenerating into cruel tyranny following a decisive moment in the reign that will recur in the traditional narrative of the tyrant.¹²³

Thucydides musters many of the elements of what will become, if it had not already done so, the traditional portrait of the tyrant to craft his depiction of the Spartan Pausanias. That Pausanias was a military hero, as an initial matter, places him in the tradition of generals who became strong men and then set themselves up as tyrants. It is also telling that Pausanias began to exhibit the characteristics of a tyrant after he had been in contact with Xerxes; the description of the Spartan general and of the steps that he took to secure his power likewise resemble the description of the steps Deioces took to secure his power over the Persians.¹²⁴ The readily discernible tie that Greek tyranny has to

emphasis on the deception involving Phye, and the ways in which the historical Peisistratus probably secured and maintained his hold on power, see Blok (2000) 17-48.

¹²³ See Hdt. 5.55: μετὰ ταῦτα ἐτυραννεύοντο Ἀθηναῖοι ἐπ' ἕτεα τέσσερα οὐδὲν ἥσσον ἀλλὰ καὶ μᾶλλον ἢ πρὸ τοῦ. The overthrow of the Peisistratids and the role of the Spartans in bringing about an end of the tyranny at Athens is described at 5.62-65. The tyranny falls when the sons of the Peisistratids are captured by the Spartans; the Peisistratids agreed to depart from Athens in order to save the lives of their young (5.65.1-2).

¹²⁴ Herodotus (1.98-99) describes the steps that Deioces took, including having a palace worthy of a king built for him and a city worthy of an imperial city and introducing practices to restrict admission to his presence. This solemn ceremonial was designed to

Persian tyranny in Herodotus persists in the work of Thucydides. Pausanias is a tyrant in the Persian mold, therefore, but a tyrant nonetheless. Pausanias can no longer live like an ordinary man. He assumes foreign dress. He is attended by a foreign bodyguard of Medes and Egyptians as he travels through Thrace. He keeps a Persian table. He makes himself difficult to approach. He is violent. He is proud.¹²⁵

The most notable tyrant in Thucydides, however, is not a man, but a city.¹²⁶ The equation of Athens with a tyrant, ruling over an enslaved empire, is a theme that runs through the history. Pericles, in his last words to the Athenians, advises them to hold on to their empire, or face the wrath of their subject peoples. He likens the empire to a tyranny, something unjust to obtain, but dangerous to release.¹²⁷ Hornblower notes that while Pericles here likens the empire to a tyranny (ὥς τυραννίδα), Cleon will identify it

safeguard Deioces from his contemporaries: ταῦτα δὲ περὶ ἑωυτὸν ἐσέμνυνε τῶνδε εἵνεκεν, ὅκως ἂν μὴ ὁρῶντες οἱ ὁμήλικες, ἔοντες σύντροφοί τε ἐκείνῳ καὶ οἰκίῃς οὐ φλαυροτέρῃς οὐδὲ ἐξ ἀνδραγαθίην λειπόμενοι, λυπεοίατο καὶ ἐπιβουλεύοιεν, ἀλλ' ἑτεροῖός σφι δοκέοι εἶναι μὴ ὁρᾶσι (*Hdt.* 1.99.2).

¹²⁵ For the portrait of Pausanias as an eastern despot, see Thuc. 1.130. Rhodes (1970) 399 concludes that the portrait of Pausanias is cast in these terms “as a comment on the holier-than-thou standpoint from which the Spartans denounced Athenian imperialism at the beginning of the Peloponnesian War.” Pausanias is portrayed as a tyrant, therefore, in order to counteract the Spartan portrait of the Athens as a tyrant-state. For the sources for Thucydides’ portrait of Pausanias and Themistocles, see Westlake (1977) 95-110.

¹²⁶ For the portrayal of Athens as a *tyrannos polis*, see Hunter (1974) 120-6; Connor (1984) 176-84; Scanlon (1987) 286-301; Hornblower (1991) 337.

¹²⁷ See Thuc. 2.63.1-2: ὥς τυραννίδα γὰρ ἤδη ἔχετε αὐτήν, ἣν λαβεῖν μὲν ἄδικον δοκεῖ εἶναι, ἀφεῖναι δὲ ἐπικίνδυνον.

outright as such.¹²⁸ Cleon will also identify the subject cities as conspirators (ἐπιβουλεύοντας) who are held in check by force, not by goodwill. The association between Persian monarchy and Greek tyranny, which facilitates the equation of the two and the importation of the concepts applied to the barbarian kings into the discourse of the Greek autocrats, is almost nowhere more clear than in the casting of the Athenian empire in the role of a successor to Persian despotism.¹²⁹

Plato in the *Republic* examines the soul of the tyrant and casts him as the ethical and political opposite of the philosopher king. The soul of the philosopher king is ruled by reason endowed with wisdom; the tyrant is the slave of his appetites.¹³⁰ Plato describes him as a man whose lusts flit around him amid clouds of incense and perfumes and garlands and wine — and all the other pleasures of a dissolute life (Pl. *Rep.* 573a-b). The man with a tyrannical personality, when he does not himself wield the power of a tyrant in the state, often becomes a thief, a burglar, a cutpurse, a footpad, and a temple

¹²⁸ For Cleon's identification of Athens as a tyranny, see Thuc. 3.37.2; Hornblower (1991) 337.

¹²⁹ For the association of the Athenian and Persian empires and their identification as tyrannies, see Scanlon (1987) 286-8. For the association of monarchies, in general, with tyrants, see Tuplin (1985) 366, who cites as evidence Arist. *Pol.* 1258^a16, 1313^a37, 1313^b9; Pl. *Laws* 696a.

¹³⁰ For the portrait of the tyrant in Plato, see generally Heintzeler (1927). For a discussion of the tyrant's unhappy soul in the *Republic*, see Parry (2007) 386-414. For the implications of tyranny for the life of the state in Plato's *Republic*, see McGlew (1993) 206-12. As my interest is in the traditional portrait of the tyrant and its influence on Suetonius, I pass over Plato's categorization of necessary and unnecessary appetites (558d-559b), the outlaw appetites (571b-2), the erotic passions (572e-573a), and their respective roles in the oligarchic, democratic, and tyrannical souls.

robber; he plays the part of an informer; he accepts bribes (Pl. *Rep.* 575b). The tyrannical personality never experiences freedom or friendship (Pl. *Rep.* 576a: ἐλευθερίας δὲ καὶ φιλίας ἀληθοῦς τυραννικὴ φύσις ἀεὶ ἄγευστος).

As he enters into public life, and seeks to make himself the autocrat over the state, the tyrant reveals himself as a man of violence, a wolf with a taste for the blood of his countrymen (Pl. *Rep.* 566a) and a parricide who attacks his own parents (Pl. *Rep.* 569b). He uses the courts and unjust accusations to assassinate his fellow citizens (Pl. *Rep.* 565e-566a). Once he has established himself in power, he makes the famous tyrannical request (τὸ δὴ τυραννικὸν αἶτημα τὸ πολυθρόλητον) for a bodyguard (Pl. *Rep.* 566b). Plato, like Herodotus, posits that a tyrant will appear moderate in the first days of his reign, having a smile and a greeting for all whom he chances to meet; he will be gracious and gentle (Ἰλέως τε καὶ πρᾶος) to all in these first days of his rule (Pl. *Rep.* 566d-e).

Plato reviews the steps that a tyrant will take to protect himself and his hold on power. He will stir up wars so that the people will have need of a leader (Pl. *Rep.* 566e). He will impose confiscatory taxes to keep his people focused on their daily needs; when the people have to devote themselves to the tasks of daily life, they will be less inclined to conspire against him (ἥττον αὐτῷ ἐπιβουλεύωσι, Pl. *Rep.* 567a). He will purge the state of its good citizens (Pl. *Rep.* 567b-c), and draw his friends from among slaves and foreigners (Pl. *Rep.* 567e).¹³¹ The tyrant depicted in Plato is now a necessarily negative figure; the tyrant is now a decidedly negative figure. He is a creature of fear, unbounded

¹³¹ Plato paints a similar portrait of the tyrant as a man unable to form true friendships in the *Gorgias* 510b-c. For the tyrant's fear of good men and distrust of flattering courtiers in Plato and in the tradition, see Dodds (1959) 344.

appetites, and suspicion; he rules by breaking the will and the ability of his subjects to resist him.

Xenophon continues the consideration of the happiness of the tyrant in his *Hiero*. His concern is not with the justice or goodness of the tyrant, but with his happiness, his ability to enjoy his life while exercising his office. The tyrant, as Hiero explains to Simonides, is not the happiest of men. Food does not taste good, wine gives no pleasure, perfumes do not smell sweet, and sex offers no satisfaction to the tyrant who must live always with the risk of being murdered (Xen. *Hiero* 1.17-28). Praise and honor have no meaning when they come from men under compulsion (Xen. *Hiero* 7.5-8). A tyrant victorious at the games has won no fair victory; one who loses, however, appears utterly ridiculous (Xen. *Hiero* 11.6-7). The tyrant must stand watch like an enemy on campaign in a hostile land, both when he is at home and when he is abroad (Xen. *Hiero* 2.6-16). He must live without friends from his own country and class, taking slaves and foreigners for friends (Xen. *Hiero* 6.1-3). The tyrant described in the *Hiero* is the loneliest of men.¹³²

Aristotle in the *Politics* conducts perhaps the most sustained political analysis of tyranny. His aim in this work is to determine the ideal constitution and to understand how such a form of government can be attained and maintained.¹³³ Tyranny, for Aristotle as

¹³² For an analysis of the content of the *Hiero*, see Gray (2007) 37-8.

¹³³ By constitution, Aristotle means the “arrangement of the offices of a state and, in particular, of that office which is sovereign over all.” Arist. *Pol.* 3.6, 1278^b8-10: ἔστι δὲ πολιτεία πόλεως τάξις τῶν τε ἄλλων ἀρχῶν καὶ μάλιστα τῆς κυρίας πάντων. As Barker (1952) lxvi observes, *politeia* is a term that is often translated “by the Latin terms ‘constitution’ or ‘form of government’, but which again is something quite different from either; for it means, as Aristotle explains, a way of life, or a system of social ethics, as

for Plato, is a perversion of monarchy.¹³⁴ After discussing the classification (*Pol.* 3.6-8), the varieties (*Pol.* 3.14-4.10), and the desirability (*Pol.* 4.11-13) of aristocracy, monarchy, and constitutional government, Aristotle turns to consider how each is established and how legislative, executive, and judicial power is apportioned within them (*Pol.* 4.14-16), and then finally to how each is preserved and how each is destroyed (*Pol.* 5.1-12). The analyses of how a tyrant rules, remains in power, and is finally overturned often overlap with Aristotle's comparable analyses of monarchy.

Aristotle devotes one section to examining how a tyranny in particular is preserved.¹³⁵ The philosopher divides the ways in which tyrannies are preserved between

well as a way of assigning political offices." I have chosen to use both of these translations for *politeia*; that Aristotle's term is more comprehensive, reaching into the social and ethical spheres, presents no difficulty for our reading of Suetonius, who likewise extends his political biographies well into the social and ethical spheres. For Aristotle's political terminology generally, see Barker (1952) lxiv-lxviii.

¹³⁴ There are three primary forms of constitution, each of which is distinguished by who holds the power to rule: monarchy, which is rule by the one; aristocracy, which is rule by the few; and constitutional, which is rule by the many. Each of these has a true form and a corresponding perversion. The true form promotes the common good, while the perversion seeks instead to further some private interest. The perversion of constitutional government is democracy. The perversion of aristocracy is oligarchy. The perversion of monarchy, finally, is tyranny. For a discussion of Aristotle's six constitutional forms, see Rowe (2000) 371-7. Garver (2011) 111-5 explains the ways in which Aristotle's system of six constitutions departs from Plato's five constitutions and analogizes these political classifications compare with those drawn by Aristotle in the *Poetics* and in his biological works.

¹³⁵ For an analysis of this "handbook for tyrants," see generally Blomqvist (1998) 20-2; Keyt (1999) 168-81.

a “way of repression” (*Pol.* 1313^a34-1314^a29) and a “way of moderation” (*Pol.* 1314^a29-1315^b10).¹³⁶ The way of repression describes what a modern reader would recognize as the traditional form of tyranny.¹³⁷ Its repressive measures aim to protect the tyrant by rendering his subjects unable to rise up against him.¹³⁸ It is the type of totalitarian regime of which the Persian Empire was the prime example, a regime that seeks to crush the spirit of its people.¹³⁹

To accomplish this aim, the repressive tyrant will cut down those who are outstanding and do away with those who are proud (*Pol.* 1313^a40-41). He will close schools, clubs, public meals, and educational institutions at which pride and trust might grow. He will regulate society so that people cannot come to know and trust each other (*Pol.* 1313^a40-1313^b6), creating a society of surveillance in which people live always

¹³⁶ Newman (1887) 4.448 distinguishes between the two ways as follows: “In the first, it is taken for granted that the subjects of a tyrant are necessarily hostile to him, and the aim is to make them *unable* to conspire ... in the second the aim is to make the subjects of the tyrant *indisposed* to conspire.”

¹³⁷ Aristotle traces the origin of the Way of Repression to Periander of Corinth, but observes that many similar measures can be discerned in the reigns of other Greek tyrants and, especially, in the history of the Persian empire (*Pol.* 1313^a36-37).

¹³⁸ These repressive measures preserve the power of the tyrant by destroying both pride and trust among the tyrant’s subjects (*Pol.* 1313^b2), by making men think in small ways (μικρὰ φρονεῖν, *Pol.* 1314^a16), and by making them small-minded and weak-souled (μικρόψυχος, *Pol.* 1314^a16-17). The relationship that this tyrant has with his subjects is despotic: the relationship of a master over his slaves.

¹³⁹ Aristotle has here described a police state in which the citizens are plagued by “feeling of insignificance that ... might be compared with the pervasive sense of insecurity that Stalin’s Great purge of the 1930s created in the Soviet Union,” Keyt (1999) 172.

observed, by everyone in public and by spies in all places. He will create strife and division among friends and between classes. He will impoverish his people, so they must devote their lives to earning a living (*Pol.* 1313b18-25). He will impose confiscatory taxes (*Pol.* 1313b25-28). The repressive tyrant wages wars, but does so only so that the people may have need of a ruler and so that they will have neither the time nor the opportunity to conspire against him.¹⁴⁰ Slaves and women are treated with indulgence, so that they might turn state's evidence against their men and their masters. The tyrant takes foreigners, rather than citizens, to be his messmates (συσσίτοις) and cronies (συνημερευταῖς), for these are least likely to offer him resistance. He uses the low and the vicious, in sum, to maintain his mastery over the high and the noble.

The way of moderation works toward the same end of keeping the tyrant in power, but does so by cloaking the actions of the tyrant under the appearance of monarchy.¹⁴¹ This entails that public property and public business should appear to be administered as the property and business of the state, rather than as the private property and business of the tyrant. The tyrant should seem to be governing, in other words, in the interest of the common good. Aristotle is not advising that the tyrant act as a king, of course, but only that he *appear* to be acting as a king.¹⁴² This concern with appearances is reflected in the extensive use of the language of appearing¹⁴³ and seeming¹⁴⁴ in this

¹⁴⁰ As Keyt (1999) 173 has observed, this idea derives ultimately from *Pl., Rep.*, 566e-567a.

¹⁴¹ Arist. *Pol.* 1314^a34-35: οὕτω τῆς τυραννίδος σωτηρία τὸ ποιεῖν αὐτὴν βασιλικωτέραν.

¹⁴² “The advice of the Way of Moderation is not to be,” as Keyt (1999) 175 observes, “but only to appear to be, a king.”

¹⁴³ The verb φαίνεσθαι occurs at *Pol.* 1314^b15, 18, 23-24, 31, 33, 39; 1315^a3, 21, 1315^b1.

section. In particular, the repeated use of φαίνεσθαι with the participle, rather than with the infinitive, stresses this need for the tyrant to be observed – not merely to seem, but to be seen and perceived – acting as a king.¹⁴⁵ Specifically, the tyrant should seek to appear like a king in matters of fiscal policy, religion, public building, the awarding of honors, the meting out of punishments, in establishing his relations with the various classes of society. He should avoid insulting his subjects, appearing drunk and dissolute in their eyes, should commit no sexual offenses against them, and should allow no members of his family to do so.¹⁴⁶

From Aristotle, and his summary account of the ways of the tyrant, we turn to the tyrant in the Roman tradition. *Tyrannus* and its cognates entered the Latin language through contact with the Hellenistic kingdoms in the eastern Mediterranean. Although the Greek tyrant was originally a ruler who had acquired power through extra-legal means, who might rule either poorly or well, justly or unjustly, at Rome the word tyrant is used in a pejorative sense to refer specifically to monarchs who ruled unjustly.¹⁴⁷ It had been

¹⁴⁴ The verb δοκεῖν occurs at *Pol.* 1314^a39, 40, 1314^b7.

¹⁴⁵ See, e.g., Keyt (1999) 175, who observes that the use of φαίνεσθαι with the participle “usually means (in Aristotle at least) that the object denoted by its subject is *observed* – that is, *appears to the senses* – to do whatever is signified by the participle.”

¹⁴⁶ For the interest of Aristotle in biography, see Huxley (1974) 203-13.

¹⁴⁷ For a discussion of the word and its cognates, particularly in the age of the late Republic, see Béranger (1975) 51-60. For the equation of the term with the concept of a despot and for the political uses made of the term in Roman invective, see Dunkle (1967) 151-71. Tabacco (1985) 18 n.46, 66-7, however, cautions that there would have been little practical difference in the Roman mind between a king and a tyrant. For a comparison of Greek and Roman understandings of kingship and tyranny, see Rawson

over three hundred years since the expulsion of Tarquinius Superbus from Rome when the first attestation of the word occurs in Ennius.¹⁴⁸ Already by the end of the fourth century, however, it would seem that the risk of a return to a monarchical form of government no longer remained a threat or even a genuine possibility. The understanding of tyranny at Rome, therefore, is a construction of Roman authors working under the influence of the Greek tradition, rather than the product of Roman historical experience of tyranny.¹⁴⁹

The word seems to have come into vogue on the Roman stage, carrying with it all of the negative connotations it had come to have in the works of the Greek tragedians. In Rome as in Greece, however, it is with the tragedians that we find the bulk of the early surviving references to tyrants.¹⁵⁰ Although little can be said with confidence about the

(1975) 149: “On the one hand, there was the Greek belief, now familiar in Rome, that a king was a supremely good ruler, the diametrical opposite of a tyrant, together with the popular Roman notion that kings were immensely wealthy, powerful and grand, and the surprisingly favorable memory of most of Rome’s own kings; on the other hand, there was the idea – both Greek and Roman – that kings and liberty were irreconcilable, and kings above all associated with cruelty.”

¹⁴⁸ The first attestation is at Enn. *Ann.* 109.5: “O Tite tute Tati, *tibi tanta, tyranne, tulisti.*”

¹⁴⁹ For the evidence in the historical record relating to the situation at archaic Rome, and the possibility that Rome followed a course roughly similar to that which events followed in Sicily and the Greek East, see Martin (1990) 49-72, Smith (2006) 49-64, and Gildenhard (2011) 87.

¹⁵⁰ Indeed, the second attestation of *tyrannus* is in the *Atreus* of Accius. Fr. 181-2 (Warmington): “ne cum tyranno quisquam epulandi gratia accumbat mensam aut eandem vescatur dapem.” For the politics of Accius and his stress on the horrors of tyranny, see

way in which these works portrayed the tyrant, they do seem to have imported many of the elements of the traditional Greek portrait, albeit adapted them to the Roman stage.¹⁵¹

In particular, as we will see in our discussion of fear in Suetonius in chapter four, the Roman tragedians acknowledged the long-recognized role that fear and hatred play in bringing about the demise of the tyrant. It has even been suggested that the adoption of the word *tyrannus* also resulted in the term *rex* acquiring a more favorable, or at least less unfavorable, connotation.¹⁵²

All of the “tyrannical” loan words from the Greek are often used interchangeably in the late Republic with the Latin words *rex*, *dominus*, *regnum*, *dominatio*, *dominatus*, *regnare*, *dominari*, *regius*, and *regie* in order to refer negatively to a “despot” and to the concepts related thereto.¹⁵³ Indeed, Cicero in places seems to have been unaware of the

Biliński (1958); Rawson (1975) 157. For the relationship between tragic tyrants and the tyrant in political rhetoric in the age of Antony and Octavian, with specific reference to the tyrannical appetites of Antony and the *Theseus* of Varius Rufus, see Leigh (1996) 171-197.

¹⁵¹ For the argument that Accius was especially fond of the figure of the tyrant, and made tyranny and oriental despotism key themes in his plays, see Dangel (1995) 17-20, where Dangel also discusses the use of the tyrant as an allegorical commentary on the Gracchi.

¹⁵² Rawson (1975) 151: “[W]hen they took over the term *tyrannus*, which is attested from Ennius onwards, it was possible to use *rex* in a neutral, even a favourable sense. To judge by Plautus, what the ordinary man thought of when the word was mentioned was fabulous wealth and fortune, rather than pride and cruelty (or else the *rex* of the parasites, a more or less benevolent patron). At the other end of the intellectual scale, the Stoics of course described the wise man as a king.”

¹⁵³ Dunkle (1967) 152 observes the wide range of uses to which these loan words were put and catalogues (n.3) the occurrences of these words in the works of Cicero. Rawson

original sense of the word, declaring in the *de Re Publica* that “tyrant” simply is the customary term for an unjust king among the Greeks (Cic. *de Rep.* 2.27.49):

Habetis igitur primum ortum tyranni; nam hoc nomen Graeci regis iniusti esse voluerunt; nostri quidem omnes reges vocitaverunt qui soli in populos perpetuam potestatem haberent.

You have here then the origin of the tyrant. For the Greeks were wont to give this name to an unjust king; our people have called kings all those who alone hold perpetual power over their people.

In Roman thought, therefore, the term *tyrannus* seems to have referred to the justice, rather than to the legitimacy, of the autocrat.¹⁵⁴ The *tyrannus*, moreover, always carried with it strong negative connotations.

The archetypal Roman tyrant was the last king of the city, Tarquinius Superbus.

The Romans did not view the seven kings as tyrants. It was only when the royal power,

(1975) 151 stresses that the significance attached to these terms seems to have encompassed a broad range. For favorable references to kingship, see Classen (1965) 385; Guia (1967) 308.

¹⁵⁴ Cicero tended to use the terms *rex* and *tyrannus* loosely. In the *de Re Publica* (2.51), the *tyrannus* is the *rex iniustus*, placed in opposition to the “bonus et sapiens et peritus utilitatis dignitatisque civilis, quasi tutor et procurator rei publicae,” the “rector et gubernator civitatis.” For the place of the tyrannus in the political philosophy of Cicero, see Lepore (1954) 100, 269, 298. Seneca simply defined a tyrant as a bad king. See, e.g., Sen. *Ep.* 114.24 “ubi impotens, cupidus, delicatus est, transit in nomen detestabile ac dirum, et fit tyrannus.” See also Griffin (2000) 538: “Seneca does not draw the contrast along Platonic lines of rule according to law or not according to law (*Politicus* 301-2), but of virtuous or vicious behaviour, and clemency versus cruelty in particular. Seneca in fact states explicitly that a tyrant and a king (the good ruler) are the same in power, but the king exercises control over himself for the public good (1.11.4). Thus Sulla, whatever his respect for the constitution, could be called a tyrant, while the tyrant Dionysius I of Syracuse was better than most kings (1.12.1-3).”

which at first had served the purpose of preserving *libertas* and expanding Roman power, degenerated into tyranny during the reign of the last Tarquin that Rome chose to entrust power to two consuls rather than to one king.¹⁵⁵ Cicero's interpretation of the degeneration of the Roman monarchy into tyranny seems to reflect the original Greek understanding of the tyrant as a ruler who acquires power in an extraordinary, and usually extra-legal, manner: Tarquin wanted to be feared because his reign had begun with a crime and he feared being punished for that crime.¹⁵⁶ Cicero elsewhere explains that Tarquin made a tyranny of the Roman monarchy by abusing the power of the office.¹⁵⁷ It was by his insolence and his pride, to use the words of Cicero, that Tarquin transformed the Roman monarchy into a tyranny and made the name of king odious to the Roman people: "tu non vides unius inopportunitate et superbia Tarquinii nomen huic populo in odium venisse regium" (Cic., *de Rep.* 1.39.62).¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ For an example of this interpretation of the events of 509 B.C., see Sall., *Cat.* 6.7: "Post, ubi regium imperium, quod initio conservandae libertatis atque augendae rei publicae fuerat, in superbiam dominationemque se convortit, inmutato more annua imperia binosque imperatores sibi fecere." I take *superbiam dominationemque* as a hendiadys for *superbam dominationem*.

¹⁵⁶ Cic. *de Rep.* 2.45: "nam rex ille de quo loquor, primum optimi regis caede maculatus integra mente non erat, et cum metueret ipse poenam sceleris sui summam, metui se volebat." For the role of fear, rather than goodwill, in the reign of a bad ruler, see Kapust (2011) 104.

¹⁵⁷ Cic., *de Rep.* 2.29.51: "Tarquinius, non novam potestatem nactus, sed, quam habebat, usus iniuste totum genus hoc regiae civitatis everterit."

¹⁵⁸ Erskine (1991) 106-20 has argued that the origins of this *odium regis* "should be sought not in the distant obscurity of the last years of the regal period, but in Rome's encounters with the Hellenistic kings of the East in the second century B.C." The Roman

The first Roman tyrant, therefore, was a king who had abused that office in the way that was typical of the abuses of the Greek tyrants. Livy's depiction of his reign bears all of the usual hallmarks.¹⁵⁹ Tarquin comes to power violently, having murdered his successor Servius Tullius (Livy 1.48). Livy has Tarquin deny burial to his predecessor, a detail that is lacking from the other accounts of Tarquin, but which recalls the traditional tyrant's tendency to place the will of the ruler over the law of the gods and the obligations of family, in general, and the story of Creon and Polyneices in particular (1.49.1).¹⁶⁰ He put to death the *primores patrum*, cutting down the tall stalks in the field

encounter with the Hellenistic monarchs may well have contributed to their antipathy toward kings and tyrants; this question of the historical impetus for the Roman attitude is not germane, however, to our investigation of the influence of the traditional literary depiction of the tyrant on Suetonius.

¹⁵⁹ Ogilvie (1965) 194-6, as well as in the relevant notes in the commentary, analyzed the Greek elements incorporated into the story of Tarquin. The synchronism of the expulsion of the tyrants and the reign of the Peisistratids, which was noted by both Gellius (17.21.4) and Pliny the Elder (*N.H.* 34.17: "hoc actum est eodem anno, quo et Romae reges pulsi"), led inevitably, Ogilvie concludes, to the assimilation of the Tarquin's reign and deposition to that of the reign of the Athenian tyrants and the attack of Harmodius and Aristogeiton. Once the basic story had been assimilated, there followed "the insertion of whole incidents from Herodotus and other Greek sources to supplement the meagre notices of Roman tradition" (195). Ogilvie (1965) 196 observes that the account of Tarquin's reign is structured around scenes that possess the Aristotelian unities and that the characters tend to speak in tragic diction, but concludes that "it is certain that L. does not depend upon Ennius or an unknown Roman tragedian. With a profound interest in psychology he is writing tragedy not copying it."

¹⁶⁰ See Ogilvie (1965) 197: "There can be little doubt that L. has deliberately altered the version which he inherited in order to remind the reader of the fate of Polyneices." The

of Roman political life, and assumed the traditional bodyguard of the tyrant (1.49.1-2).¹⁶¹ He ruled by force, without the legal sanction of popular or senatorial approval: “neque enim ad ius regni quicquam praeter vim habebat, ut qui neque populi iussu neque auctoribus patribus regnaret” (1.49.3). Livy seems here to reveal his awareness of the Greek understanding of the tyrant as a ruler who assumes office unlawfully. He ruled also by fear: “eo accedebat ut in caritate civium nihil spei reponenti metu regnum tutandum esset” (1.49.4).¹⁶² He sought allies not from among his own people, but from among foreigners, befriending the Latin race in particular “ut peregrinis quoque opibus tutior inter cives esset” (1.49.8).¹⁶³ Tarquin even communicates to his son Sextus the same message that Periander communicated to Thrasybulus, lopping off the heads of the tallest poppies with his stick as he walks through his gardens with the messenger his son had sent to him for advice (1.54.6).¹⁶⁴ He undertakes a building program at Rome, the

story also anticipates the attitude, and even the actions, of several of the Caesars in Suetonius toward their predecessors in office.

¹⁶¹ The gathering of a bodyguard is a standard practice of the tyrant. For tyrants and their bodyguards, see Pl., *Rep.* 567e; Xen. *Hiero* 5.3.

¹⁶² See Arist., *Pol.*, 5.11, 1314b19. Newman (1902) 4.467-8 catalogues instances in which tyrants are depicted as having sought to inspire the fear of their subjects.

¹⁶³ See Xen. *Hiero* 6.5 (noting that the tyrant is left to trust in foreigners rather than citizens, barbarians rather than Greeks: ἔτι δὲ ξένοις μὲν μᾶλλον ἢ πολίταις πιστεύειν, βαρβάροις δὲ μᾶλλον ἢ Ἑλλήσιν.).

¹⁶⁴ For the story of Thrasybulus and Periander, see Hdt. 5.92; Arist., *Pol.* 3.13, 1284^a26-30 and 5.10, 1311^a20-22. The anecdote lies behind Eur. *Suppl.* 445-9 as well. The story of Zopyrus and the capture of Babylon (Hdt. 3.154) also shapes the account of the war with the Gabii. See Ogilvie (1965) 205-6, who concludes that “the insertion of two such

centerpiece of which is the temple of Jupiter on the Capitoline (1.55.1), but which also included the construction of seats at the circus and the building of the Cloaca Maxima.¹⁶⁵

The overthrow of Tarquin, finally, came about as a result of the sexual assault perpetrated by his son on the chaste Lucretia. This creates another parallel with the attack that Harmodius and Aristogeiton launched against the Peisistratids. The tyrannicides were moved to action at Athens on account of the attention paid by the tyrant's brother to Aristogeiton and by the insulting behavior of Hipparchus toward the sister of Harmodius. It is the threat that the appetites and power of the tyrant pose to the honor and virtue of his subjects that motivates the account of the attack launched by Harmodius and Aristogeiton against the Peisistratids. At Rome, Sextus rapes Lucretia, displaying the *vis*

episodes from Greek history into Roman annals to provide flesh and blood to an otherwise emaciated fact must belong to the earliest (third-century) generation of historians.”

¹⁶⁵ Xenophon observed that “money spent by a tyrant on public projects comes closer to being essential expenditure than money he spends on himself,” (*Hiero* 11.1: καὶ γὰρ ἔμοιγε δοκεῖ τὰ εἰς τὴν πόλιν ἀναλούμενα μᾶλλον εἰς τὸ δέον τελεῖσθαι ἢ τὰ εἰς τὸ ἴδιον ἀνδρὶ τυράννῳ. καθ’ ἕν δ’ ἕκαστον σκοποῦμεν); the adornment of the city creates a climate of goodwill that will contribute to his remaining safely in office. For the prudent tyrant, the answer to the question whether “a residence gorgeously furnished at extraordinary expense, or the whole city equipped with defensive walls, temples, colonnades, squares, and harbours” (*Hiero* 11.2: οἰκίαν πρῶτον ὑπερβαλλούσῃ δαπάνῃ κεκαλλωπισμένην μᾶλλον ἢ γῆ κόσμου ἃν σοι παρέχειν ἢ πᾶσαν τὴν πόλιν τείχεσσι τε καὶ ναοῖς καὶ παστάσι καὶ ἀγοραῖς καὶ λιμέσι κατεσκευασμένην;) is self-evident. Aristotle’s tyrant will likewise adorn and improve his city (κατασκευάζειν ... καὶ κοσμεῖν τὴν πόλιν, *Pol.* 5.11, 1314^b37-38).

and *libido* of the tyrant fully in action; indeed, Livy reports that Brutus made a speech attacking just those vices (1.59.8).¹⁶⁶

The tale of Appius Claudius, the *decemvir*, and Verginia, the maiden after whom he lusted and whose virtue he sought to compromise, follows a similar pattern to the tale of Sextus and Lucretia.¹⁶⁷ In the Livian portrait, Appius exhibits the typically Claudian, and tyrannical, vices of violence, savagery, and arrogance (Livy 3.33-58). Wiseman has observed that, by the time Livy composed his account of Appius the Decemvir, the portrait of the tyrant had come to be centered on the vices of *vis*, *superbia*, *crudelitas*, and *libido*.¹⁶⁸ Appius, by virtue of being one of the Claudii, possessed the first three of these

¹⁶⁶ That Tarquin had ruled in the savage and lawless way that fit the Greek template for tyranny no doubt helped to blur the lines between kingship and tyranny in the Roman mind. That Rome went, in a relative short time, from monarchy to tyranny and then to polity likewise made the Platonic and Aristotelian models of revolving constitutional forms well suited for Cicero's project of describing Roman political history. See Gildenhard (2007) 196: "Scipio [in the *Tusculan Disputations*] interprets the transformation of Tarquinius Superbus ... from within the model of revolving forms of government as elaborated by Plato and, in particularly, Polybius." See also Ogilvie (1965) 195: "The accidents of time which had turned Tarquin into a tyrant on a Greek model was fortunate for the philosophical historians who in their concern to fit Roman history to a cyclic mould welcomed a tyranny already made for the purpose." For Sextus' exhibition of the vices of a tyrant, see Dunkle (1971) 16.

¹⁶⁷ See Livy 3.44-49. Livy (3.44) explicitly draws the comparison with the rape and death of Lucretia: "Sequitur aliud in urbe nefas ab libidine ortum, haud minus foedo eventu quam quod per stuprum caedemque Lucretiae urbe regnoque Tarquinius expulerat"

¹⁶⁸ Wiseman (1979) 80: "The characteristics of the tyrant had been part of the stock in trade of Greek political philosophy since the age of Herodotus and Euripides, and it was agreed that he exemplified tyrannical power aimed at the gratification of his personal

vices; by virtue of being a Decemvir, he naturally became associated with tyranny.

Although Livy, in his account of the rape of Verginia, focuses on the *pudicitia* of Verginia and on the legal processes Appius that used in his pursuit of the girl, the underlying portrait of the tyrant is, nevertheless, clearly discernible.¹⁶⁹ Appius, like Hipparchus and Sextus before him, was seized by lust: “Ap. Claudium virginis plebeiae stuprandae libido cepit” (3.44.2). *Libido* remains his overweening vice; he is described, moreover, as *amore amens*. Verginia’s fiancé, Icelus, pleads that Appius be content with *saevitia*, and leave the *pudicitia* of the people free from his *libido*: “saevite in tergum et in cervices nostras: pudicitia saltem in tuto sit” (3.45.9). When Appius Claudius’ efforts to win her over through persuasion fail, he turns his mind “ad crudelem superbamque vim” (3.44.4). His efforts to corrupt the girl, which will ultimately be defeated by the

appetites. Through the influence of Hellenistic rhetorical theory, he had become, by the age of Cicero, a standard element in the practice declamations used for the training of budding orators. His characteristic vices were *vis*, *superbia*, *crudelitas*, and *libido*, all of which duly appear in the political invectives of Cicero and his contemporaries at the end of the Roman Republic.”

¹⁶⁹ For Livy’s account of Verginia, see Ogilvie (1965) 476-8, who observes that tyranny plays a more prominent role in the account found of Dionysius of Halicarnassus and, presumably, in the sources upon which Livy and Dionysius relied. This source, Wiseman (1979) 81 concludes, was “an artist, with a firm grip on his material well in advance. (The same mastery appears in his casual reference to Appius the Decemvir as one who despised the gods; impiety was a tyrant’s crime. ...).” For the impiety of Appius the Decemvir, see Livy 2.56.4 (“impie”); 2.57.2 (“deorum hominumque contemptor”). Wiseman (1979) further observes that, in the account of Appius in Livy, “*Dominatio*, *regnum* and *tyrannis* are the key words now, with Tarquinius Superbus as the natural point of comparison.” For the tyrannical elements in the account of Verginia, see also Dunkle (1971) 16.

dramatic action taken by her father to preserve her virtue at the expense of her life, will involve the abuse of a Roman legal process over which he presides. The tyrant administers the law partially in order to serve his own ends and aims, subordinating the common good to the private interest.

Hieronimus, however, is the Syracusan whom Livy depicts with all of the traditional trappings of the tyrant (24.5). Hieronimus first distinguishes himself from his people by assuming, in sharp distinction with his predecessor Hiero, the purple dress and the diadem of the tyrant, as well as his armed bodyguard (“*purpuram ac diadema ac satellites armatos*,” 24.5.4). He imitates Dionysius by driving forth from his palace behind a team of four white horses: “*quadrigisque etiam alborum equorum interdum ex regia procedentem more Dionysi tyranni*” (24.5.4). He adds suitable behavior to these outward trappings of the tyrant (24.5.5):

hunc tam superbum apparatus habitumque convenientes sequebantur contemptus omnium hominum, superbae aures, contumeliosa dicta, rari aditus non alienis modo sed tutoribus etiam, libidines novae, inhumana crudelitas.

His proud dress and appurtenances were followed by a corresponding contempt for all men, ears sealed by pride, words filled with insult, seclusion from strangers and former guardians alike, lusts never before seen, and inhuman cruelty.

Livy is here drawing liberally from the traditional portrait of the tyrant in order to transform this ruler, who reigned a mere thirteen months before being assassinated, into a despotic autocratic. Hieronimus is proud, shut off from strangers, shut off from his former friends, insulting, lustful, and cruel.¹⁷⁰

¹⁷⁰ Elements of the traditional portrait of the tyrant are also present, as Dunkle (1971) 16-7 observes, in Livy’s depiction of L. Papirius Cursor in book 8, throughout his account of

In the introduction to the *Catiline*, Sallust depicts Sulla in terms familiar from the traditional portrait of the tyrant.¹⁷¹ Sulla's rule began well, but soon degenerated as avarice flourished under his reign (*Cat.* 11.4). The decline of the beneficent despot into tyranny is a traditional pattern — discernible in the historical accounts of the reign of Hippias at Athens and, in the *Caesares*, of the regimes of Tiberius and Nero at Rome — that tyrants have followed in the literature. Sulla also is reported to have encouraged his troops to rob temples, another traditional behavior of the tyrant.¹⁷² Sallust's depiction of

Hannibal, his portrait of Philip V (27.31.3-8; 31.30.6-11; 31.31.17; 32.21.21), his description of Q. Plemnius in book 29, and his sketches of Nabis (34.24.3-4) and of C. Lucretius Gallus (43.7.8).

¹⁷¹ For a discussion of Sallust's depiction of Sulla, see Dunkle (1971) 15. Dunkle here observes that Sallust portrays Roman virtues as degenerating into the typical tyrannical vices, and that the cause of this degeneration was leisure and riches, which led to luxury, which in turn led to avarice, which turned men toward the tyrannical vices: "namque avaritia fidem probitatem ceterasque artis bonas subvorti; pro his *superbiam*, *crudelitatem*, *deos neglegere*, omnia venalia habere edocuit." (Sall. *Cat.* 10.4; I have retained the italics added by Dunkle). I add to Dunkle's analysis that this is the path along which the virtues of both peoples and individual men are said to decline in the *περὶ βίον* literature of the Peripatetics. For a discussion of this progression, see Cooper (2002) 307-39. For the argument that the influence of Aristotle himself can be detected in the writings of Sallust, see Earl (1972) 842-56.

¹⁷² Dunkle (1971) 15 concludes that the historical Sulla had acted as a tyrant and that Sallust was simply making full use of the opportunity with which he had been presented. The question raised by Sulla's depiction in the *Catiline* is, in this respect, comparable to that raised by the *Caesares*. I am not persuaded that the accounts of Pausanias (1.20.4; 9.7.4; 9.33.6) and of Plutarch (*Sulla* 12) suffice to establish that this was, in fact, Sulla's "actual behavior." It may well be the case that Sulla was rather consistently portrayed by a broad range of ancient authors as a tyrant. I maintain that the emphasis that Sallust, like

Sulla in the *Catiline* accords with Cicero's characterization of Sulla as the *magister populi*: the *sapiens* has a better right to the title of *magister populi*, Cicero explains, than Sulla who was the *magister* of *luxuria*, *avaritia*, and *crudelitas* (Cic. *de Fin.* 3.75).

Cicero's Verrine Orations amply illustrate the ways in which a Roman orator can reshape this material to cast political figures in the role of cruel and unjust tyrants.¹⁷³ The departure of Verres from the forum deprived the people not of justice and law, but violence, cruelty, and rapacity: "non enim ius abesse videbatur a foro neque iudicia, sed vis et crudelitas et bonorum acerba et indigna direptio" (*Verr.* 5.31). Verres exhibits the sadistic violence and cruelty typical of the tyrant, not only crucifying a Roman citizen, but doing so at Taormina, where his victim could see the coast of Italy where he would have been free of Verres' jurisdiction: "'spectet,' inquit, 'patriam; in conspectu legum libertatisque moriatur'" (*Verr.* 5.170). Verres has rendered Sicily, unlike Italy, a land that is devoid of *leges* and *libertas*. The tyrant is the traditional enemy of liberty in both the Greek and, even more so, Roman traditions. That he acts contrary to law, moreover, is a commonplace attribute of the tyrant that Cicero attributes to the Roman governor at several points in his attack.¹⁷⁴

Verres is also portrayed as an enemy of the gods and a sexual predator. He is a temple-robber, driven by avarice and impiety to violate the houses of the gods (*II Verr.*

Suetonius, placed on these details reveals both an awareness and a willingness to use the stereotypical portrait of the tyrant.

¹⁷³ For Cicero's depiction of Verres as a tyrant, see Dunkle (1967) 160-2; Frazel (2009) 125-221.

¹⁷⁴ See, e.g., *Verr.* 5.59: "accepisti a Mamertinis navem contra leges, remisisti contra foedera."

1.7). The tyrant is always portrayed as sexually abusing both wives and children, and Verres is no exception (*I Verr.* 14):

In stupris vero et flagitiis, nefarias eius libidines commemorare pudore deterreor; simul illorum calamitatem commemorando augere nolo, quibus liberos coniugesque suas integras ab istius petulantia conservare non licitum est

I am deterred by modesty from describing his unspeakable lusts, exhibited in acts of rape and outrage; at the same time, I do not wish to increase by bringing again to mind the injury that was suffered by those men who were not permitted to protect their wives' and children's integrity from the lust of that wretched man.

Verres rapes free-born girls and matrons (*Verr.* 4.116). The rapes committed by Verres, both before and while he was governor, ultimately lead Cicero to dub him a cruel and lustful tyrant ("tyrannum libidinosum crudelemque," *II Verr.* 1.82). In sum, Cicero portrays Verres as a man who exhibits the tyrant's lust and cruelty against Romans and allies alike, his impiety toward the gods, and his avarice and disrespect for the rule of law: "dicimus C. Verrem, cum multa libidinose, multa crudeliter in civis Romanos atque socios, multa in deos hominesque nefarie fecerit, tum praeterea quadringentiens sestertium ex Sicilia contra leges abstulisse" (*I Verr.* 56).¹⁷⁵

Cicero will adapt this traditional portrait of the tyrant to his critique of both Julius Caesar and Antony. In the *Philippics*, orations that Appian described as speeches against

¹⁷⁵ Wiseman (1979) 122 suggests that Cicero likewise considered Clodius, with his bodyguard of slaves and followers to have been a tyrannical figure. As Hinard (1975) 88-107 has observed, the characterization of the prosecutor Naevius in the *pro Quinctio* bears many of the features of the stock tyrant. Buchheit (1975a) 193-211 and (1975b) 570-91 in turn has shown how Cicero in the *pro Sexto Roscio* cast Chrysogonus as a tyrant, who indulged in the decadent lifestyle of the tyrant in private while using the Roman legal system to advance his ambition in public.

Antony as a tyrant (App. *B.Civ.* 4.20: τοὺς κατὰ Ἀντωνίου λόγους οἷα τυράννου), Cicero warns Antony not to pursue tyrannical power because even Caesar had failed in the attempt to do so. In so doing, he becomes one of the first Roman writers to cast a Caesar in the role of a tyrant (*Phil.* 2.116). Caesar, Cicero explained, had possessed many of the qualities and had performed many of the acts that characterize the personality and the regime of a tyrant (*Phil.* 2.116):

Fuit in illo ingenium, ratio, memoria, litterae, cura, cogitatio, diligentia; res bello gesserat, quamvis rei publicae calamitosas, at tamen magnas; multos annos regnare meditatus, magno labore, magnis periculis, quod cogitarat effecerat; muneribus, monumentis, congiariis, epulis multitudinem imperitam delenierat; suos praemiis, adversarios clementiae specie devinxerat; quid multa? Attulerat iam liberae civitati partim metu, partim patientia consuetudinem serviendi.

There was in that man genius, reason, memory, learning, care, reflection, diligence; he had done things in war, although calamitous to the Republic, that were nevertheless grand; having for many years planned to rule, at great labor, through many dangers, what he had planned, he achieved. He had softened the masses for rule by public spectacles, monuments, largesse, and feasts. He bound his supporters to him by means of rewards, and his enemies by a simulation of clemency. What more? In part by fear, in part by forbearance, he had already imported a habit of servitude to a free state.

The virtues inherent in the nature of the man — genius, reason, memory, learning, care, reflection, and diligence — combined with the specific measures he took to win the support of the masses — the spectacles and the public buildings, his largesse and public banquets — as well as his willingness to foster the appearances of virtue rather than actually cultivate the virtue of *clementia*, all serve to cast Caesar as a traditional tyrant.

Cicero explains that he was not the first to have associated Caesar with a tyrant: Caesar himself had been accustomed to do so. Cicero, in a passage that Suetonius

includes in his own biography of Julius Caesar, reports that Caesar frequently had two lines of the *Phoenissae* of Euripides on his lips (Cic. *de Off.* 3.82):

Nam si violandum est ius, regnandi gratia
Violandum est; aliis rebus pietatem colas.

For if the law is to be broken, then it is to be broken for
the sake of ruling; let a man cultivate piety in other matters.

Cicero notes that he has here provided a translation of the *Graecos versus* which Caesar *in ore semper habebat*; it is this translation, moreover, that Suetonius has included in his life of Julius Caesar (“quos sic ipse convertit,” *Jul.* 30.5). The original Greek verses, spoken by Eteocles in the *Phoenissae*, make clear the nature of the rule for which Caesar was willing to put aside the law (Eur. *Phoen.* 524-25):

εἵπερ γὰρ ἀδικεῖν χρή, τυραννίδος πέρι
κάλλιστον ἀδικεῖν, τᾶλλα δ' εὐσεβεῖν χρεών.

It is for the sake of tyrannical power that Caesar is willing to act contrary to law. As depicted by both Cicero and Suetonius, therefore, the first of the Caesars sought to acquire a tyranny, perhaps in the way that Eteocles had acquired his and, perhaps like the one that Eteocles had acquired. That the Caesar of Cicero and Suetonius expresses his Roman political ambitions by having always on his lips two lines from a work of Greek tragedy — the genre in which the tyrant had first assumed a significant role in the political discourse at Athens some 450 years earlier — reveals the continuity, the persistence, the versatility, and the adaptability of the traditional portrait of the tyrant in the literature of ancient Rome.

Finally, Cicero casts Antony in the role of a tyrant by assigning him the bodyguard of foreign mercenaries (Cic. *Phil.* 13.18):

Qua enim in barbaria quisquam tam taeter, tam crudelis tyrannus quam in hac urbe armis barbarorum stipatus Antonius? Caesare dominante veniebamus in senatum, si non libere, at tamen tuto. hoc archipirata—quid enim dicam tyranno?—haec subsellia ab Ituraeis occupabantur.

For in what barbarian land was there ever any tyrant so foul and cruel as Antony, attended by the arms of barbarians in this city? When Caesar exercised his dominion, we would come into the senate, if not in freedom, then nevertheless in safety. But with this arch-pirate — for why should I say tyrant — in power, these benches were occupied by Itureans.

As we will see, the association of the tyrant and the pirate is a theme that resurfaces again and again in Roman declamation. For the present, it suffices to note that, while Antony may be only a two-penny tyrant when compared to Caesar, he remains a tyrant, accompanied by the foreign bodyguard of the tyrant.¹⁷⁶

That the figure of the tyrant continued to play a part in Roman oratory and rhetoric in the imperial period is clear from the set-piece speeches and exercises of Roman declamation.¹⁷⁷ The tyrant appears in the *Controversiae* of Seneca the Elder, the Minor Declamations attributed to Quintilian, and the declamations of Calpurnius

¹⁷⁶ For the depiction of Antony as a tyrant in the *Philippics*, see Dunkle (1971) 13. For the tyrant and his bodyguard, see Arist. *Pol.* 14, 1285a26-29: οἱ γὰρ πολῖται φυλάττουσιν ὄπλοις τοὺς βασιλεῖς, τοὺς δὲ τυράννους ξενικόν: οἱ μὲν γὰρ κατὰ νόμον καὶ ἐκόντων οἱ δ' ἀκόντων ἄρχουσιν, ὥσθ' οἱ μὲν παρὰ τῶν πολιτῶν οἱ δ' ἐπὶ τοὺς πολίτας ἔχουσι τὴν φυλακὴν. See also Gray (2007) 125 for the tyrant and his bodyguard in Xenophon's *Hiero*.

¹⁷⁷ For the role of the tyrant in Roman *declamatio*, and in turn the role of *declamatio* in perpetuating and transmitting the traditional portrait of the tyrant, see Dunkle (1971) 13-4; Tabacco (1985).

Flaccus.¹⁷⁸ These tyrants exhibit many of the stereotypical features of the tyrants.¹⁷⁹ They are violent men who live in seclusion and are in constant danger of being killed; in some cases, the tyrants govern in a way that reflects the perverted character and inverted nature of the despot; in many of these exercises, the tyrant has been killed and the matter at issue concerns consequences, both positive and negative, for the tyrannicides.¹⁸⁰ The ability of

¹⁷⁸ See Sen. *Contr.* 1.7, 2.5, 3.6, 4.7, 5.8, 7.6, 9.4; Quint. *Decl. Min.* 253, 254, 261, 267, 269, 274, 282, 288, 293, 322, 329, 345, 351, 352, 374, 382; Cal. Flacc. *Decl.* 1, 6, 11, 13, 22, 39, 45.

¹⁷⁹ Consider, e.g., [Quint.] *Decl. Min.* 293. In the course of four sentences, a hero who asked to be set up as tyrant over the city he had defeated attributes to tyranny and to tyrants the qualities of cruelty, anger, avarice, and libidinousness.

¹⁸⁰ See, e.g., Sen. *Contr.* 1.7 (tyrannicide who had killed his own brother is then captured by pirates and requests that his father pays ransom); *Contr.* 3.6 (man sues tyrannicide for cost of his house that he had burned down while tyrant was hidden inside); *Contr.* 7.6 (tyrant allows slaves to kill masters and rape mistresses); *Contr.* 9.4 (son ordered to beat his father does so, then becomes member of tyrant's inner circle and kills the tyrant, who lives in *arx*; his father defends him when his hands are sought as punishment for the beating he had earlier administered); [Quint.] *Decl. Min.* 253 (neighboring tyrant demands surrender of tyrannicide); *Decl. Min.* 267 (former tyrant weeps *iuxta arcem*); *Decl. Min.* 288 (father kills two sons, who were tyrants, and asks for exile of third son as his reward); *Decl. Min.* 345 (man kills tyrant under a contract with a rich man; they debate who should receive the reward); *Decl. Min.* 382 (same); Cal. Flac. *Decl.* 1 (wife kills tyrant husband and tyrant son, and then requests other son's exemption from penalty). For the seclusion of the tyrant in his castle/*arx*, see Walker (1952) 149-53; Courtney (1980) 194, discussing specifically the necessity for a Greek tyrant to seize the acropolis of his city; Sussman (1994) 94. The tyrants are also reported to desire the impossible, a detail of the traditional portrait of the tyrant that will reappear in the

the tyrant to dissimulate, to win a good reputation by actions that run contrary to his nature, is also present in the portrait.¹⁸¹ The tyrant in Roman declamation is never the ruler of the city in which the legal controversy at issue is being debated. If a tyrant is in power, he is in power only in another city.¹⁸² In declamation, the tyrant is a stock figure who has been effectively neutered; his exercise of tyrannical power cannot influence the outcome of the case under discussion. It has been said that the role of these rhetorical tyrants is “typical of later rhetoric’s anachronistic irrelevance.”¹⁸³ These tyrants are, indeed, stock figures, used in much the same way that the poor man, the rich man, and the pirate were used.¹⁸⁴ The focus is on resolving a complex, if not paradoxical, legal

Suetonian lives of many of the Caesars. See Cal. Flacc. *Decl.* 45: “Amplius reges impossibilia desiderant.”

¹⁸¹ See, e.g., [Quint.] *Decl.* 254: “Sed illud interim vereor, ne tyrannus ex me petat famam lenitatis. Habet enim apud malos quoque multum auctoritatis virtus, et forsitan hoc ille ambitiose faciet, ut potestate contentus sit.”

¹⁸² See Tabacco (1985) 10-1: “La controversia si pone dunque sempre o al di qua o al di là del fenomeno tirannico ... Il tiranno può essere tale <in atto> solo quando si configura come tiranno di altra città.” Rhetoric and oratory may depict and critique tyranny, but they cannot flourish under it. The practice of declamation reflects something of Secundus’ critique of Roman oratory in the *Dialogus* of Tacitus (36-40).

¹⁸³ The phrase is used by Kennell (1997) 351 to characterize the traditional view. Kennell then goes on to argue that the role of the tyrant in the rhetorical exercises of the first and second centuries A.D. may not have been entirely anachronistic or irrelevant since minor tyrants continued to rise and fall in the eastern cities of the empire throughout the period.

¹⁸⁴ Dunkle (1971) 14, n.7 observes that the “tyrant and the pirate represent to the Roman mind archetypes of evil men.” Seneca also uses the tyrant and the pirate as stock evil figures (Sen. *de Ben.* 2.18.6). That the story of Caesar’s capture by pirates plays the part

conundrum; the tyrant certainly adds color to the exercise. The degree to which he adds substance, and a dimension of political critique, is harder to assess.

The offensive role that the stock tyrant can play in Roman oratory is amply demonstrated by the defense that Dio Chrysostom raised to charges that had been brought against him related to his building program in Prusa.¹⁸⁵ This program appears to have involved a high degree of creative destruction that had given rise to an accusation that Dio was behaving like a tyrant:

νῦν γὰρ ἐὰν ἄπτωμαι τοῦ πράγματος καὶ σπουδάζω γίγνεσθαι τὸ ἔργον,
 τυραννεῖν μέ φασί τινες καὶ κατασκάπτειν τὴν πόλιν καὶ τὰ ἱερὰ πάντα.
 δῆλον γὰρ ὅτι ἐνέπρησα τὸν νεὼ τοῦ Διός. καίτοι τοὺς ἀνδριάντας ἐκ τοῦ
 μύκωνος ἐρρυσάμην, καὶ νῦν ἐν τῶν φανερωτάτῳ κεῖνται τῆς πόλεως.

For now, if I touch upon the matter and hasten to realize the project, some say that I am acting like a tyrant and that I am razing the city and all its temples to the ground. For it is clear that I fired the temple of Zeus. And yet I rescued the statues from the ash heap and they now stand in the most prominent part of the city.

Aristotle and Xenophon had recognized that a ruler who wishes to avoid the charge of tyranny should appear to act as a beneficent king by, among other things, adorning his city with lavish public works. That the case against Dio turned on whether he was seeking to improve the city in the way recommended by Aristotle, or was seeking instead to improve his own residence in the way tyrants have always done, reveals both the persistence of the traditional portrait of the tyrant and the continuity of that portrait over time. Dio specifically disavows any desire for a palace, like those enjoyed by Croesus,

that it does in his biography, and that Caesar gets the better of them, may reflect the stock roles that the tyrants and pirates assume in the tradition.

¹⁸⁵ Dio Chrys. *Or.* 47. For a discussion of the speech and the role played in it by the figure of the tyrant, see Kennell (1997) 353-4.

Darius, and Nero (Dio Chrys. *Or.* 47.14), for there is no benefit to be derived from a golden house: οὐδὲ γὰρ ὄφελος οὐδὲν οἰκίας χρυσεῆς (Dio Chrys. *Or.* 47.15). Once again, the oration reveals a tradition that runs in a direct line from Croesus to Nero.

Dio explains, in line with Aristotle's counsels in the *Handbook for Tyrants*, that the city would derive substantial benefit from being fittingly adorned (πόλεως δὲ ὄφελος εὐπρεποῦς γιγνομένης, Dio Chrys. *Or.* 47.15). These adornments include more air, shade in summer and sunshine in winter beneath the shelter of a roof, and stately edifices (Dio Chrys. *Or.* 47.15). Whether a building program is that of a tyrant or that of a steward, it would seem, depends on how it is characterized.

That the building program by which Dio intended to improve his city is cast by his opponents as demolition and even arson is, moreover, a telling detail for our study of the rhetorical tyrant. There is an unmistakable resonance — indeed, Dio himself names Nero and speaks of the benefit of a golden house — between this portrait of the tyrant to which Dio was responding and the characterization of Nero as an arsonist in Suetonius. Indeed, the Roman biographer describes both the positive and negative dimensions of Nero's building program in terms strongly reminiscent of Dio's oration.

The gravamen of the case against Dio involved his building program, but the case against him appears to have deployed the full range of accusations with which the rhetorical figure of the tyrant provided the orator. Dio responds to the charges, remarking that he finds it ridiculous and amazing when he hears someone speaking of him as a tyrant:¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁶ Dio Chrys. *Or.* 47.23: ὅταν δὲ ἀκούω λέγειν τινὰ ὡς περὶ τυράννου, παράδοξον ἔμοι φαίνεται καὶ γελοῖον.

ἐγὼ γὰρ ἐπίσταμαι τῶν τυράννων ἔργα τοιαῦτα, μοιχεύειν γυναῖκας ἀλλοτρίας καὶ διαφθείρειν παῖδας, ἀνθρώπους ἐλευθέρους τύπτειν καὶ αἰκίζεσθαι πάντων ὁρώντων, τοὺς δὲ καὶ στρεβλοῦν, οἷον εἰς ζέοντα λέβητα καθιέντας, ἄλλους δὲ καταπιπτοῦν· ὧν οὐδὲν ἐφῶ ποιῶ· ἐτέραν δὲ γυναῖκα τύραννον Σεμίραμιν, ὅτι πρεσβυτέρα τὴν ἡλικίαν οὔσα καὶ μάχλος ἠνάγκαζε συγγίγνεσθαι τινὰς ἑαυτῇ. τῶν δὲ τυράννων τὸν δεῖνα ἀκήκοα ταῦτα ποιοῦντα, πρεσβύτην θρασύν (Dio Chrys. *Or.* 47.24).

For I know that the deeds of the tyrants are of the following sort: they defile the wives of other men and they corrupt young boys, they beat and maltreat freeborn men in the sight of all; some they even torture, for example by lowering them into a boiling cauldron; others they cover in pitch. ... A particular woman tyrant, Semiramis, I have heard that she would as an old and lustful woman force some men to lie with her; among the male tyrants, I have heard it said that a particular one did the same thing, the bold old wretch!

Many of the acts of lust, cruelty, and insult that have long lurked in the portrait of the tyrant have now come to the fore in the rhetorical depiction: sexual assaults on married women and young children, combined with brutality directed at the free born. The inventiveness and extreme nature characteristic of the tyrant's cruelty is also present: the boiling cauldron and the covering in pitch of the tyrant's unfortunate victim. At this point, of course, it is hard to tell whether the portrait of the old tyrant as a flaccid wretch compelling lovers into his embrace contributed to the depiction, or drew from the reality, of Tiberius. That Dio, an official within the Roman empire, would not only allude to Tiberius but also name Nero in his discussions of tyranny suggests that the characterization of these early Roman emperors as tyrants may not have been as shocking at the turn of the first century as one otherwise might have expected.

The influence of rhetoric on, and its relationship with, the other literary genres, and in particular historiography, is now generally accepted.¹⁸⁷ The specific influence of

¹⁸⁷ For the role of rhetoric in Greek and Roman poetry, see generally Cairns (1972). For historiography, see Wiseman (1979); Woodman (1988).

the rhetorical figure of the tyrant, as we have already seen, was felt in the depictions of Roman kings, consuls, and military commanders.¹⁸⁸ The historian Tacitus applied many of the traditional attributes of the tyrant not only to the Roman army, to Roman provincial governors, and to the Germans, as well as to Sejanus, Artabanus, Fonteius Capito, Queen Cartimandua, and Antonius Primus, but also the emperors themselves. Suetonius was not the first, therefore, to speak of the Roman emperors using the language and imagery of the tyrant. As we will see in the course of this dissertation, however, he did so consistently and in the case of each of the emperors about whom he wrote.

¹⁸⁸ For the rhetorical tyrant in Roman historiography, see Walker (1952) 204-25 (Tacitus); Dunkle (1971) 12-9 (Sallust, Livy, and Tacitus); Keitel (2007) 441-6 (Tacitus' portrait of Vitellius).

Chapter 4

Dissecting the Roman Tyrants: The Eidological Portraits of the Emperors in the *Caesares*

This chapter argues that the virtues, vices, deeds, statements, successes, and failures upon which Suetonius focuses in the eidological sections of the *Caesares*, as well as the anecdotes and details that he gathers under each rubric, reflect on the whole his decision to cast the emperors as tyrants. Suetonius attributes to the emperors the *saevitia*, *crudelitas*, *libido*, *luxuria*, and *metus* that are the typical features of the stock literary tyrant. He paints portraits of tyrants in the eidological chapters of the *Caesares*, moreover, using the categories of deeds and range of public policies that writers such as Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and Seneca have consistently used both to create their portraits of tyrants and to assess the successes and failures, as well as to judge the justice and injustice, of their regimes. In sum, Suetonius consistently turns to the stock figure of the tyrant when deciding how to depict the reigns of the first twelve emperors.

Suetonius depicts all of the emperors in ways that reflect, albeit in varying ways and in different degrees, the stock figure of the tyrant. The biographies of some emperors — those of Julius, Tiberius, Gaius, Nero, and Domitian in particular — are straightforward portraits of unjust and cruel tyrants. The traditional portrait of the tyrant also lies behind the biographies of the “good” emperors such as Augustus, Vespasian, and Titus. In the case of these emperors, Suetonius includes some details that cast the emperor as a tyrant — the *avaritia* of Vespasian, the *saevitia* and *crudelitas* of Octavian on campaign, and the Neronian cruelty and indulgence of the young Titus — as well as others that serve to distinguish the emperor from the malevolent tyrant. Suetonius uses the traditional portrait

of the tyrant to establish either that the emperor was a tyrant or that the emperor had ruled in a way that set himself apart from the traditional tyrant.

Suetonius' *Caesares* is a rhetorical work. As we have already seen in chapters one and two, the structural division of each biography into sections of topical rubrics and chronological narrative reflects the practice of epideictic rhetoric, while the techniques that Suetonius uses to describe the periods before, during, and after the life of each emperor reveal the author's training in the rhetorical art of praising and blaming great men effectively and persuasively. In this chapter, I will show that Suetonius used the figure of the stock tyrant to draw his portraits of the Caesars in power. Although the tyrant was a figure of the distant past in Suetonius' day, the author could nevertheless have become familiar with the stock tyrant from Roman invective and declamation. As we will see, however, it would be wrong to speak of the influence of a purely "rhetorical tyrant" on Suetonius; the tyrant who lurks behind the *Caesares* is a creation not only of rhetoric and oratory, but of ancient literature generally.

In the present chapter, I will show the way in which Suetonius assembles his biographies using the ethical, political, and literary building blocks that had contributed to the stock figure of the tyrant. I begin with the characteristic ethical qualities of the tyrant –*saevitia*, *crudelitas*, *metus*, *libido*, and *superbia* – and examine how Suetonius uses these vices to cast the emperors as tyrants. I then turn to explain how the other traditional behaviors, actions, relationships, and talents that were attributed to the tyrant appear within the rubrics found in the *Caesares*.

Over the course of this analysis, Suetonius' reasons for choosing to focus on the specific qualities on which he focused and to include the particular material that he did

under each rubric will be made clear. The unifying theme of the *Caesares* has to date remained elusive, leading many to conclude that each biography is nothing more than a topically organized collection of amusing and often prurient anecdotes about each emperor. I will demonstrate that the stock figure of the tyrant, in fact, contributes thematic coherence not only to the individual biographies but also to the collection as a whole. It is from the durable and intense power that the stock literary tyrant has long exercised over the popular imagination that, I believe, Suetonius' anecdotal and oftentimes seemingly arbitrary collection of vices and crimes derived its power to shape the popular memory of each emperor and mold the modern understanding of the principate. It is, quite simply, the figure of the tyrant that brings unity, coherence, and power to this seemingly cacophonous assortment of perversions, vices, and crimes.

Saevitia and Crudelitas **The Savage Violence of the Tyrant**

Fear, hubris, and appetite play a part in the reign of most tyrants, but savagery, cruelty, and violence are in many ways the most prominent characteristics of the traditional tyrant. For all of Tiberius' vices, it is his *saevitia* that keeps the people's *invidia* alive and growing even after the death of the tyrant: "crevit igitur invidia, quasi etiam post mortem tyranni saevitia permanente" (*Tib.* 75.3). It is accordingly with the savage cruelty of the tyrant that we begin our review of the rubrics of the *Caesares*.

Cicero recounts in the *Verrine Orations* what is perhaps the most notorious example of tyrannical cruelty, that of the bronze bull that Phalaris, that cruelest of tyrants (*crudelissimus omnium tyrannorum*), owned and used when he ruled Agrigentum in the 6th Century B.C. (Cic., *Verr.* 4.73):

tum alia Gelensibus, alia Agrigentinis, in quibus etiam ille nobilis taurus, quem crudelissimus omnium tyrannorum Phalaris habuisse dicitur, quo vivos supplicii causa demittere homines et subicere flammam solebat. Quem taurum cum Scipio redderet Agrigentinis, dixisse dicitur aequum esse illos cogitare utrum esset Agrigentinis utilius, suisne servire anne populo Romano obtemperare, cum idem monumentum et domesticae crudelitatis et nostrae mansuetudinis haberent.

Then Scipio returned some things to the Geloans, other things to the Agrigentines, among which was that famous bull, which Phalaris, the cruelest of all tyrants, is said to have owned, and in which he used to put condemned men alive and then light a fire underneath it. When Scipio returned this bull to the Agrigentines, he is reported to have said that they ought to think over whether it would be better for them to be slaves of their own or subjects of the Roman people, since they had this same monument both of their native cruelty and of our kindness.

The tale of the Bull of Phalaris includes many of the characteristic elements of tyrannical cruelty.¹⁸⁹ The cruelty of a tyrant is extreme both in terms of its severity and its intensity.

The cruelty of the tyrant is most often exhibited in the punishments he metes out. His cruelty is more often directed at his own citizens than at his foreign enemies. The bull itself, moreover, is a sign and symbol of the bestiality of the tyrant's cruelty. Finally, the tale reflects the inventiveness that tyrants exhibit in their cruelty. Men kill their fellow men; the tyrant kills with savage style and panache.

Tyrants are violent and cruel, therefore, and often extreme and inventive in the way they give vent to their savage nature. The point need not be belabored. There are, however, several ways in which the tyrant characteristically expresses his savage nature. First, the tyrant will often attack one family member in a way that causes suffering to the other members of the family. The feast that Atreus served Thyestes and that which Astyages served to the son of Harpagus are of a piece with Cambyses forcing Egyptian

¹⁸⁹ For the place of Phalaris in the ancient imagination, see generally Hinz (2001).

parents to watch 2000 of their sons, with mouths bridled and ropes around their necks, paraded before them on their way to execution (Hdt. 3.14).¹⁹⁰ Pythius asked Xerxes to allow one of his five sons to remain behind as the expedition set out against Greece; Xerxes, in his rage (κάρτα τε ἐθυμώθη, Hdt. 7.39.1), has the son cut in half and marches his entire army between the remains (Hdt. 7.39-40).¹⁹¹ Second, tyrants are cruel to the members of their own families and, very often, particularly so to the women and children. Periander killed his wife by kicking her while she was pregnant, while Cambyses kills both his sister, who also dies after being kicked during her pregnancy, and his brother Smerdis out of simple jealousy.¹⁹² Third, tyrants are literally bestial in their cruelty, often making use of animals or mimicking the practices of wild beasts.¹⁹³ Plato had, of course,

¹⁹⁰ Hdt. 1.119; 3.14. Asheri, Lloyd, and Corcella (2007) 412 remark on Cambyses' cruelty toward the Egyptians that while the existence of a "scale of feelings" is assumed by Homer, "the wicked idea of [Cambyses'] experiment assumes also a despotic regime, that imposes collective punishments on entire families and offers the "choice of mercy" to one of the victims."

¹⁹¹ The account of Zibelmios the Thracian in Diodorus Siculus, as Leigh (1996) 175-5 has observed, reflects the cruelty, as well as the appetites, of the tyrant. The Thracian ruler has children killed before the eyes and in the laps of their parents; he then cooks them and feeds them to their parents, renewing the ancient feasts of Tereus and Thyestes. See Diod. Sic. 34-5.12.1.

¹⁹² For Periander, see Diog. Laert. 1.95. For Cambyses' murder of Smerdis on account of jealousy, see Hdt. 3.30.

¹⁹³ Dunkle (1971) 14 concludes that an increasingly greater emphasis was put on *saevitia* rather than *crudelitas* as the Republic yields to Empire; he observes that the "association of *belua* with the tyrant could very well have suggested the suitability of *saevitia* with its primary connotation of animal savagery as a term to describe the tyrant who had come to

compared the tyrant to a wolf who preys upon the flock of his people.¹⁹⁴ Alexander of Pherae plays to type and incorporates wild dogs into his “play” (παιδιή), dressing men up in the skins of boars or bears and setting dogs upon them; he then either lets the dogs tear these unfortunates to pieces or spears them himself.¹⁹⁵ Fourth, the punishments inflicted

be considered more animal than human.” In my opinion the attribution of bestial savagery to the tyrant begins much earlier in the tradition, and certainly no later than Plato.

¹⁹⁴ For wolves and tyranny in Plato, see Lanza (1977) 65-7; Mainoldi (1984) 187-200; Pl. *Rep.* 565d-566a: ὥς ἄρα ὁ γευσάμενος τοῦ ἀνθρωπίνου σπλάγχχνου, ἐν ἄλλοις ἄλλων ἱερείων ἐνὸς ἐγκατατετμημένου, ἀνάγκη δὴ τούτῳ λύκῳ γενέσθαι. ... ἄρ’ οὖν οὕτω καὶ ὅς ἂν δήμου προεστώς, λαβὼν σφόδρα πειθόμενον ὄχλον, μὴ ἀπόσχηται ἐμφυλίου αἵματος, ἀλλ’ ἀδίκως ἐπαιτιώμενος, οἷα δὴ φιλοῦσιν, εἰς δικαστήρια ἄγων μαιφονῇ, βίον ἀνδρὸς ἀφανίζων, γλώττη τε καὶ στόματι ἀνοσίῳ γευόμενος φόνου συγγενοῦς, καὶ ἀνδρηλατῇ καὶ ἀποκτεινύῃ καὶ ὑποσημαίνῃ χρεῶν τε ἀποκοπὰς καὶ γῆς ἀναδασμόν, ἄρα τῷ τοιούτῳ ἀνάγκη δὴ τὸ μετὰ τοῦτο καὶ εἵμαρται ἢ ἀπολωλέναι ὑπὸ τῶν ἐχθρῶν ἢ τυραννεῖν καὶ λύκῳ ἐξ ἀνθρώπου γενέσθαι; Pl. *Phd.* 82a; Ps.-Plat. *Ep.* 3.318e. For the tyrant as a creature who consumes his people, in Plato, Ovid, and other Greek and Latin authors, see Leigh (1996) 192 n.36. For Cicero’s use of this motif, and a comparison of the depiction of Antony at *Philippics* 2.70-71 with the discussion of the tyrant as a wolf in the *Republic*, see Leigh (1996) 176-8. See also Cic. *Phil.* 2.59: “saturavit se sanguine dissimillimorum sui civium.”

¹⁹⁵ Plut., *Pelopidas* 29.4: ἐτέροις δὲ δέρματα συῶν ἀγρίων καὶ ἄρκτων περιτιθεῖς καὶ τοὺς θηρατικούς ἐπάγων κύνας καὶ διέσπα καὶ κατηκόντιζε, παιδιᾷ ταύτῃ χρώμενος. Cicero affirms that the tyrant is a man only in appearance; he is, in reality, a beast who should be segregated from the human race. Cic. *de Off.* 3.32: “Etenim, ut membra quaedam amputantur, si et ipsa sanguine et tamquam spiritu carere coeperunt et nocent reliquis partibus corporis, sic ista in figura hominis feritas et immanitas beluae a communi tamquam humanitate corporis segreganda est.”

by tyrants are never ordinary, and are often perversely clever.¹⁹⁶ Alexander of Pherae had his dogs and his bull, but, presumably for variety, would also have men buried alive (Plut. *Pelopidas* 29.4). We have already seen Xerxes dividing the son whom his father did not want to see separated from him. Fifth, the tyrant in his wrath will strike out at whole peoples and seek to create total destruction in his own city and beyond.¹⁹⁷ Finally, tyrants often put their victims at ease before delivering the blow; the tyrant's dinner party rarely ends well for the guest of honor.¹⁹⁸

Suetonius will include a range of examples of tyrannical cruelty in each emperor's biography to aid in casting that emperor, and all of the Caesars, as tyrants. Tiberius, for example, executes men on evidence provided by their children, showing the tyrant's tendency to insert his violence into the family (*Tib.* 61.2). He forbids people to mourn for the condemned (*Tib.* 61.2), as Creon in the *Antigone* had forbidden the burial of those

¹⁹⁶ For the tragic tyrant's traditional use of torture, including starvation and imprisonment in dark dungeons, see Tarrant (1976) 357-8.

¹⁹⁷ See, e.g., Sen. *H.F.* 351 (Lycus): "stat tollere omnem penitus Herculeam domum"; Sen. *Pho.* 345 (Oedipus): "ab imo tota considat domus"; Sen. *Thy.* 190-91 (Atreus): "haec ipsa ... domus / ruat vel in me, dummodo in fratrem ruat." For the tyrant's desire to bring about total ruin, see Tarrant (1976) 346.

¹⁹⁸ In mythology, of course, the children of the guest fare none too well at the table of the tyrant. Among the Persians, Astyages first put Harpagus at ease with an invitation to dinner before serving him the flesh of his son. See Hdt. 1.119. See Accius, *Atreus* fr. 10 (Ribbeck): "Ne cum tyranno quisquam epulandi gratia / accumbat mensam aut eandem vescatur dapem." For cannibalism as an element in the representation of the tyrant in Republican political thought, see Leigh (1996) 171-97.

who had fought against Thebes.¹⁹⁹ Suetonius describes two punishments, in particular, that leave little doubt as to the tyrannical nature of Tiberius' reign: "Obiectum est poetae, quod in tragoedia Agamemnonem probris laccessisset; obiectum et historico, quod Brutum Cassiumque ultimos Romanorum dixisset" (*Tib.* 61.3).²⁰⁰ As a result of his *saevitia* and *crudelitas*, Tiberius' life and reign come to be characterized by the hatred and fear that are the hallmark of the reign of the tyrant: "quam inter haec non modo invisus ac detestabilis, sed praetrepidus quoque atque etiam contumeliis obnoxius vixerit, multa indicia sunt" (*Tib.* 63.1).

Suetonius attributes to the Caesars acts of cruelty that are drawn from all of the categories of tyrannical cruelty and are, moreover, often cast in terms that are specifically evocative of the tradition or even of an individual tyrant's behavior. The Caesars, as we have just seen in the case of Tiberius, will cause suffering to all of the members of a family. Gaius is described as having forced parents to witness the executions of their sons, a detail that calls to mind the behavior of Cambyses in Egypt (*Cal.* 27.4).²⁰¹ When

¹⁹⁹ For Creon's edict, see Soph. *Ant.* 26-36. For the shocking, though not necessarily alien, quality of such an action to an Athenian audience, see Griffith (1999) 127.

²⁰⁰ Tacitus (6.29.6) reports that the poet in question, Mamercus Scaurus, was in fact condemned for adultery with Livia Julia and for magical rites. Suetonius' version of the story emphasizes the repression of speech that is typical of the tyrant as well as the self-identification of Tiberius with Atreus. For the comparable accounts in Dio and Tacitus, see Lindsay (1995) 167. For a discussion of censorship at Rome, see Cramer (1945) 157-96.

²⁰¹ This is not the only example of Gaius acting like an eastern potentate. There are distinctively Herodotean overtones running throughout the portrait of Gaius. For example, Suetonius tells how the emperor loved Caesonia *et ardentius et constantius* and

two sons came to beg Vitellius to spare the life of their father, the emperor had all three put to death (*Vit.* 14.2). Even Augustus takes delight in inflicting mutual suffering on father and son. Early in his reign, when a father and son begged for their lives, he bid them cast lots or play *mora* to decide which of them should be spared. He watched as the father was first executed when he offered to die for his son; the son then took his own life.²⁰²

The Caesars did not hold their tyrannical cruelty in check when it came to members of their own family. Gaius and Nero likely had a hand in the death of their predecessors. Suetonius devotes two of the longer rubrics in the *Nero* to describing his attacks on his mother, his wives, and his family. Nero begins his career as a parricide (*Nero* 33.1). He murders his step-brother Britannicus (*Nero* 33.2). He goes to increasing, and increasingly theatrical, lengths to murder his mother, Agrippina (*Nero* 34.1-4). He murders his aunt (*Nero* 34.5). He has Octavia put to death on false charges of adultery (*Nero* 35.1). His love for Poppaea does not save her from dying the death of a tyrant's wife. Like the wife of Periander, and the sister of Cambyses, she dies when kicked by

was prone to display her *amicis vero etiam nudam* (*Cal.* 25.3); this behavior recalls the Lydian Candaules.

²⁰² *Aug.* 13.2. Dio (47.49) and Appian (*BC* 4.135) report that Augustus denied mercy to none who asked, save the actual murderers and extreme anti-Caesareans. Carter (1982) 103 concludes that Suetonius must here be drawing from pro-Antonian sources. I suggest that Suetonius is not here a slave of his sources, but has deliberately selected details that add to the tyrannical character of the young Caesar seeking to secure his hold on power. Suetonius also reports that Augustus denied burial to his victims.

Nero while she was pregnant (*Nero* 35.3).²⁰³ He has his step-son by Poppaea drowned, when the boy is reported to have played at being a military commander and an *imperator* (*Nero* 35.5); the boy who plays the game of kings, Nero had perhaps learned from Herodotus (Hdt. 1.120.1-2), might one day be the king. There was, quite simply, no relationship that Nero did not violate; no relative he would not put to death: “Nullum adeo necessitudinis genus est quod non scelere perculerit” (*Nero* 35.4). When Vitellius, who was able to exhibit a remarkable amount of cruelty in a comparatively brief reign, learned that he would live a long life provided he outlived his mother, he had her starved to death or, perhaps, supplied with poison (*Vit.* 14.5).

The emperors exhibit even the bestial cruelty typical of the more extreme tyrants. The reign of Alexander of Pherae, who dressed men in the skins of bears and oxen and fed them to wild animals, served as an inspiration to several of the Caesars. Gaius, blending economy with his cruelty, fed condemned criminals to the beasts in the amphitheatre as the price of meat rose (*Cal.* 27.1). Nero placed bestial savagery in the service of his *libido*, dressing himself, rather than his victim, in the skin of an animal, having himself released from a cage, and then attacking the private parts of men and women who had been bound to stakes (*Nero* 30.3). Nero is believed, moreover, to have entertained the desire to feed men alive to a certain Egyptian who was accustomed to eat raw flesh and whatever else might be given to him.²⁰⁴ Domitian has a man thrown to the

²⁰³ Hunter (1994) 1080 notes, in his study of the historicity of Chariton’s romances, that the kicking to death of one’s wife is a stock element in the traditional portrait of the tyrant.

²⁰⁴ *Nero* 37.2: “Creditur etiam polyphago cuidam Aegypti generis crudam carnem et quidquid daretur mandere assueto, concupisse vivos homines laniandos absumendosque

dogs for having criticized the emperor for his dislike of Thracian gladiators (*Dom.* 10.1). Although Gaius had no bronze bull, he did have a poet burnt alive for a *double entendre* made at his expense (*Cal.* 27.4).

Fourth, the violence of the emperors is often colorful and inventive. Suetonius reports that tourists will still visit the site on Capri from which Tiberius would watch his victims hurled off a cliff and into the sea, where boats waited with men ready to beat them to death should they survive the fall (*Tib.* 62.2). Tiberius also devised a particularly clever form of punishment to which the emperor had, according to Suetonius, given a considerable degree of thought (*excogitaverat*): “ut larga meri potione per fallaciam oneratos, repente veretris deligatis, fidicularum simul urinaeque tormento distenderet” (*Tib.* 62.2). Nero, after trying to poison his mother, Agrippina, on three occasions, next constructs a collapsing ceiling and then a collapsing boat in his efforts to murder her (*Nero* 34.2-3). His aunt hopes to live to see his beard shaved; Nero, in a flash of tyrannical panache, calls for his barber.

Gaius and Nero exhibit the tyrant’s desire to seek the total destruction of their city and its people. Gaius first faults the entire equestrian order for its love of the games and later expresses his wish that the entire Roman people might be put to death with one

obicere.” Accordingly to Bradley (1978) 225, the “curious and far-fetched” item is recorded only here and in the Chronographer of the Year 354. The story is indeed a curious example of cruelty, comparable to the story of Vedius Pollio and his eels. See Sen. *De Clem.* 1.18.2, and the commentary thereon in Braund (2009) 339. I believe that the emphasis on the eating of raw flesh and scraps adds an element of the bestial and the uncivilized that makes the anecdote a coherent element in the portrait of a bestial and lawless tyrant.

blow: "Utinam p. R. unam cervicem haberet!" (*Cal.* 30.2). He plans to murder to a man the legions who had beset his father Germanicus in his youth (*Cal.* 48). Suetonius reports that Nero put the city to the torch in 64 A.D. because of his distaste for her narrow streets. Later, in the final days of his reign, he planned to renew the attempt, only this time he would first release wild animals in order to hinder the escape of the people from the flames (*Nero* 43.1).

Finally, tyrants often put their victims at ease before striking. Vitellius has noble men, including his *condiscipulos et aequales*, lured to court by promises of advancement and then killed: "omnibus blanditiis tantum non ad societatem imperii adlice factos vario genere fraudis occidit" (*Vit.* 14.1). Titus, in the days before his accession when he imitated Nero in his actions and way of life, had A. Caecina put to death only after he had, in good tyrannical fashion, put him at ease by first entertaining him at dinner (*Tit.* 6.2). Gaius explains an outburst of laughter to the consuls seated on other side of him at a particularly extravagant banquet as the result of his having realized that he had only to give the signal to have both of their throats cut; the remark well captures the arbitrary and abrupt way in which the tyrant can turn to cruelty (*Cal.* 32.3: "'Quid,' inquit, 'nisi uno meo nutu iugulari utrumque vestrum statim posse?'"").

The reign of the Caesars was, as we learn from the accounts of the historians, marked by violence and, often, by acts of wanton cruelty. That Suetonius includes them in the *Caesares* would neither convert these biographies into portraits of tyrants nor even distinguish his work from the other accounts of the emperors. Yet, even though many of these Suetonian anecdotes of tyrannical violence and cruelty are not found exclusively in

the *Caesares*,²⁰⁵ the fact nevertheless remains that Suetonius consistently emphasizes the tyrannical dimension of the emperor's savagery and cruelty. Consider, for example, the case of Poppaea Sabina. The story of how she died at the conclusion of the Neronian games when struck by Nero in a fit of rage is told also by Tacitus (Tac. *Ann.* 16.6.1). Tacitus had played down the cruelty of the emperor, however, suggesting that the death of Poppaea was an accident brought on by Nero's *fortuita iracundia*. He even denies another rumor that Nero had poisoned her, concluding that it was the product of *odium* toward Nero; Nero, he continues, was "liberorum cupiens et amoris uxoris obnoxius." He concludes with the elaborate funeral arrangements Nero made for his wife. Suetonius acknowledged that Nero loved Poppaea ("dilexit unice," *Nero* 36.3), but then reports that she had reproached Nero when he returned home late from the races and that he had, in response, kicked his pregnant and sick wife to death. No attempt is made to soften the emperor's actions. Suetonius simply presents those facts – the fact that his wife is pregnant and ill, that Nero has returned from a public spectacle, the kick – that establish the association of Nero's murder of his wife and the murders of pregnant wives and sisters perpetrated by Periander and Cambyses. Suetonius makes use of the material in the way that best serves the purpose of creating a portrait of Nero as a traditional tyrant.

The Emperor and his Fears

Fear and tyranny go hand in hand. At all times and in all places, in peacetime and in war, at home and abroad, the tyrant lives in fear that he will be overthrown and murdered. Zeus fears the threat to his power about which Prometheus claims to know.

²⁰⁵ For the use of *saevitia* in connection with Tiberius by Tacitus, for example, see Woodman and Martin (1989) 79, where a list of Tacitus' uses of the term is provided.

Hiero affirms that a tyrant lives on perpetual campaign, ever in hostile territory even in the city his subjects associate with safety. Fear is also the principal means by which a tyrant maintains power and on account of which he becomes an object of hatred and is, ultimately, often removed from power.²⁰⁶ In the Roman tradition, the tyrant both fears his people and is feared by them.²⁰⁷ As we have already seen, the tyrant is willing to accept the hatred of his people, so long as his people continue to fear him. To establish this climate of fear, the tyrant will use everything from informers to executioners, establishing the ancient equivalent of the surveillance state.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁶ See, e.g., Pl. *Rep.* 417B: δεσπόται δ' ἐχθροὶ ἀντὶ συμμάχων τῶν ἄλλων πολιτῶν γενήσονται, μισοῦντες δὲ δὴ καὶ μισούμενοι καὶ ἐπιβουλεύοντες καὶ ἐπιβουλεύόμενοι διάξουσι πάντα τὸν βίον, πολὺ πλείω καὶ μᾶλλον δεδιότες τοὺς ἔνδον ἢ τοὺς ἔξωθεν πολεμίους; Pol. 5.1.6: τυράννου μὲν γὰρ ἔργον ἐστὶ τὸ κακῶς ποιοῦντα τῷ φόβῳ δεσπόζειν ἀκουσίων, μισούμενον καὶ μισοῦντα τοὺς ὑποτακτομένους; Cic. *de Rep.* 2.45: “rex ille .. cum metueret ipse poenam sceleris sui summam, metui se volebat.”

²⁰⁷ For the fear of the tyrant and its use in the historical works of Tacitus, see Walker (1952) 78: “Men know the tyrant may destroy them and so fear him; he knows their hatred and so fear them; fear makes him cruel as it makes them grasping, and egotism reacts to make them all more fearful; all lie constantly because it is the only way to gain, often the only way to survive, and because they fear truth most of all.”

²⁰⁸ See, e.g., Aesch. *P.V.* 226; Pl. *Rep.* 578a-579e; Arist. *Pol.* 1311^a25-7. For the tyrant's being motivated by his own fear of assassination to inspire fear in his subjects, see Cic. *Rep.* 2.45; Sen. *de Clem.* 1.12.3: “alter [armas habet], ut magno timore magna odia compescat, nec illas ipsas manus, quibus se commisit, securus adspicit.” For the hostility that follows as a result of the tyrant's efforts to inspire fear, see Pl. *Rep.* 579b, 579e; Xen. *Hiero* 2.18. For the proverbial fear of the tyrant, see Tarrant (1976) 187; Woodman and Martin (1989) 253, for the fear to which the subjects of a tyrant are particularly prone; Braund (2009) 302.

Fear does not plague some of the Caesars. Indeed, it plays no significant role in their lives or their regimes. The rubric that immediately precedes those that set out the case for Caesar having been *iure caesus*, for example, is dedicated to his *moderatio* and his *clementia*. This description of Caesar as a *civilis princeps* casts him in the role of a good and beneficent ruler by noting the absence from his regime of the repressive measures typical of the tyrannical ruler (*Jul.* 75.4-5):

ac si qua posthac aut cogitarentur gravius adversus se aut dicerentur,
inhibere maluit quam vindicare. Itaque et detectas coniurationes
conventusque nocturnos non ultra arguit, quam ut edicto ostenderet esse
sibi notas, et acerbe loquentibus satis habuit pro contione denuntiari ne
perseverarent, Aulique Caecinae crimosissimo libro et Pitholai
carminibus maledicentissimis laceratam existimationem suam civili animo
tulit.

And after this, if any very serious plots were launched against him or any slanders spoken against him, he preferred to inhibit rather than to punish them. And so, he would say nothing more about conspiracies when they were uncovered and about nighttime gatherings that reveal by edict that he was aware of them. For those who spoke harshly about him, he considered it sufficient to warn them publicly not to persist in their slanderous talk. He bore with a spirit of civility the harm done to his own reputation by the slanderous book of Aulus Caecina and the libelous verses of Pitholaus.

Caesar eschews the repressive measures that are typical of the tyrant. He dissuades those whom he has discovered to be plotting against him simply by revealing their plots to the light of day. Caesar also does not suppress freedom of speech, even libelous and malicious talk damaging to his reputation. This tolerance of free expression, and even of seditious talk, is of note precisely because it goes against the behavior that one would expect from a tyrant. It provides a contrast, therefore, with the increasingly tyrannical behavior that is presented in the following chapters to make out the case that the tyrannicides acted justifiably.

Augustus does not rule in fear. Although there are moments when the emperor fears a particular danger,²⁰⁹ fear does not characterize or pervade his reign. At the outset of his reign, he enlists a bodyguard of veterans because he fears that Antony will retaliate (“periculum in vicem metuens,” *Aug.* 10.3) after discovering that Augustus had hired assassins to kill him. He does recognize that fear can motivate men to obey, but rather than foster such fear, he seeks to weed out those “quos metus magis quam voluntas contineret” (*Aug.* 15.1). Augustus is, in short, an emperor who neither experiences fear himself nor seeks to instill fear in his subjects.

Suetonius also reports that Vespasian and Titus lived free from fear of assassination. Vespasian was so free of fear that, when he learned that Mettius Pompusianus had an imperial horoscope, he made the man a consul.²¹⁰ No mention of fear is made in the *Titus*. The emperor, like his father, is unwilling to put anyone to death, “sed peritulum se potius quam perditulum adiurans” (*Tit.* 9.1). Like Caesar, he does not put plotters to death, but merely admonishes them and instructs them to desist. When two young men were discovered *in adfectione imperii*, Titus took action, but not the actions of a tyrant (*Tit.* 9.1-2):

Duos patricii generis convictos in adfectione imperii nihil amplius quam ut desisterent monuit, docens principatum fato dari, si quid praeterea desiderarent promittens se tributurum. Et confestim quidem ad alterius matrem quae procul aberat, cursores suos misit, qui anxiae saluum filium

²⁰⁹ He did, however, fear thunder and lightning. See *Aug.* 90.1: “Tonitrua et fulgura paulo infirmius expavescebat.”

²¹⁰ *Vesp.* 14: “Nam ut suspicione aliqua vel metu ad perniciem cuiusquam compelleretur tantum afuit, ut monentibus amicis cavendum esse Mettium Pompusianum, quod volgo crederetur genesim habere imperatoriam, insuper consulem fecerit, spondens quandoque beneficii memorem futurum.”

nuntiarent, ceterum ipsos non solum familiari cenae adhibuit, sed et insequenti die gladiatorum spectaculo circa se ex industria conlocatis oblata sibi ferramenta pugnantium inspicienda porrexit. Dicitur etiam cognita utriusque genitura imminere ambobus periculum adfirmasse, verum quandoque et ab alio, sicut evenit.

To two men of a patrician family who were found guilty of aspiring to the principate, he did nothing more than admonish them to desist from their plot, instructing them that the principate is given by fate, promising them that if there were anything else they desired, he would give it to them. He immediately dispatched his own couriers to the mother of one of them, who lived far off, to announce to the concerned mother that her son was safe. Furthermore, he not only invited them to dine with him and his friends, but even on the following day at a gladiatorial show he offered them, whom he had arranged to have seated near him, the swords of the contestants that had been offered to him for his inspection. It is even said that he looked into the horoscopes of both men and affirmed that danger threatened both of them, but at another time and from another man, just as eventually turned out to be the case.

The anecdote serves the purpose of establishing the *clementia* of the emperor.²¹¹ It is cast in terms, however, that differentiate the actions of Titus from those of a tyrant. Titus goes to great lengths to put the two men at ease, for example, offering to give them whatever they want that is within his power to confer. Had he been a tyrant, these men would have been executed the moment the emperor's reassuring behavior had begun to make them feel safe and secure. A reader familiar with the tradition would also expect that, when Titus receives the swords from the gladiators at the games, the young men had little time left to live; Titus instead defeats this expectation and hands over these weapons to the very men who had planned to kill him. Tyrants are notorious, finally, not only for punishing sons for the sins of parents, and parents for the sins of their son, but also for

²¹¹ For the anecdote as an example of imperial *clementia*, see Martinet (1981) 100. Aelian will attribute a similar anecdote, involving Darius I bringing a group of conspirators back to loyalty during a hunt (*Var. Hist.* 6.14).

finding joy in forcing parents to witness the deaths of their own children. Titus sends his own messengers to the mother of one of these men, not to destroy or alarm her further, but rather to put her anxious mind at ease. All of the drama that a reader familiar with the story from Thucydides of Mytilene and the racing ships of the Athenians or that from Herodotus of Psammeticus and the messengers of Cambyses arriving too late to save his son, would expect drama, if not disaster, to follow in the story of the mother of this young man. Suetonius includes many of the details that are part of the traditional narrative of the tyrant's revenge. It is the act of revenge alone that is lacking. Suetonius has used the rhetorical tyrant in his portrait of Titus, therefore, precisely in order to highlight the *clementia* of Titus.

Tiberius, in contrast, is a creature of fear. Even before he has entered into the principate, he has already been living in fear ("non privatum modo, sed etiam obnoxium et trepidum egit," *Tib.* 12.2). He isolates himself on Rhodes, avoiding contact with those passing through the island on their way to the east ("mediterraneis agris abditus vitansque praeternavigantium officia," *Tib.* 12.2). Even in his private life, therefore, Tiberius is already living like the tyrant, secluding himself from the people in fear for his life. The retirement of Tiberius to Rhodes is not, of course, a story that Suetonius invented in order to create a literary tyrant. The details, however, that Suetonius chose to include – the fact that fear was the man's motivation, Tiberius' seclusion even while on the island, and his avoidance of contact with visiting dignitaries – cast this action as the action of a tyrant.

Tiberius then begins his reign cautiously. He is plagued by fear that dangers threaten him on all sides. He likens his situation as emperor to that of a man who has

taken hold of a wolf by the ears.²¹² His fear is the fear of being overthrown which all tyrants share; it arises for the same reasons it has always arisen and afflicts Tiberius as it has afflicted all tyrants. A slave had, for example, assembled a sizeable band of men to kill Tiberius in “in ultionem domini” (*Tib.* 25.1); personal revenge is a stock motive of the tyrannicide in the Greek literature and was, of course, the motive behind even Brutus’ assassination of Tarquin.²¹³ Tiberius is also threatened by Lucius Scribonius Libo, a *vir nobilis*, who was plotting a revolution, and by two mutinies among the legions, who were seeking to set up Germanicus in his place. A slave seeking revenge, a noble, and the army. Tiberius faces the full range of threats that confront any tyrant. He removes these threats to his power, as Aristotle counseled, slowly and incrementally during the first year of his reign. Even when he has freed himself from his fear, however, he continues to

²¹² *Tib.* 25.1: “Cunctandi causa erat metus undique imminentium discriminum, ut saepe lupum se auribus tenere diceret.” Lindsay (1995) 111 observes that the statement was proverbial. I add that the association of the statement specifically with tyranny dates at least to Thucydides, who has Pericles liken the Athenian empire to a tyranny, something unjust to obtain, but dangerous to let go of. See Thuc. 2.63.1-2: ὥς τυραννίδα γὰρ ἤδη ἔχετε αὐτήν, ἣν λαβεῖν μὲν ἄδικον δοκεῖ εἶναι, ἀφεῖναι δὲ ἐπικίνδυνον. This is, moreover, one example of how wolf imagery of the sort seen in Plato’s discussion of the tyrant (*Rep.* 556a) continues to reverberate through the traditional discourse on tyrants and tyranny. Campbell (1983) 417-27 suggests that the quotation also reflects the emperor’s relationship specifically with the army.

²¹³ See, e.g., Arist. *Pol.*, 5.10, 1311^a28-36. The peripatetic Phaenias of Eresus composed a work, presumably inspired by Aristotle’s observation, specifically on tyrants killed in revenge. For Brutus Ultor, see Virg. *Aen.* 6.817-18: “vis et Tarquinius reges animamque superbam / ultoris Bruti, fascisque videre receptos?”

follow the course of the tyrant, putting on the unassuming countenance of the humble citizen that Plato counseled the tyrant to assume in the early days of his regime.²¹⁴

The tyrant who fears his people soon seeks to create fear in his people. He will use fear, and the state of surveillance and of repression by which it is created, in order to protect himself and preserve his regime. These repressive measures soon cause the people not only to hate, but to fear their ruler. The tragic tyrant is willing to accept the hatred of his people, however, provided they continue to fear him: “Oderint, dum metuant.”²¹⁵ Gaius not only embraces this motto and makes it truly his own, but also puts it into practice.²¹⁶

Fear plays a similar role in the reigns of several of the other emperors. Suetonius describes Claudius as growing so timid and suspicious that he begins to attend banquets only with an armed escort: “neque convivia inire ausus est nisi ut speculatores cum lanceis circumstarent militesque vice ministrorum fungerentur” (*Claud.* 35.1). Suetonius shows that the fear felt by the tyrant drives him, in the case of Claudius, to adopt the bodyguard of the tyrant. Domitian lived, as we will see more clearly in the following

²¹⁴ *Tib.* 26.1: “Verum liberatus metu civilem admodum inter initia ac paulo minus quam privatum egit.” For the tyrant’s need to dissimulate and play the part of a humble citizen early in his rule, see *Pl. Rep.* 566d-e.

²¹⁵ Accius, fr. 203R². See also Sen. *Ag.* 72-3: “metui cupiunt/metuique timent”; Sen. *Oed.* 74: “regna custodit metus.” For the tragic tyrant’s desire to be feared in order to be obeyed, see Tarrant (1976) 187. Tacitus uses a telling inversion of the line – “metuebatur non occultus odii” (*Ann.* 4.7.1) – to indicate, as Woodman and Martin (1989) 114 observe, that “Sejanus, in his efforts at achieving the tyrannical ambitions, experiences the fear to which tyrants are conventionally prone.”

²¹⁶ *Cal.* 30.1: “Tragicum illud subinde iactantibus: ‘Oderint, dum metuant.’”

chapter, in a state of constant fear and anxiety (“pavidus semper atque anxius,” *Dom.* 14.2), always suspicious that death was drawing near and growing even more savage on account of his fear (“metu saevus,” *Dom.* 3.2). During his reign, Nero feels fear, on two occasions, when he faces the judges and opponents he must face in his musical tour of Greece.²¹⁷ He kills Britannicus, because he envies his voice, and because he fears that the boy may grow more popular than him.²¹⁸ Nero, as he draws near the end of his life, oscillates between a state of disinterested calm and anxious fear as the news of the rising armies and generals comes in from the provinces. It is in a state of terror (*conterritus*, *Nero* 49.2) that Nero reaches for the weapons with which his life will be ended.

***Libidines Domini:* The Appetites of the Emperor**

The tyrant has traditionally been depicted as a man given over to drinking, dining, and sex. This portrait of the decadent tyrant may find its origins, once again, in the Greek accounts of the Great King and of the other eastern potentates. Both Herodotus and Xenophon attribute the decline of not only the Persian royalty but also the Persian national character to the adoption of delicate and decadent practices.²¹⁹ Xenophon tells

²¹⁷ *Nero* 23.2: “Quam autem trepide anxieque certaverit, quanta adversariorum aemulatione, quo metu iudicum, vix credi potest”; *Nero* 24.1: “cum elapsum baculum cito resumpsisset, pavidus et metuens ne ob delictum certamine summo veretur, ...”;

²¹⁸ *Nero* 33.2: “Britannicum non minus aemulatione vocis, quae illi iucundior suppetebat, quam metu ne quandoque apud hominum gratiam paterna memoria praevaleret, veneno adgressus est.” The association and confusion of art and politics is reflected in what and whom Nero fears during his reign.

²¹⁹ See, e.g., Hdt. 1.126 (Persians inspired by Cyrus to attack the Medes in order to obtain their luxurious lifestyle); Xen., *Cyr.* 8.7-17 (Persian decline follows adoption of Median

how the Persians grew increasingly effeminate (θρυστικώτεροι, *Cyr.* 8.8.15) following the reign of Cyrus; they soon came to adopt the dress and luxury of the Medes (τῇ δὲ Μήδων στολῇ καὶ ἀβρότητι, *Cyr.* 8.8.15). They ate from morning to night (*Cyr.* 8.8.9). They are carried out drunk from their banquet halls (*Cyr.* 8.8.10). They hire cooks who seek always to invent new dishes (*Cyr.* 8.8.16).²²⁰ The depictions of the Greek tyrant

softness). Plato, in the *Laws*, attributes the decline to the corrupting influence of the wealth that Cyrus had acquired through his conquests; having grown up in luxury and having been raised by women, the King's children were spoiled and degenerate (Pl. *Laws* 694d). These children declined in the same rapid and all-encompassing way the children of tyrants and men of wealth always decline (Pl. *Laws* 696a: διαφερόντως πλουσίων καὶ τυράννων παῖδες τὰ πολλὰ ζῶσιν: οὐ γὰρ μή ποτε γένηται παῖς καὶ ἀνὴρ καὶ γέρων ἐκ ταύτης τῆς τροφῆς διαφέρων πρὸς ἀρετήν). For the ideological role of Persian decadence in Greek discourse, see Briant (2002) 193-210.

²²⁰ Likewise, in the *Agésilas*, by showing, point by point, the ways in which he was unlike the Persian King, Xenophon argues that Agesilaus was a good king. This included his being abstemious in matters of food and drink (*Xen. Ages.* 9.3). The Peripatetics report that this decadence persisted to the very end of the empire. Before being defeated by Alexander, Darius is said to have held contests in order to see who could invent new pleasures for the Great King. See Klearchus (Wehrli) fr.50 = Athenaeus 12.539b:

Κλέαρχος δ' ἐν τοῖς περὶ Βίων περὶ Δαρείου λέγων τοῦ καθαιρεθέντος ὑπὸ τοῦ Ἀλεξάνδρου φησὶν 'ὁ Περσῶν βασιλεὺς ἀθλοθετῶν τοῖς τὰς ἡδονὰς αὐτῷ πορίζουσιν ὑπὸ πάντων τῶν ἡδέων ἡττωμένην ἀπέδειξε τὴν βασιλείαν καὶ καταγωνιζόμενος ἑαυτὸν οὐκ ἦσθετο πρότερον ἢ τὸ σκῆπτρον ἕτεροι λαβόντες ἀνεκηρύχθησαν.' "And Clearchus, in his treatise on Lives, speaking of Dareius who was dethroned by Alexander, says, 'The king of the Persians offered prizes to those who could furnish pleasures (τὰς ἡδονὰς) for him, and by this conduct allowed his whole empire and sovereignty to be weakened by all these pleasures (ὑπὸ πάντων τῶν ἡδέων ἡττωμένην). Nor was he aware that he was

quickly assimilated these exotic eastern appetites for food, drink, and sex. Pausanias' descent into despotism goes hand in hand with the Medizing of his tastes and appetites; Thucydides reports that the Spartan adopted not only the violence and the pride of the Persian king, but also his dress and table habits (Thuc. 1.94.1-5 & 1.130.1-2).

The Greek tyrant is a creature ruled by his appetites. Plato defined the tyrant as a creature of *eros*, a master of slaves who is himself nevertheless a slave to his own appetites. He is a man in whose soul lust, wrath, and love of drink are united.²²¹ When this tyrannical *eros* rules the soul, feasting, reveling, and courtesans become the order of the day.²²² The satisfaction of the appetites for food and drink is the first matter that Hiero and Simonides discuss in the *Hiero* of Xenophon (*Hiero* 1.17-28). Both Aristotle and the Peripatetics describe the tyrant as continuously engaged in banqueting, drunken carousing, and sexual debauchery. In the *Politics*, Aristotle cautions the tyrant who drinks from dawn to dusk and for days on end that he is running the risk of rendering himself

defeating himself till others had wrested his scepter from him and had been proclaimed in his place.'"

²²¹ Pl. *Rep.* 573c: τυραννικὸς δέ, ἣν δ' ἐγώ, ὃ δαιμόνιε, ἀνὴρ ἀκριβῶς γίγνεται, ὅταν ἡ φύσει ἢ ἐπιτηδεύμασιν ἢ ἀμφοτέροις μεθυστικός τε καὶ ἐρωτικός καὶ μελαγχολικός γένηται. See also Leigh (1996) 174: "When Plato in Books 8-9 of the *Republic* seeks to distinguish the psychological make-up of the oligarch, the democrat and the tyrant, he does so by representing the degree to which each is governed by his appetites. A central motif of Greek and Roman representations of the tyrant, therefore, is his representation as a figure of overpowering ἐπιθυμία or *libido*."

²²² Pl. *Rep.* 573d: οἶμαι γὰρ τὸ μετὰ τοῦτο ἑορταὶ γίνονται παρ' αὐτοῖς καὶ κῶμοι καὶ θάλειαι καὶ ἐταῖραι καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα πάντα, ὧν ἂν Ἔρως τύραννος ἐνδον οἰκῶν διακυβερνᾷ τὰ τῆς ψυχῆς ἅπαντα.

contemptible and leaving himself open to attack.²²³ The Peripatetic biographers supported Aristotle's observation by offering specific examples of tyrants who were overly devoted to wine and who put their regimes and their lives in peril as a result.²²⁴ The sexuality of the tyrant, finally, is characterized by excess and abuse of power, expressed toward the young and the married, and characterized by violence and transgression.²²⁵ The appetites

²²³ See Arist. *Pol.*, 5.11, 1314b28-36, and especially 32-33: ἀλλὰ μάλιστα μὲν μετριάζειν τοῖς τοιούτοις, εἰ δὲ μή, τό γε φαίνεσθαι τοῖς ἄλλοις διαφεύγειν.

²²⁴ Phainias of Eresus relates that Dionysius allowed his drinking buddy Philoxenus to become too familiar and, ultimately, had to have him thrown into the quarries when he was caught in an affair with the tyrant's wife. Wehrli fr.13 = Athenaeus 6f-7a: Φαινίας δὲ φησιν ὅτι Φιλόξενος ὁ Κυθήριος ποιητής, περιπαθῆς ὢν τοῖς ὄψοις, δειπνῶν ποτε παρὰ Διονυσίῳ ὡς εἶδεν ἐκείνῳ μὲν μεγάλην τριγλάν παρατεθεῖσαν, ἑαυτῷ δὲ μικράν, ἀναλαβὼν αὐτὴν εἰς τὰς χεῖρας πρὸς τὸ οὖς προσήνεγκε. πυθομένου δὲ τοῦ Διονυσίου τίνος ἔνεκεν τοῦτο ποιεῖ, εἶπεν ὁ Φιλόξενος ὅτι γράφων τὴν Γαλάτειαν βούλοισι τινα παρ' ἐκείνης τῶν κατὰ Νηρέα πυθέσθαι: τὴν δὲ ἡρωτημένην ἀποκεκρίσθαι διότι νεωτέρα ἀλοίη: διὸ μὴ παρακολουθεῖν: τὴν δὲ τῷ Διονυσίῳ παρατεθεῖσαν πρεσβυτέραν οὖσαν εἰδέναι πάντα σαφῶς ἃ βούλεται μαθεῖν. τὸν οὖν Διονύσιον γελάσαντα ἀποστεῖλαι αὐτῷ τὴν τριγλάν τὴν παρακειμένην αὐτῷ. He elsewhere records how the tyrant Scopas "was fond of drinking throughout his whole life and would make his return from drinking parties seated on his throne and carried by four bearers, and in that way he returned to his house." Wehrli fr. 14 = Athenaeus 438c: Φαινίας δὲ ὁ Ἐρέσιος ἐν τῷ ἐπιγραφομένῳ Τυράννων ἀναίρεσις ἐκ τιμωρίας Σκόπα φησὶ τὸν Κρέοντος μὲν υἱόν, Σκόπα δὲ τοῦ παλαιοῦ ὕδοῦν φιλοποτοῦντα διατελέσαι καὶ τὴν ἐπάνοδον τὴν ἀπὸ τῶν συμποσίων ποιεῖσθαι ἐπὶ θρόνου καθήμενον καὶ ὑπὸ τεσσάρων βασταζόμενον οὕτως οἴκαδε ἀπιέναι.

²²⁵ See, e.g., Hdt. 3.80.5 (tyrant destroys established order, rapes women, and executes men unjustly); Eur. *Supp.* 452-54 (ἢ παρθενεύειν παῖδας ἐν δόμοις καλῶς, / τερπνὰς τυράννοις ἡδονὰς, ὅταν θέλῃ, / δάκρυα δ' ἐτοιμάζουσιν). It is the lust of Hipparchus for Aristogeiton that brings about the attack on the Peisistratids; the archetypal Roman

of the tyrant appear in Roman tragedy and, in turn, made their way into Roman political invective.²²⁶

The emperors in the *Caesares* share the tyrant's appetite for food and drink. Claudius is notably devoted to food and drink: "cibi vinique quocumque et tempore et loco appetentissimus" (*Claud.* 33.1). The first anecdote that Suetonius offers under this rubric serves to emphasize the relationship between the emperor's private intemperance and the public business, as well as the negative consequences that the former have upon the latter. Claudius is drawn away from the business of the principate by the smell of a feast. He is ruled by his appetites; at first actively hearing ("cognoscens") a case, he is then passively struck by the smell of the feast ("ictusque nidore prandii"), which causes him to abandon his judicial business ("deserto tribunali") (*Claud.* 33.1). Claudius is the tyrant who is mastered by his tyrannical *eros*. He rarely leaves a feast unless he is stuffed (*distentus*) and sodden (*madens*). Suetonius reports that a feather must often be put down his throat as he lies gaping-mouthed on his back (*Claud.* 33.1) – a detail that the reader will encounter again when the emperor's appetite for mushrooms contributes to his death.

tyrant, Tarquinius Superbus, is likewise deposed after his son's rape of Lucretia. It is no accident, finally, that Ovid repeatedly refers to Tereus as a tyrant in his account of the rape of Philomela and of the subsequent fate of Itys. See *Met.* 6.436; 6.549; 6.581; Leigh (1996) 175 traces this to the tragedies on the theme by Sophocles and Accius.

²²⁶ Leigh (1996) 171-97 describes how the portrait of the tyrant as a creature governed by his appetites made its way to Rome and became manifest in the writings of the tragedians; he makes a convincing case that the Theseus of Varius Rufus performed at the *ludi Actiaci* in 29 B.C. went hand in hand thematically with the long-running critique of Antony as a tyrant.

Tiberius has the nature of the decadent tyrant from his youth: Suetonius reports that he had won for himself the name Biberius Caldius Mero while a young man on military campaign (*Tib.* 42.1). As emperor, this character trait manifests itself in the multi-day drinking binges that are the hallmark of the tyrant. Tiberius' drinking also has consequences for his management of public business. It was after spending two days drinking with Pomponius Flaccus and Lucius Piso, for example, that he appointed the one governor of Syria and the other prefect of the city (*Tib.* 42.1).²²⁷ Tiberius gives preference to an obscure candidate for the quaestorship because he was able to drain an amphora of wine when challenged by the emperor to do so (*Tib.* 42.2). Cestius Gallus wins his way back into the imperial favor by giving a dinner party at which nude girls waited on the guests (*Tib.* 42.2). As if to confirm that he has confused the administration of the state and the enjoyment of his vice, Tiberius formally establishes a bureaucratic office, the *a voluptatibus*, which he assigns to a Roman knight (*Tib.* 42.2).

Vitellius' tastes are rich, exotic, and unrelenting. Substantial outlays must be made in order to satisfy the appetites of the emperor, a negative political consequence for the public fisc that was naturally associated with the private *luxuria* of the emperor. Vitellius exhibits the tastes of the tyrant, however, specifically in craving the exotic and the novel and in the continuous and unrelenting quality of his hunger. The lust for the exotic is reflected in a dish he had prepared in his *clipeus Minervae πολιούχου* (*Vit.* 14.2). The dish includes a variety of exotic ingredients collected from the Parthian border to the

²²⁷ Nero's parties are likewise the sort of all-day affairs (*epulas a medio die ad mediam noctem protraherat*, *Nero* 17.1) that Aristotle prescribed in the *Politics*. For a discussion of the role played by Nero's feasting, both public and private, in his portrayal as a tyrant by Tacitus, Suetonius, and Dio, see Goddard (1994) 67-82.

Spanish coast and brought to Rome “per navarchos ac triremes.” That these triremes were commanded by navarchs, rather than trierarchs, shows the importance of these culinary missions; Suetonius again shows how the emperors follow the tyrants in conflating public and private by using public means to serve his private ends.²²⁸

While tyrants are known for their love of food and drink, they are notorious for their perverted and capricious sexuality. The objects of the lust of the tyrant are the young of both sexes and women who are noble and, preferably, married.²²⁹ Cicero includes the sexual violation of *liberos coniugesque* among the charges that he levels at Verres (1.14). The tyrant’s sexual appetite often leads to acts of violence committed in pursuit of sexual gratification. The tradition begins with the narratives of Lucretia and Verginia, but the behavior is consistently attributed to the tyrant in Roman rhetoric and literature.²³⁰

²²⁸ See Shotter (1993) 182, observing that “the importance of the mission was indicated by the fact that the triremes were commanded not by the usual trierarchs, but by navarchs who normally commanded larger vessels.” That Vitellius had a taste for the exotic is reported by Tacitus (*Hist.* 2.62.1), who omits both the story of the shield and the full catalogue of exotic ingredients; Tacitus observes that ingredients were brought to Rome *strepentibus ab utroque mari itineribus*, but not that the vessels were triremes commanded by navarchs. For the *luxuria* of Vitellius in Tacitus, see Ash (2007) 247, who refers to the other relevant passages in the *Histories*. The “Shield of Minerva” is also described by Pliny (*N.H.* 35.163) and Dio (65.3).

²²⁹ For the role of *libido* in the traditional portrait of the tyrant, see Dunkle (1967) 161-2; Dunkle (1971) 16.

²³⁰ See, e.g., Cal. Flac. *Decl.* 16 (the case of a young woman who said nothing as she was raped by a young man): “Quis non inhorruit, quis tecum, puella, non flevit? Dicat nunc: ‘libuit et licuit’! civis haec, an regis oratio est? Nec erat arbiter iudicii sui sed minister alieni.” Here, Flaccus has associated the tyrant’s lust and violence with his disregard for

It is in his sexuality that Suetonius' Tiberius reveals that he has the nature of the tyrant. Suetonius focuses exclusively on the ways in which Tiberius' unnatural vices were perpetrated against the traditional victims of the tyrant's appetites: young boys, girls, and noble women. On Capri, he is serviced by select flocks of girls and boys (*Tib.* 43.1).²³¹ He dresses up these boys and girls as Pans and nymphs and stations them around the island. He trains the boys to swim between his thighs and nibble on his privates. He places babies not yet weaned to his penis. Tiberius' sexuality, in sum, is unnatural and deviant, and specifically directed at young boys and young girls. Suetonius continues that the emperor sought oral gratification *illustrium feminarum capitibus* (*Tib.* 45). That this discussion of his lusts for young boys and girls is followed by his sexual violence toward Roman matrons places the sexuality of Tiberius in line with the traditional depiction of the tyrant and his lusts.

Of the twelve portraits in the *Caesares*, the *Caligula* and *Nero* offer the most complete catalogues of the sort of decadent behavior traditionally associated with the tyrant. These two emperors live lives of luxury, effeminacy, and perversion. They abuse, transform, and invert the natural order in order to subvert traditional social and sexual norms. Gaius transforms the imperial palace into a brothel in which married women and free-born youths are put up for rent (*Cal.* 41). He shares the tyrant's interest in both married women and young boys and girls of high birth, but now brings his perversion to the heart of Rome — Tiberius had fully indulged the perverse passions of the tyrant only law. In the Greek tradition, the tyrant is early on described as a man who confuses sex and power, for which see Lateiner (1989) 180.

²³¹ There is some debate as to whether these "sphincterists" were male or female. For the view that they were versatile female prostitutes, see Champlin (2009) 315-32.

on the Island of Capri — and adds to it the transgressive dimension that is of the essence of the tyrant's nature.²³² The tyrant abuses the laws of nature and society because the tyrant is a creature naturally opposed to the rule of laws of any sort; the tyrant must be a law unto himself. Nero, likewise, after first having converted land into sea for his feasting (*Nero* 17.2), makes noble women play the role of common innkeepers (*Nero* 17.3). He has old men of consular rank and aged matrons take part in the games at the *Juvenalia* (*Nero* 11.1). The reality of class and age must yield to the caprice of the emperor. He goes still further, compelling 400 senators and 600 knights to fight in the arena, combining perversion with insult (*Nero* 12.1). Nero's *Domus Aurea*, as we have already seen, confuses city and country, private and public, as well as heaven and earth. In the lives of these two emperors, therefore, Suetonius offers a portrait of the transgressive tyrant imposing his will on Roman society.

The tyrant's inversions of the natural order are nowhere more apparent than in the sexuality of these two emperors. Gaius lives in incest with all of his sisters, taking the virginity of Drusilla and, many years later, taking her from her husband and living with her openly as if he were himself her husband (*Cal.* 24.1). He treats newlyweds as if they were his own brides, often divorcing them a few days after taking them in this form of mock marriage and commanding them not to marry again (*Cal.* 25). Nero physically transforms the slave Sporus into a woman ("in muliebre naturam transfigurare conatus," *Nero* 28.1), and then marries him with all the usual ceremonies ("cum dote et

²³² The attacks on the young was considered so common a practice among Greek tyrants that Aristotle felt it warranted to caution the tyrant against such acts of insult (ὕβριζοντα, 1314^b24) against boys and girls (μήτε νέον μήτε νέαν, 1314^b24-25).

flammeo per sollemnia nuptiarum celeberrimo officio deductum ad se pro uxore habuit,” *Nero* 28.1). Nero plays the part of a woman himself, finally, and becomes the bride of Doryphorus; Suetonius records that he had added the appropriate sound effects on his wedding night (“voces quoque et heulatus vim patientium virginum imitatus,” *Nero* 29.1).

The incest with his sisters in which Gaius indulges places him in the tradition of eastern tyrants and Egyptian Pharaohs. Nero lives the dream of the Greek tyrant. Oedipus slept with his mother when he became tyrant at Thebes. Hippias dreamed of sleeping with his mother at the time of his return to Greece with the Persians and drew hope from his dream that he would record his tyranny at Athens (Hdt. 6.107). Plato attributes these dreams of maternal incest to the beastly and tyrannical part of the soul, which, gluttoned with food or drink, seeks to satisfy all of its desires in restless sleep (Pl. *Rep.* 571c-d):

οἶσθ' ὅτι πάντα ἐν τῷ τοιούτῳ τολμᾷ ποιεῖν, ὥς ἀπὸ πάσης λελυμένον τε καὶ ἀπηλλαγμένον αἰσχύνης καὶ φρονήσεως. μητρὶ τε γὰρ ἐπιχειρεῖν μείγνυσθαι, ὥς οἶεται, οὐδὲν ὀκνεῖ, ἄλλῳ τε ὀτρωῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ θεῶν καὶ θηρίων, μαιφονεῖν τε ὀτιοῦν, βρώματός τε ἀπέχεσθαι μηδενός.

You know that in such a situation [of being sated with food and drink, the bestial nature] dares to do all things, as if it were loosed and freed from reason and from any sense of shame. For nothing then hinders it from attempting to sleep with its mother, as it fancies, and with any sort of man, god, or wild beast. It sets its hand to any foul deed of murder and restrains itself from no food.

Suetonius reports that Caesar, like Hippias, had himself dreamed of raping his mother while he was in Spain; the interpreters told the confused general that this dream should give him hope of acquiring “arbitrium terrarum orbis.”²³³ Nero, by stages, acts out

²³³ *Jul.* 7.2: Etiam confusum eum somnio proximae noctis — nam visus erat per quietem stuprum matri intulisse — coniectores ad amplissimam spem incitaverunt arbitrium

literally the dream of the tyrant. He first acquires a concubine who resembles Agrippina. Then, at last, he engages in incest with his mother (*Nero* 28.2). Julius has the dream of the tyrant; Nero lives the dream.

As in the traditional accounts of the tyrant's descent into depravity, many of these imperial perversions culminate in acts of violence, outrage, and insult.²³⁴ Their insulting behavior spills over into the sexual sphere. The tyrant Dionysius had been faulted for defiling the noble women of Locris *en masse*. The emperors at Rome rival their predecessor in Syracuse. Nero commits acts of hubris against not only freeborn boys and married women, but even against the Vestal Virgin Rubria ("super ingenuorum paedagogia et nuptarum concubinatus Vestali virgini Rubriae vim intulit," 28.1). Gaius

terrarum orbis portendi interpretantes, quando mater, quam subiectam sibi vidisset, non alia esset quam terra, quae omnium parens haberetur. Plutarch reports that Caesar had the dream before crossing the Rubicon. Pelling (2011) 318-9 concludes that Plutarch had moved the material to this more significant position to draw the parallel – and establish the contrast – more clearly with Hippias. The dream is unambiguously monstrous in Plutarch. Artemidorus 1.79 had, however, declared such dreams an ambiguous, but frequently good, sign for the political figure. Suetonius is using the dream to associate Caesar with tyranny, in the sense that he will dominate his mother, who "non alia esset quam terra, quae omnium parens haberetur."

²³⁴ Gaius commits acts of physical violence against countless individuals and for varied reasons (see *Cal.* 30, 32, and 35). He forces men to act in ways opposed to their social standing. Senators must run alongside his litter in full toga and wait on him at table (*Cal.* 26.1). Heads of household must fight in the arena (*Cal.* 26.5). Nero wanders the streets at night attacking whomever he chances upon (*Nero* 26.2). He puts to death whomsoever he pleases ("quoscumque libuisset quacumque de causa," *Nero* 27.1). There was no social class against a member of which he would not commit an act of violence.

abstained from violating no illustrious woman at Rome (“non temere ulla inlustriore femina abstinuit,” 36.1) (*Cal.* 36.2):

quas plerumque cum maritis ad cenam uocatas praeterque pedes suos transeuntis diligenter ac lente mercantium more considerabat, etiam faciem manu adleuans, si quae pudore submitterent; quotiens deinde libuisset egressus triclinio, cum maxime placitam seuocasset, paulo post recentibus adhuc lasciuiae notis reuersus uel laudabat palam uel uituperabat, singula enumerans bona malaue corporis atque concubitus. quibusdam absentium maritorum nomine repudium ipse misit iussitque in acta ita referri.

Often, he would examine these women, whom he had summoned to dinner with their husbands, as they passed before his feet, slowly and diligently in the way a person would examine slaves, even lifting up their face with his hand, if any should look down from modesty; then as often as it should have pleased him to have left the room, when he had summoned the one who had especially pleased him, having returned a little later with the marks of passion still fresh, he would either praise or censure them openly, listing each of the good and bad points of her body and her performance in bed. To certain ones he himself would send a bill of divorce in the name of their absent husbands and order it so entered in the public record.

Gaius insults his guests, to whom he owes hospitality. He shows no respect for marriage, acting as the husband of women whom he had not wed and divorcing those whom he had not married. He shows no respect for modesty. He treats the freeborn as if they were slaves. He treats private acts and attributes as if they were matters for public comment. All of this transgressive behavior serves, moreover, to insult and outrage his subjects. Gaius is showing the tyrant's complete disregard for the laws and norms of nature and society.

Among the Flavians, neither Vespasian nor Titus is notable for his decadence.²³⁵

Domitian is not intemperate in his appetites for food and drink, but is excessively lustful (“libidinis nimiae,” 22).²³⁶ Suetonius has perhaps modeled his Domitian on the life of Dionysius II of Syracuse. Dionysius would summon Locrian maidens to his palace, rolling about naked with them on the floor on a layer of flowers, omitting no form of infamy. Suetonius depicts Domitian engaging in this sort of constant intercourse, which he referred to as bed-wrestling (*clinopalen*, 22).²³⁷

In sum, the details that Suetonius gathers about the intemperance of the emperors creates a portrait that is consistent with the traditional understanding of the political consequences of high-living on the conduct of government. Excessive dedication to the pleasures of drink and sex lead to inversions of the natural and social orders, to effeminacy, to insult, to disregard for the duties of the office, and ultimately to the contempt and hatred of the people. In the following chapter, we will see how these vices

²³⁵ Titus, who grew up at court in the company of Britannicus, is suspected of high living (*suspecta in eo etiam luxuria erat*, 7.1), but is later said to have given banquets that were pleasant but not excessive (*iucunda magis quam profusa*, 7.2).

²³⁶ Domitian gave numerous and ample banquets, but he did not prolong them; he did not eat past sunset nor revel afterward: “convivabatur frequenter et large, sed paene raptim; certe non ultra solis occasum nec ut postea comissaretur” (*Dom.* 22). In terms of drinking, Domitian is not the traditional tyrant who carouses from dawn to dusk for days on end. See, e.g., Arist. *Pol.* 5.11, 1314b29-30.

²³⁷ See Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae* 541c: Clearchus also describes the Tarentines as coming to such a point of luxury (εἰς τοσοῦτο τρυφῆς προελθεῖν) that they removed all the hair from their bodies; Domitian personally removes all the hair from his concubines (*Dom.* 22).

contribute to the downfall of several of the emperors. For the present, it will suffice to demonstrate that the details Suetonius includes about the personal lives of the Caesars, details that many have thought he included solely in order to satisfy the prurient interests of his readers, in fact contribute to the construction of a coherent, traditional, and politically astute depiction of the effect of degeneracy on the functioning of the principate.

**The Empire of Appearances:
*Fama, Dissimulatio, and Degeneration in the Caesares***

The tyrant seeking to acquire and maintain his hold on power has traditionally sought to appear to be a beneficent ruler who acts as a steward protecting the state and the interests of the people. The dictators of the last century well realized that the perception of an imminent threat or public emergency, the clear and present danger of mass destruction, creates a willingness in the masses to accept the concentration of power in the hands of one man or party. In antiquity, both Aristotle and Plato recognized and analyzed the power that maintaining the appearance of being a common citizen or a disinterested steward of the public property has to protect the tyrant from the wrath of his people.²³⁸

In casting the emperors in the roles of traditional tyrants, Suetonius portrays the Caesars acting in ways that reveal their recognition that it is more important for a ruler to be seen to be good rather than actually to *be* good. Suetonius will often report, not that an emperor was a good ruler or possessed a particular virtue, but that he acted in a way to show that he possessed a particular virtue. He frequently depicts the emperors acting in a

²³⁸ For the tyrant seeking to appear an ordinary citizen, see Pl. *Rep.* 566d-e. For Aristotle and the tyrant's need to be seen to be acting as a beneficent king, see Keyt (1999) 175.

way that is tailored to create the public image or perception of themselves as possessing a particular virtue or vice.²³⁹ He shows none of the concern for whether the emperors lived happy lives that Plato and Xenophon do in their philosophical discussions of tyranny. Nor is he concerned with the emperor's character traits, save inasmuch as those traits are perceived by the public and have consequences for the ruler. As Leo recognized over a century ago, the *Caesares* seem by and large to lack the ethical and didactic quality that are the hallmarks of Plutarch's biographies and, indeed, of most ancient and some modern biography.²⁴⁰ The *Caesares*, in this one respect, have more in common with the

²³⁹ Suetonius uses the verbs *ostendere* and *exhibere* when speaking of an emperor's public display of a virtue. See, e.g., *Jul.* 75.1: "Moderationem vero clementiamque cum in administratione tum in victoria belli civilis admirabilem exhibuit"; *Aug.* 44.1: "Liberalitatem omnibus ordinibus per occasiones frequenter exhibuit"; *Tib.* 32.2: "Parem moderationem minoribus quoque et personis et rebus exhibuit"; *Tib.* 48.1: "Publice munificentiam bis omnino exhibuit"; *Cal.* 44.1: "Postquam castra attigit, ut se acrem ac severum ducem ostenderet ..."; *Nero* 10.1: "Atque ut certiores adhuc indolem ostenderet, ex Augusti praescripto imperatorum se professus, neque liberalitatis neque clementiae, ne comitatus quidem exhibendae ullam occasionem omisit."

²⁴⁰ See, e.g., Bradley (1991) 3713: "[T]he 'Caesares' differ appreciably from annalistic history and from other biographical writings in that they lack all didactic purpose. ... The reason for this is obvious: the only person to whom imperial biography could have instructive value was the emperor, and the futility of trying to control a ruler by moral counsel had long since been proven – by Seneca's composition of the 'De clementia' for the young Nero, for example." While, as a follower of Aristotle, I am naturally less inclined to conclude that a future ruler is capable of being educated, and while, as a reader of Plutarch, I also doubt that only a ruler can learn lessons from the biography of a ruler, I agree with Bradley that Suetonius' *Caesares* seem to lack an overtly didactic aim.

political portraits of the tyrant in Aristotle and Cicero than with the more ethical portrait of the tyrant in Xenophon.

Anecdotes in Suetonius reveal how the emperor was perceived as much as they reveal what the emperor was in fact like. Plutarch, by contrast, includes anecdotes because they reveal the virtues and vices of a biographical subject better than do the subject's great and famous deeds: "For it is not so much histories that we are writing but lives, and there is not always in the most outstanding deeds a revelation of virtue or vice, but often a little matter like a saying or a joke hinted at character more than battles where thousands die, huge troop deployments, or sieges of cities."²⁴¹ It is Plutarch's concern with character that causes him to focus on the biographical subject's private moments. Suetonius, by contrast, uses anecdotes drawn not only from the private life of the emperor, but from his public and political life as well; he does so, moreover, in order to reveal how the emperor was perceived.²⁴² Plutarch and Suetonius may seem similar in the way they use anecdotes, but upon closer examination they not only use them about

²⁴¹ See Plut., *Alex.*, 1.2: οὔτε γὰρ ἱστορίας γράφομεν, ἀλλὰ βίους, οὔτε ταῖς ἐπιφανεστάταις πράξεσι πάντως ἔνεστι δῆλως ἰσχυρῆς ἢ κακίας, ἀλλὰ πρᾶγμα βραχὺ πολλάκις καὶ ῥῆμα καὶ παιδιὰ τις ἔμφασιν ἤθους ἐποίησε μᾶλλον ἢ μάχαι μυριόνεκροι καὶ παρατάξεις αἱ μέγισται καὶ πολιορκίαι πόλεων.

²⁴² Compare also Vell. Pat. 42.1-2. Velleius there offers the story of the capture of Caesar by a band of pirates as a "documentum tanti mox evasuri viri." This anecdote is offered in order to reveal something about Caesar. In Suetonius, *documenta* are the material upon which the Roman public, rather than the reader, forms its political, rather than ethical, judgment of the emperor: "Maiore adeo et favore et auctoritate adeptus est quam gessit imperium, quamquam multa documenta egregii principis daret; sed nequaquam tam grata erant, invisae quae secus fierent." (*Galba* 14.1).

different ranges of material but also do so in order to accomplish very different aims.

Plutarch is indeed concerned with ethics. Suetonius is a political writer.

The *Galba* is here illustrative of the importance Suetonius attached to the reputation and popular perception of the emperor. Suetonius begins the narrative of the emperor's accession by noting that his bad reputation had preceded him to Rome ("praecesserat de eo fama saevitiae simul atque avaritiae," *Galba* 12.1). This reputation was confirmed and increased when he at last arrived at Rome ("ea fama et confirmata et aucta est, ut primum urbem introiit," *Galba* 12.2). The reality of the emperor's character and actions is not at issue. Suetonius is concerned rather with the public's perception of him; he states that stories were then told about the emperor, with the intention of ridiculing him, without any regard for the truth or falsehood of those stories ("illa quoque verene an falso per ludibrium iactabantur," *Galba* 12.3). It is because of his resulting reputation, because of the public perception of the emperor as both avaricious and vicious, that his arrival at Rome is not pleasing to the people ("quare adventus eius non perinde gratus fuit," *Galba* 13.1). That this displeasure at the accession of Galba is expressed at the theatrical performances reflects the performative nature of imperial political virtue. The emperor need not be a certain way, but must show himself to be a certain way; he must act the part of a good emperor.

The tyrant should create the perception not simply that he is a good man, however, but that he is a good ruler specifically. This requires that the tyrant, and by extension the emperor, show himself concerned for the public good; he should create the impression that he is a steward of the public fisc who rules in a way that promotes the well-being of his citizens, rather than as a master managing his slaves and private

estates.²⁴³ Tiberius, the emperor generally associated with *dissimulatio* by the historians, follows the same practice in the *Caesares*. Suetonius affirms that the emperor Tiberius put on the good public face at the outset of his reign: “Paulatim principem exseruit praestititque etsi varium diu, commodiorem tamen saepius et ad utilitates publicas proniorem” (*Tib.* 33.1). The emperor enters into office playing the part, advised by both Aristotle and Plato, of the ruler acting to benefit the public interest. The reign of the emperor does, however, progressively degenerate as the years pass and, little by little, his true nature is allowed free rein.

The pattern of progressive degeneration is typical of the literary accounts of the reigns of tyrants. The tyrant enters into office on his best behavior. Plato describes the behavior that a tyrant should exhibit upon first entering into power (*Pl. Rep.* 566d-e):

ἄρ’ οὖν, εἶπον, οὐ ταῖς μὲν πρώταις ἡμέραις τε καὶ χρόνῳ προσγεῶν τε καὶ ἀσπάζεται πάντας, ὃ ἂν περιτυγχάνῃ, καὶ οὔτε τύραννός φησιν εἶναι ὑπισχνεῖται τε πολλὰ καὶ ἰδία καὶ δημοσία, χρεῶν τε ἡλευθέρωσε καὶ γῆν διένειμε δῆμῳ τε καὶ τοῖς περὶ ἑαυτὸν καὶ πᾶσιν ἰλεώς τε καὶ πρῶτος εἶναι προσποιεῖται;

Then at the start and in the first days does he not smile upon all men and greet everybody he meets and deny that he is a tyrant, and promise many things in private and public, and having freed men from debts, and distributed lands to the people and his own associates, he affects a gracious and gentle manner to all?

²⁴³ Aristotle observes that, in pretending to play well the part of a king (ὑποκρινόμενον τὸ βασιλικὸν καλῶς), the tyrant may either perform, or seem to perform, the acts of a beneficent king. See Arist. *Pol.* 5.11, 1311^a:39-40: τὰ δ’ ἄλλα τὰ μὲν ποιεῖν τὰ δὲ δοκεῖν ὑποκρινόμενον τὸ βασιλικὸν καλῶς. For the tyrant as a steward of the public finances, see, e.g., Arist. *Pol.* 5.11, 1314^b14-18: ἔπειτα τὰς εἰσφορὰς καὶ τὰς λειτουργίας δεῖ φαίνεσθαι τῆς τε οἰκονομίας ἕνεκα συνάγοντα, κἄν ποτε δεηθῇ χρῆσθαι πρὸς τοὺς πολεμικοὺς καιροὺς, ὅλως τε αὐτὸν παρασκευάζειν φύλακα καὶ ταμίαν ὡς κοινῶν ἀλλὰ μὴ ὡς ἰδίων.

The tyrant will come in like a lamb. It is only when he has put his people at ease, and become secure in his hold on and in the exercise of his power, that he reveals himself to be the ravenous wolf with a taste for the blood of his people.

In some cases, there will be a precipitating event that either causes the tyrant to turn bad or explains why that turn for the worse took place. The reign of Hippias began benignly, for example, but grew severe and oppressive following the assassination of Hipparchus. In other cases, the vices of the tyrant, concealed at the outset, simply emerge into the open over time. The man may always have been a tyrant, but he only reveals himself as such when he has secured his hold on power.

Suetonius applies this template of degeneration and *dissimulatio* to the reign of Tiberius. The emperor begins his reign playing the part of a ruler concerned for the public good. Tiberius follows the practice of tyrants and seeks seclusion, distancing himself from the capital and setting up his court on the Island of Capri. This is the event that, for Suetonius, marks the moment of transition in the reign: “ceterum secreti licentiam nactus et quasi civitatis oculis remotis, cuncta simul vitia male diu dissimulata tandem profudit” (*Tib.* 42.1).²⁴⁴ From this point on, the traditional tyrannical vices begin to flow forth on Capri: his *aviditas* for food and drink (*Tib.* 42), his lust (*Tib.* 43), directed at both young boys (*Tib.* 44) and noble women (*Tib.* 45), his avarice (*Tib.* 46), failure to adorn

²⁴⁴ Woodman and Martin (1996) 319 observe that Tiberius’ behavior in secreting himself on Capri rendered him, “in short, the typical tyrant.” See also Xen. *Ages.* 9, where the Persian King is said to believe that his dignity required that he be seldom seen; Plin. *Pan.* 48.5 (of Domitian): “tenebras semper secretumque captantem, nec umquam ex solitudine sua prodeuntem nisi ut solitudinem faceret.”

the city with public buildings and works (*Tib.* 47), and his turn to plunder and confiscatory taxation (*Tib.* 49) all follow the end of the emperor's *dissimulatio*. Suetonius is not the first author to have attributed *dissimulatio* to Tiberius.²⁴⁵ The characterization of Tiberius as a tyrant in the *Caesares*, however, is reflected not only in the role of *dissimulatio* in his reign, but in this catalogue of tyrannical virtues that follows the emperor's descent into degeneracy on Capri.

The portrait of the tyrant as a ruler who dissimulates at the outset of his rule but whose reign eventually takes a turn for the worse influences not only the life of Tiberius, but the other *Caesares* as well. Although the pattern is reflected at the most general level in the author's tendency to begin with virtues and examples of good behavior of each emperor and then proceed to vices and bad actions, there are lives in which the practice of *dissimulatio* and the turning point in the biography are made more explicit.²⁴⁶ Gaius employs *dissimulatio* to protect himself in the court of Tiberius on Capri, while Nero is reported to have abandoned his practice of dissimulating during his rule and given free

²⁴⁵ As Woodman and Martin (1989) 29 observe, the debt that the portrait of Tiberius in the *Annales* owes to the traditional depiction of the tyrant has long been recognized in Tacitean scholarship: "Scholars ... have convincingly demonstrated that T.'s portrait of Tiberius owes much to that of the typical tyrant as described by Xenophon, Plato and Aristotle and especially familiar to Roman readers through its popularity in declamatory literature." As the catalogue of traditional vices that Suetonius attributed to Tiberius immediately after the descent of the reign into vice suggests, Suetonius owes an even greater debt to this typical tyrant.

²⁴⁶ The *Tiberius*, *Caligula*, *Nero*, and *Domitian* adhere to the pattern. Even in the *Claudius* and *Vespasian*, however, in which the life of the emperor is divided into private and public spheres, the tendency remains to begin with virtues (*Claud.* 11-12; *Vesp.* 12-15) and turn only later to vices (*Claud.* 34-40; *Vesp.* 16).

rein to his vices.²⁴⁷ The transition from the good to the bad dimensions of the reign of Gaius is marked by perhaps the best known statement in the *Caesares*: “hactenus quasi de principe, reliqua ut de monstro narranda sunt,” (*Cal.* 22.1). A similar division is found in the *Nero*: “Haec partim nulla reprehensione, partim etiam non mediocri laude digna in unum contuli, ut secernerem a probris ac sceleribus eius, de quibus dehinc dicam,” (*Nero* 19.3). These divisions are topical, but given the ways in which Suetonius, as we have seen, introduced chronology into the eidological sections of the *Caesares*, they suggest a temporal division, and progressive decline, in the rulers and their reigns as well.²⁴⁸

Even the good emperors begin their reigns in the way that tyrants do. Augustus, on the whole, follows the precepts of Aristotle’s Way of Moderation. He adorns the city (*Aug.* 29), he reforms the civic administration (*Aug.* 30), and attends to the traditional Roman religion (*Aug.* 31). In his suppression of pernicious practices that had arisen at Rome during the civil war, he likewise follows the traditional practices of the tyrant. He begins by suppressing all colleges that were not ancient and legitimate: “collegia praeter antiqua et legitima dissolvit” (*Aug.* 32.1). Although Augustus is reported to have done so for the noble purpose of suppressing brigandage, the suppression of guilds and associations is a typical practice followed by the tyrant seeking to destroy the confidence

²⁴⁷ *Cal.* 10.2, stating the Gaius endured his mistreatment by others at court “incredibili dissimulatione”; *Nero* 27.1: “Paulatim vero invalescentibus vitiis iocularia et latebras omisit nullaue dissimulandi cura ad maiora palam erupit.”

²⁴⁸ That Nero goes from bad to worse, and is increasingly willing to be seen to be vicious, is suggested at numerous places in the biography. See, e.g., *Nero* 22.1: “*primo clam, deinde propalam*”; *Nero* 27.1.

and strength of his subjects.²⁴⁹ Augustus also burns treasury records of old debts. His motive is to remove one ground for bothersome litigation. His action, however, is one of the means by which a tyrant traditionally wins the favor of his people upon taking office.²⁵⁰ Augustus administers the laws both conscientiously and leniently.²⁵¹ He revises old laws and enacts new ones, on areas regulating chastity and protecting the public from the avarice of its rulers.²⁵² Suetonius uses the categories of the tyrant, therefore, even when he seeks to establish that Augustus was a good emperor.

“Puto deus fio!” The Emperors and the Gods

The relationship of the emperors with the gods and with Roman religion that Suetonius describes in the *Caesares* reflects the traditional portrait of the tyrant in two ways. Some of the emperors show the respect for the gods and for the traditional Roman religion that the ancient discourse on tyranny counsels the tyrant to exhibit. Others treat the gods and the religion of the city with contempt or set themselves up as rivals to the gods.

²⁴⁹ Arist. *Pol.* 5.11, 1313a41-1313b1: καὶ μήτε συσσίτια ἔαν μήτε ἑταιρίαν μήτε παιδείαν μήτε ἄλλο μηθὲν τοιοῦτον, ἀλλὰ πάντα φυλάττειν ὅθεν εἶωθε γίγνεσθαι δύο, φρόνημά τε καὶ πίστις.

²⁵⁰ Aug. 32.2: “Tabulas veterum aerari debitorum, vel praecipuam calumniandi materiam, exussit.” For the forgiveness of debts by the tyrant, see, e.g., Pl. *Rep.* 566d-e; Sall. *Cat.* 21.2: “tum Catilina polliceri tabulas novas.”

²⁵¹ Aug. 33.1: “Ipse ius dixit assidue et in noctem nonnumquam, si parum corpore valeret lectica pro tribunali collocata, vel etiam domi cubans. Dixit autem ius non diligentia modo summa sed et lenitate.”

²⁵² Aug. 34.1: “Leges retractavit et quasdam ex integro sanxit, ut sumptuariam et de adulteriis et de pudicitia, de ambitu, de maritandis ordinibus.”

The proper attitude of the tyrant to religion is not treated extensively in the literature. In the *Hiero*, Xenophon makes almost no mention of religion.²⁵³ Aristotle advises the tyrant to seek to appear respectful in religious matters. The treatment of religion in the *Politics* suggests that putting on a public display of piety seems “more necessary for preserving and improving tyrannical government than it is for the preservation and improvement of any other political order.”²⁵⁴ It should, however, make the tyrant seem not virtuous, but powerful; it should discourage the people from rising up against the tyrant by making them believe that he has the support and protection of the gods.²⁵⁵ The tyrant should not take his religion too far; he should avoid appearing at all silly in his piety.

In contrast to this relative paucity of observations regarding the proper level of religious observation, the tradition is replete with examples of tyrants acting impiously,

²⁵³ Strauss (1948) 93 remarks on the silence of Xenophon on this subject. He contrasts this silence with Xenophon’s discussion in the *Cyropaedia* (8.1.23), where he indicated “that the regime of Cyrus became the more pious in proportion as it became more absolute.” Strauss concludes that Cyrus was a king, not a tyrant. Tyranny, according to Xenophon’s definition, is rule without laws. Piety is “knowledge of the laws concerning the gods: where there are no laws,” Strauss concludes, “there cannot be piety.”

²⁵⁴ Strauss (1948) 93.

²⁵⁵ Arist. *Pol.* 5.11, 1314b-1315a: ἔτι δὲ τὰ πρὸς τοὺς θεοὺς φαίνεσθαι ἀεὶ σπουδάζοντα διαφερόντως (ἧττόν τε γὰρ φοβοῦνται τὸ παθεῖν τι παράνομον ὑπὸ τῶν τοιούτων, [1315a] ἐὰν δεισιδαίμονα νομίζωσιν εἶναι τὸν ἄρχοντα καὶ φροντίζειν τῶν θεῶν, καὶ ἐπιβουλεύουσιν ἧττον ὥς συμμάχους ἔχοντι καὶ τοὺς θεοὺς), δεῖ δὲ ἄνευ ἀβελτερίας φαίνεσθαι τοιοῦτον. Keyt (1999) 178-9 observes that “Aristotle does not believe in divine retribution himself,” and so “presumably allows the tyrant’s ... public religiosity to mask private scepticism.”

either by insulting the gods or by claiming divine honors for themselves. In Greek tragedy, the tyrant who claims divine honors or seeks to rival the gods inevitably comes to a bad end. Agamemnon calls down doom upon himself when he treads upon the garments put down by Clytemnestra, knowing that this act “becomes the gods and none besides” and admitting himself to be “a mortal, a man,” who “cannot trample upon these tinted splendors without fear” (*Ag.* 920-926). Creon, by seeking to put his own edict above divine law, ultimately destroys both himself and his family. Pentheus rejects the divinity of Dionysus and is torn to pieces by his own mother. It is the tyrant, not the citizen, who is prone to religious hubris of this sort; the tyrant’s extra-legal status and sweeping power on the plane of human activity leads him to conclude that he is not bound by the laws of the gods and has power that rivals that of the gods. When he claims these divine prerogatives for himself, however, he inevitably ends badly.

The tendency of eastern monarchs to engage in hubristic rivalry with the gods is a theme to which Herodotus returns at several points. Xerxes’ bridging the Hellespont, his scourging of its rebellious waters, and his digging of a canal across the Athos peninsula all conform with his stated desire to make his empire coextensive with the world over which the sun shines and, by implication, over which Zeus rules.²⁵⁶ Xerxes has chosen to rival the gods by extending his empire beyond its ordained limits. His actions against nature reveal his hubris. Cambyses, however, is the figure who goes literally mad in his rush to challenge the gods by extending the empire beyond its borders. He finally strikes

²⁵⁶ Hdt. 7.8γ: γῆν τὴν Περσίδα ἀποδέξομεν τῷ Διὶ αἰθέρι ὁμορεύουσιν. οὐ γὰρ δὴ χώραν γε οὐδεμίαν κατόψεται ἥλιος ὁμοῦρον ἐοῦσαν τῇ ἡμετέρῃ.

out at the Apis bull in his madness, an act of deicide for which he will suffer a condign punishment.²⁵⁷

The Romans continue in this tradition of depicting the tyrant as the impious rival of the gods. Mezentius, the *contemptor divum* (*Aen.* 7.648; *contemptor deum*, *Aen.* 8.7), is the Italian tyrant who opposes the arrival of *Pius Aeneas* and, again and again, offers an example of tyrannical impiety and religious hubris that contrasts with the religious piety of the future founder of the Latin race.²⁵⁸ Ovid describes Pentheus, the tyrant who dared to oppose the god Dionysus, as a *contemptor superum* (*Met.* 3.514). Statius, finally, describes Capaneus, who opposes the gods with the same vehemence with which Mezentius opposes Aeneas, as a *superum contemptor* (*Theb.* 3.602).

Tyrants are frequently guilty of *hierosulia*. The primary motivation for robbing temples seems to have been avarice rather than impiety. Plato describes the tyrant as a temple robber, but explains that, before turning to temples, the tyrant begins by robbing private houses; it is only when private resources prove inadequate to satisfy his appetites that he turns to the temples and their rich treasures (*Pl. Rep.* 574d). Plato's tyrant is driven by need for money to commit impiety. It is the satisfaction of appetite, rather than

²⁵⁷ Hdt. 3.27-9 (killing of Apis) and 3.64.66 (death of Cambyses). For the religious significance of the Apis bull and its killing, see Asheri, Lloyd, Corcella (2007) 427-8. For the condign nature of the fate suffered by Cambyses, see Gould (1989) 75.

²⁵⁸ For the other examples of impiety exhibited by Mezentius and their significance in the *Aeneid*, see Fordyce (1977) 179. Horsfall (2000) 423 traces the origins of the story regarding the impiety of Mezentius.

any innate impiety, that first drives the tyrant to commit this assault on the temples of the gods.²⁵⁹

The original motivation will, by the time of Suetonius, no longer play a significant part in the rhetorical and literary depiction of the tyrant. He will simply be a despoiler of temples. In the Latin tradition, the looting of temples continues to serve as an example of the tyrannical vices of cruelty, avarice, and violence, but with a now prominent coloring of impiety.²⁶⁰ In making out his case against Verres, for example, Cicero portrays the Roman governor as a looter of temples; the impiety of the tyrant has now come into prominence (II *Verr.* 1.7):

rapiunt eum ad supplicium di patrii, quod iste inventus est qui e complexu parentum abreptos filios ad necem duceret, et parentis pretium pro sepultura liberum posceret. religiones vero caerimoniaeque omnium sacrorum fanorumque violatae, simulacraque deorum, quae non modo ex suis templis ablata sunt sed etiam iacent in tenebris ab isto retrusa atque abdita, consistere eius animum sine furore atque amentia non sinunt.

The gods of our fathers are carrying him off to judgment, because that reprehensible man was found to have led sons snatched from the embrace of the parents to death and to have demanded that parents pay a price for the right to bury their children. The violated

²⁵⁹ Xenophon at *Hiero* 4.11 also describes the tyrant as a man who frequently robs temples. For the tyrant's financial motivation for temple robbing, see Frazel (2009) 181, who interprets the Platonic texts I have here cited in light of Aristotle's observations about how tyranny and oligarchy share the aim of amassing wealth, "for it is by wealth and by it alone, that a tyrant has to maintain his guard and his luxury." Dionysius I, the tyrant of Syacuse, was offered as an example of a tyrant who robbed temples to finance his regime. See [Arist.] *Oec.* 1349^a12-1250^a6.

²⁶⁰ Tabacco (1985) 87: "La crudeltà, l'avidità e la libidine sessuale, soddisfatta attraverso la violenza, appaiono i comportamenti viziosi tipici del tiranno, che si colorona di empietà quando vittime ne siano i templi e le istituzioni religiose."

rites and rituals of all the temples and of all the shrines, the images of the gods, which were not only carried off from their temples but which even lie in darkness, thrown off and discarded by this wretch, do not allow his mind to rest free of rage and madness.

Verres is presented, first, as a Roman Creon, violating the rights of family to attend to the burial of the dead; his motive was not the punishment of traitors, but the enrichment of his own purse. Cicero, like Plato and Xenophon, recognizes avarice as a motivation of the tyrant's actions, but emphasizes the impious consequences attendant on those actions: the tyrant violates the rites and rituals of religion, shows contempt for the religion of his people, and despoils the temples of the gods.²⁶¹ In Cicero, the impiety of the tyrant can now be discerned as a motif in the Roman portrait of the tyrant. The irreligious tyrant will continue to appear as a stock figure both in the Augustan poets²⁶² and in the exercises of the rhetorical schools.²⁶³

The emperors in the *Caesares* display the same mix of religiosity and impiety that the tyrants exhibit in the Greek and Roman literary and philosophical traditions. The Roman virtue of *pietas* refers to an attitude of devotion, respect, and duty toward those to whom one was bound in any way.²⁶⁴ This virtue governs relations between a man and the gods, his family, and his subjects. My concern is with the specifically religious displays

²⁶¹ See, e.g., Cic. *Div. Caec.* 3: "sese iam ne deos quidem in suis urbibus ad quos confugerent habere, quod eorum simulacra sanctissima C. Verres ex delubris religiosissimis sustulisset."

²⁶² The figures of Mezentius in Virgil (*Aen.* 8.7, 8.483) and Lycaeus in Ovid (*Met.* 1.218-23). Lycaeus exhibits not only the tyrant's contempt for the religion of his people and for the gods, but is also, tellingly, a wolf, the animal associated with the tyrant in Plato.

²⁶³ See generally Tabacco (1985). See also Sen. Elder, *Contr.* 1.7, 2.5, 3.6, 5.8, 7.6, 9.4.

²⁶⁴ Noreña (2001) 158.

of *pietas* in the *Caesares*. Again, my concern is not with the personal beliefs, spirituality, or superstitions of the emperors,²⁶⁵ but with the public, political, and ritualistic dimension of *pietas*.

The emperors' religious devotion, and their tendency to attribute their success and their protection to the gods, is displayed most publicly in their building programs.²⁶⁶

These programs, as described by Suetonius, effectively incorporate the gods and their temples into the political propaganda of the emperors. That Julius built a temple of Mars emphasizes his prowess as a military commander and associates the emperor and his

²⁶⁵ The superstitions and personal religious beliefs of the emperors are discussed in the *Caesares*, with the emphasis generally placed on the emperor's superstitions. The rubric in the *Tiberius* (69) is typical: "circa deos ac religiones neglegentior, quippe ad dictus mathematicae plenusque persuasionis cuncta fato agi, tonitrua tamen praeter modum expavescebat et turbatiore caelo numquam non coronoam lauream capite gestavit, quod fulmine afflari negetur id genus frondis." Wallace-Hadrill (1983) 189-97 observes that signs and omens, which often receive extensive treatment, "revolve around two issues, and two only: the rise to imperial power and the fall from it." Indeed, Suetonius says far more about the role of superstition, omens, and portents than he does about the role of public religion, in the *Caesares*. Because these signs and portents play a far more significant role in the deaths of the emperors, they will be analyzed in the chapter five, when I turn to examine the death-narratives in the *Caesares*.

²⁶⁶ There are emperors who pay no honor to the gods. Tiberius conducted no building program of note and was by and large not interested in religion. Gaius is reported to have built no temples to the gods – although he does build a bridge from his own palace over the temple of Augustus to the temple of Jupiter on the Capitoline (32.4), and builds a temple, as well as establishes a priesthood, in his own honor (32.3) – and is described as contemptuous of them (51.1); this is, however, probably the result of his belief in his own divinity.

ability as a commander with that God (*Jul.* 44). Augustus built a temple of Mars Ultor, a temple of Apollo on the Palatine, and a shrine of Jupiter Tonans on the Capitol (*Aug.* 29). Suetonius makes explicit that Augustus built each of these temples in response to a sign of favor from the gods. Augustus had vowed to build a temple to Mars at Philippi during the war that he had undertaken to avenge the death of his father Julius (*Aug.* 29.2). The temple thanks the god, and simultaneously demonstrates to the people that the god had aided him in war. He built the temple to Apollo because the augurs had told him that a lightning strike indicated that he should do so; that Apollo desires a temple in the house of Augustus, a detail that Suetonius includes in his account (“in ea parte Palatinae domus,” *Aug.* 29.3), demonstrates that the god is with the emperor. He dedicated the shrine to Jupiter Tonans, finally, after he had survived a lightning strike during his Cantabrian expedition (*Aug.* 29.3). The gods protect him personally. Augustus honors the gods because the gods protect him and promote his interests both in private and public life, in peace and at war, at Rome and abroad. These building projects serve the purpose that Aristotle attributes to a tyrant’s religiosity in the *Politics*; they establish in the eyes of the people that the tyrant has the support of the gods.²⁶⁷

The public religious practices of Augustus catalogued in the *Caesares* function as pious propaganda. When Augustus begins to serve as Pontifex Maximus, for example, he edits the Sibylline books and deposits them in gold cases under the pedestal of the Palatine Apollo (*Aug.* 31.1). Augustus had, as the reader had recently been reminded,

²⁶⁷ Vespasian (9.1) builds both a Temple of Peace, after the conclusion of hostilities following the death of Nero, and rebuilds a Temple of Claudius that had been demolished by Nero. Both of these projects serve readily apparent propagandistic purposes.

built this temple near his own residence. These two juxtaposed anecdotes demonstrate the close relationship of Augustus with the gods, and particularly with the god Apollo, as well as the emperor's knowledge of and control over the future.

This control of prophecy parallels the emperor's control over time itself. The editing of these oracles is immediately followed in the *Augustus* by the reform of the calendar and the renaming of the month Sextilis (*Aug.* 31.2). He then increases the number and importance of the priests, especially of the Vestal virgins (*Aug.* 31.3). He revives ancient rites which had fallen into disuse. The purpose for offering these honors to the gods is revealed when Suetonius juxtaposes them with the honors the emperor paid to those leaders who raised the republic from the lowest to the highest state (*Aug.* 31.5). Augustus views the gods as agents who protect and advance the interests of the state. These gods are now, of course, also protecting and advancing the interests of Augustus himself, not only safeguarding the emperor but also demonstrating that the gods recognize that the health of Augustus contributes to the health of the state.

Claudius also uses religion for a civic purpose, albeit not to suggest to his people that the gods protect him, but rather to demonstrate his own concern for the proper functioning and well-being of the city. He appoints men to the priestly colleges only after he has sworn that they are worthy of the position and that he has not nominated them for personal considerations (*Claud.* 22). He performs the proper rituals whenever the city is hit with an earthquake or when ominous birds are seen on the Capitoline (*Claud.* 22). These practices are not offered because they "call attention to Claudius' antiquarian

fussiness.”²⁶⁸ They all reveal a concern for the common good; they show Claudius acting, as Aristotle had advised the tyrant to act, as a steward of the state.

Nero, one of the bad emperors in the *Caesares*, follows the opposite course. He has contempt for the gods of the city and will, as a result, ultimately make himself an object of contempt in the eyes of the people. Nero originally respected only the rites of the Syrian Goddess. Nero’s religion, at the beginning, is not Roman. He at last abandons this traditional foreign religion, however, in favor of a purely private superstition (*Nero* 56):

Religionum usque quaque contemptor, praeter unius Deae Syriae, hanc mox ita spreuit, ut urina contaminaret, alia superstitione captus in qua sola pertinacissime haesit, siquidem imagunculam puellarem, cum quasi remedium insidiarum a pebeio quodam et ignoto muneri accepisset, detecta confestim coniuratione pro summo numine trinisque in die sacrificiis colere perseveravit volebatque credi monitione eius futura praenoscere.

He held all religious rites in contempt, except those of the Syrian Goddess; but at last he paid her so little reverence, that he made water upon her; being now engaged in another superstition, in which only he obstinately persisted. For having received from some obscure plebeian a little image of a girl, as a preservative against plots, and discovering a conspiracy immediately after, he constantly worshipped his imaginary protectress as the greatest amongst the gods, offering to her three sacrifices daily. He was also desirous to have it supposed that he had, by revelations from this deity, a knowledge of future events.

Nero has the desires in matters of religion that he should, the religious desires that Augustus in fact had had: he hopes to cultivate the belief that the gods are protecting him from conspiracies and hopes that they will give him knowledge of the future. He seeks these aims, however, in a way that achieves the opposite result. Following the example

²⁶⁸ Hurley (2009) 158.

set by Cambyses, who stabbed the god of the Egyptians, Nero now urinates on the Syrian Goddess. He adheres to his subsequent private superstition *pertinacissime*. The practices he comes to follow are not those of the people, but a purely private devotion; his religion separates him from the city. The source of his religion is, originally, the east; later, he adopts a purely private religious practice, the source of which is a plebeian girl and her toy doll. Nero's religious beliefs make him an object of contempt, not awe.

Pretension to divinity is one allegation that, in Suetonius' opinion, weighed against Julius Caesar and rendered him *iure caesus*.²⁶⁹ Caesar, Suetonius records, had accepted honors *ampliora humano fastigio* (*Jul.* 76.1), including a golden throne, temples, altars, statues placed among the cult images of the gods, a *flamen*, Luperci, and the naming of a month after himself. Cicero provides contemporary confirmation of Caesar's having accepted many of these elements of a divine cult – *pulvinar*, *simulacrum*, *fastigium*, *flamen* – and takes them to be evidence of his having been a tyrant.²⁷⁰ For Suetonius himself, moreover, it will count in Tiberius' favor that he refuses all of the divine honors that Caesar had assumed (*Tib.* 26.1).

²⁶⁹ For Suetonius' attitude to divine honors received by an emperor at Rome during his own life, see Wardle (2012) 308. Wardle discusses the divine honors that the emperors received or denied during their lifetimes at 308-12. For the refusal of divine honors, see Charlesworth (1939) 1-10 (Augustus); Wallace-Hadrill (1983) 163. For the ideology of refusal, generally, see Béranger (1953) 137-70.

²⁷⁰ Cic., *Phil.* 2.110: "et tu in Caesaris memoria diligens, tu illum amas mortuum? quem is honorem maiorem consecutus erat quam ut haberet pulvinar, simulacrum, fastigium, flaminem? est ergo flamen, ut Iovi, ut Marti, ut Quirino, sic divo Iulio M. Antonius? quid igitur cessas? cur non inauguraris? sume diem, vide qui te inauguret: conlegae sumus; nemo negabit. O detestabilem hominem, sive quod tyranni sacerdos es sive quod mortui!"

Gaius is a *contemptor deum* in the tradition of Pentheus, Mezentius, and Capenaesus,²⁷¹ and surpasses Cambyses in his mad pretensions to divinity. As soon as the transition from *princeps* to monster has been made, Suetonius describes the way in which Gaius rapidly moves beyond kingship to divinity (*Cal.* 22.1-2):

Nec multum auit quin statim diadema sumeret speciemque principatus in regni formam converteret. Verum admonitus et principum et regum se excessisse fastigium, divinam ex eo maiestatem asserere sibi coepit.

Nor was he far from immediately assuming the diadem and transforming the appearance of a principate into the reality (*formam*) of a monarchy. But when admonished that he had surpassed the heights achieved by emperors and kings, he began from that moment to assert a claim to divine majesty for himself.

The refusal of the diadem creates a strong parallel with Caesar.²⁷² The issue for Gaius is, at first, whether to maintain the appearance of a principate (*speciem principatus*) or assert his claim to kingship openly. He then transcends even Caesar's choice, and asserts his claim to divinity. He brings statues of the gods, which are described as "religione et arte praeclara," to Rome, where he has their heads replaced with a likeness of his own. He extends the entrance of the palace to the temple of Castor and Pollux, which he uses as the vestibule for his house; he often stands between the two gods, offering himself for worship when receiving people. He is referred to as Jupiter Latiaris. He sets up a temple to his own godhead and establishes his own priest. At night, he invites the moon "in amplexus atque concubitum." By day, he converses with Jupiter Capitolinus, putting his ear to the mouth of the statue, as if carrying on a secret conversation. Finally, Jupiter

²⁷¹ Suetonius alludes to the title at *Cal.* 51.1: "Nam qui deos tanto opere contemneret ...".

²⁷² Hurley (1993) 85 affirms that the reference to *diadema* and *regnum* make the reference to Caesar explicit.

invites the emperor to live with him in *contubernium*, and the emperor builds a bridge linking his own palace with the Capitol.²⁷³

Religion and the manipulation of religion serve in the *Caesares* both to reveal and to conceal the tyrannical reality of the principate and the ambitions of the emperor.

Augustus follows the way of moderation, providing a model of how an emperor should behave. He pays his respects to those gods he associates with his successes, creating the impression in the public imagination that his success is owed to the intervention of the divine. Claudius uses religion to show his public-mindedness, using the display of public ritual to demonstrate his concern for the well-being of his city and of his subjects. Nero offers an example of how not to behave, showing his contempt for the gods of the city while, at the same time, showing himself contemptible on account of his devotion, first, to the Syrian goddess and, then, to a small doll given him by a plebeian girl. Julius and Gaius, however, stand squarely in the tradition of the tyrant who in his *hubris* seeks to rival the gods in heaven while still a man on earth.

Tax-and-Spend Tyrants: The Emperor and Imperial Finances

The tyrant seeks to acquire the wealth of his people. This may be because he is a creature subject to *avaritia*. It may be because he envies his subjects their good fortune (Hdt. 3.82). He may levy taxes in order to subjugate his people, making the power to tax into a power to destroy. He may levy taxes in order to protect himself; indeed, the repressive tyrant will subject his people to such a high degree of taxation that they will

²⁷³ The word has both sexual and military connotations. For the specifically sexual connotation, see Hurley (1993) 91, who concludes that “Gaius coveted both divine females and divine males as sexual partners.”

soon lack the means they would need to conspire against him.²⁷⁴ A tyrant may use not only taxes, but also murder, pillaging, the criminal courts, sycophants, and even temple robbing.²⁷⁵ There are many ways for the repressive tyrant to raise money and suppress his people. Aristotle advises the moderate tyrant seeking to maintain power to pretend to act as a steward of the public property rather than a master of a private estate.²⁷⁶ The ways in which a tyrant spends the money that he has collected from his people will also vary depending on whether he is a repressive or moderate tyrant. A repressive tyrant will spend money profligately for private ends, bankrupting himself and his people as he pursues his private aims and pleasures. The moderate tyrant will adorn his city to create the appearance that he is acting in the public interest.

Suetonius discusses the emperors' handling of the imperial finances under a variety of rubrics. He considers an emperor's financial management to be both an ethical matter revelatory of the ruler's character and a practical and political matter of sound

²⁷⁴ See, e.g., Pl. *Rep.* 567a: “οὐκοῦν καὶ ἵνα χρήματα εἰσφέροντες πένητες γιγνόμενοι πρὸς τῷ καθ’ ἡμέραν ἀναγκάζονται εἶναι καὶ ἥττον αὐτῷ ἐπιβουλεύωσι”; Arist. *Pol.* 5.11, 1313b18-21: καὶ τὸ πένητας ποιεῖν τοὺς ἀρχομένους τυραννικόν, ὅπως μήτε φυλακὴ τρέφεται καὶ πρὸς τῷ καθ’ ἡμέραν ὄντες ἄσχολοι ὧσιν ἐπιβουλεύειν.

²⁷⁵ Plato is among the first to stress the role of criminal prosecutions and informers in satisfying both the tyrant's *avaritia* and lust for power. The Platonic tyrant will engage in the latter practice himself as he is seeking to rise to power. The ancient authors suggest that tyrants were particularly fond of robbing temples. See, e.g., *Hiero* 4.11; *Rep.* 574d; Sen. *Eld. Contr.* 5.8: “Nulla rapietur, nullus occidetur, nullum spoliabitur templum.” This may be because the practice manifests not only the tyrant's avarice but also his impiety.

²⁷⁶ Arist. *Pol.* 1314^b16-18: “ὅλως τε αὐτὸν παρασκευάζειν φύλακα καὶ ταμίαν ὡς κοινῶν ἀλλὰ μὴ ὡς ιδίῶν”.

public administration. He considers both revenues and expenses. This section accordingly reviews Suetonius' discussions of the virtues and vices of liberality, avarice, generosity, and prodigality. The next sections will examine two categories of imperial expenditure, i.e., the imperial building programs and public spectacles.

Suetonius' discussion of Augustus' *liberalitas* emphasizes the repeated and public nature of the emperor's exhibition of this virtue before his subjects.²⁷⁷ The first act of liberality that he records involves the emperor's appropriation of the treasures of a royal regime (*regia gaza*, 41.1) and the injection of that wealth into the Roman financial system. It is Egypt, with its pyramids and pharaohs, that was often identified as a prime example of a tyrannical regime using its public financial administration, both revenues and expenditures, in order to enslave its people.²⁷⁸ Augustus confiscates the wealth of Egypt and distributes it at Rome. This act of redistributing of the wealth of a foreign monarchy sets the tone for the rubric.

The emperor's liberality has its limits. Augustus is, as an initial matter, not giving away this gold out of Egypt to the people, but offering to lend it at a reduced rate of interest. He does this not only in the case of the Egyptian loot, but also with money he confiscates from condemned criminals ("quotiens ex damnatorum bonis pecunia

²⁷⁷ *Aug.* 41.1: "liberalitatem omnibus ordinibus per occasiones frequenter exhibuit."

Liberalitas is attributed in the *Caesares* not only to Augustus (41-42), but also to Nero (10.1), Titus (7.3-8.1), and Domitian (9). That this virtue is attributed to the best and worst men shows the practical, rather than ethical, quality of this virtue for Suetonius. For a review of *liberalitas* under Augustus and his successors, see generally Kloft (1970) 73-177.

²⁷⁸ *Arist. Pol.* 5.11, 1313b21-22, who refers to the pyramids as a παράδειγμα of this tyrannical practice.

superflueret,” *Aug.* 41.1). Augustus is acting in order to appear virtuous, but not to appear extravagant; he uses military plunder and judicial verdicts to fund largesse that makes him appear a wise ruler rather than a demagogue and a flatterer. That this is his precise aim is made clear when he responds to the people’s demand for more wine by restraining, rather than indulging, them. He follows this course to show that he is more concerned with the public good than he is with flattering the people (*Aug.* 42.1).²⁷⁹ Suetonius suggests that the emperor is acting so as to seem neither a repressive tyrant nor a demagogue, but the just ruler who acts for the well-being of the state.²⁸⁰

Nero makes his own show of *liberalitas*. Suetonius is again not so much concerned with the emperor’s character, as with the popular beliefs about his character that those actions create.²⁸¹ He begins his reign by announcing his intention to rule “ex Augusti praescripto” (*Nero* 10.1). Suetonius reports, in other words, that the emperor intended for his reign to be understood in a particular way. The emperor’s concern is with seeming to be good, not with doing good. Suetonius makes this clear by noting that it is the opportunity to exhibit liberal behavior that Nero does not omit: “neque liberalitatis

²⁷⁹ The relationship between tyranny and democracy that was first posited by Plato and Aristotle is reflected in the Roman suspicion of a leader who flatters the masses. See, e.g., Kennell (1997) 354: “Roman authorities, to say nothing of the local elites, apparently regarded with suspicion anyone who curried the favor of the masses too assiduously, as such behavior was the mark of a tyrant.”

²⁸⁰ For Augustus’ avoidance of appearing to take the role of demagogue by means of this refusal to provide the people with wine, see Louis (2010) 337.

²⁸¹ *Nero* 10:1: “ut certiores adhuc indolem ostenderet.”

neque clementiae ne comitatis quidem exhibendae ullam occasionem omisit,” *Nero*

10.1.²⁸²

Suetonius then catalogues these exemplary deeds that established Nero’s reputation for *liberalitas*. By his actions, Nero creates the impression that he has disavowed the financial practices that are typical of the tyrant (*Nero* 10.1):

grauiora uectigalia aut aboleuit aut minuit. praemia delatorum Papiae legis ad quartas redegit. diuisis populo uiritim quadringenis nummis senatorum nobilissimo cuique, sed a re familiari destituto annua salaria et quibusdam quingena constituit, item praetorianis cohortibus frumentum menstruum gratuitum.

The heavier taxes he either abolished or diminished. The rewards for informers under the Lex Papia, he reduced by 75 percent. Having distributed four hundred sesterces a man to the people, he established an annual allowance for senators in reduced family circumstances, in some cases as much as five hundred thousand sesterces; and then to the praetorian cohorts he gave a monthly allowance of corn free of charge.

Nero abolished or reduced the confiscatory taxes that were the hallmark of the repressive tyrant. His reduction of the *praemia delatorum* under the Lex Papia constituted a disavowal of one of the principal means of acquiring wealth attributed to the tyrant by Plato and Aristotle.²⁸³ He provides money to the nobles among the senators in reduced straits; Nero permits the taller stalks of grain that have previously been cut down to grow

²⁸² Domitian is also described not as being liberal, but of giving no reason for suspecting him of being avaricious: “cupiditatis quoque atque auaritiae uix suspicionem ullam aut priuatus umquam aut princeps aliquamdiu dedit” (*Dom.* 9.1).

²⁸³ Titus follows a more extreme course of action in his dealing with informers and instigators, having them beaten in the forum and then put up and sold in the amphitheatre or deported *in asperrimas insularum*. *Tit.* 8.5.

back. The monthly grain allowance to the praetorians, finally, shores up support with the bodyguard of the emperor. Nero is acting to consolidate his hold on power.²⁸⁴

Gaius and Nero (in the latter part of his reign) are two emperors whom Suetonius singles out for their prodigality. Gaius, he reports, surpassed all prodigals in his expenditures: “nepotatus sumptibus omnium prodigorum ingenia superavit” (*Cal.* 37.1). It is not the extent of his spending that draws Suetonius’ opprobrium, however, but the ingenuity of the purposes to which he put those expenditures. He devised novel types of foods and banquets; he bathed in hot and cold perfumes; he drank valuable pearls dissolved in vinegar; he served bread and dainties made of gold (*Cal.* 37.1). He does scatter large sums of money from the roof of the Basilica Julia, but all of his other expenditures are directed toward his own enjoyment (*Cal.* 37.2-3).

Gaius’ ingenuity reflects the preference for the extravagant and the unnatural that characterizes the public spending, and indeed many of the vices, of the traditional tyrant. He builds galleys on which he places colonnades, banquet halls, and even trees and vines; his ships blur the line between land and sea (*Cal.* 37.2). He builds villas and houses without regard for their cost. His only aim is to accomplish the impossible. He converts sea into land, plains into mountains, and mountains into plains. He builds tunnels of extraordinary length. The delight that Gaius takes in the impossible and unnatural has been a sign of the hubris of the tyrant since the excavation of the tunnel of Eupalinos on Samos in the time of Polycrates and the bridging of the Hellespont and the cutting of a

²⁸⁴ Alone of the emperors, Titus is said to have been benevolent by nature (“natura autem benevolentissimus,” *Tit.* 8.1), a fact which comports with Suetonius’ judgment of Titus.

canal across Athos by Xerxes.²⁸⁵ As will be discussed in the following section, this theme of tyrannical hubris runs also through the account of the emperor's building program.

While Nero may have modeled his early reign on that of Augustus, he is later said to have admired and envied his uncle Gaius for the speed with which he ran through the fortune that Tiberius had left to him. Nero spent extravagantly on entertaining Tiridates – an expenditure that might have been excessive, but which was nevertheless for a nominally public purpose – but also on gifts for lyre players, gladiators, and usurers (*Nero* 30.2):

Menecraten citharoedum et Spiculum murmillonem triumphalium uirorum patrimonii aedibusque donauit. cercopithecum Panerodem faeneratorem et urbanis rusticisque praediis locupletatum prope regio extulit funere.

He gave Menecrates the lyre-player and the gladiator Spiculus patrimonies and estates worthy of men who had celebrated a triumph. He gave the monkey-faced usurer Paneros, whom he had enriched with urban and country estates, a funeral worthy of a king.

Nero's spending exhibits that confusion of private and public that is of the essence of the tyrannical vice of prodigality. Aristotle counseled the moderate tyrant to avoid lavishing gifts specifically on mistresses, foreigners, and performers (ἐταίραις καὶ ξένοις καὶ τεχνίταις, *Arist. Pol.* 5.11, 1314^b4), because such expenditures are especially offensive to those who labor to earn their wages. Nero buries a usurer with a funeral fit for a king

²⁸⁵ For the Eupalinian tunnel, see *Hdt.* 3.60. For the canal at Athos, see *Hdt.* 3.22-24. For the bridging of the Hellespont, see *Hdt.* 7.33-34. For the unnatural and impossible as typical of the diatribe against tyrannical hubris, see Hurley (1993) 143. Horace makes such behavior a sign of the hubris of the leisure class in general: "contracta pisces aequora sentiunt, iactis in altum molibus" (*Carm.* 3.1.33-4).

(*regio funere*, *Nero* 30.2), and treats a lyre player and a gladiator like men who had celebrated triumphs.

Nero's descent into prodigality moves from public, albeit excessive, spending in the case of Tiridates, to lavish spending on private individuals, to personal indulgence. Suetonius reports, for example, that Nero never wore the same garment twice (*Nero* 30.3). In nothing was his behavior more ruinous (*damnosior*, *Nero* 31.1), however, than in his construction of the *Domus Aurea*. Nero converted the public space of the city into a private residence for the emperor at spectacular expense (*Nero* 31.1). Nero and Gaius are prodigal, rather than generous or benevolent, because their spending is both irrational and directed toward gratifying solely the private pleasures of the emperor.

Balanced against these imperial expenditures are the imperial revenues. Just as moderate emperors relaxed confiscatory tax policy and relied less upon informers, so too the bad emperors raised taxes, encouraged informers, and devised ever more extreme measures for raising revenue. After his hopes of finding the hidden treasure of queen Dido had been thwarted (*Nero* 31.4), Nero funds his reign with false accusations and robbery (*Nero* 32.1). When Domitian found himself in dire financial straits, "nihil pensi habuit quin praedaretur omni modo" (*Dom.* 12.1). He seizes the property of both the living and the dead, and does so on any accusation brought by any accuser ("usquequaque quolibet et accusatore et crimine," *Dom.* 12.1).

Tiberius falls short of the virtue of liberality and into the vice of avarice. He is described as intensely frugal ("pecuniae parcus et tenax," *Tib.* 46).²⁸⁶ His parsimony

²⁸⁶ Suetonius attributes *avaritia* to Julius (54), Gaius (38-42), Nero (32), Galba (12), Domitian (12.1-2).

resulted in the absence of certain forms of imperial behavior: he undertakes no public works, pays for no public spectacles, and provides no relief to senators who cannot show that they have extreme need for relief. There are two instances in which Tiberius does, however, exhibit munificence (“publice munificentiam bis omnino exhibuit,” *Tib.* 48.1).²⁸⁷ First, he lends one hundred million sesterces to the state and then pays for the rebuilding of houses on the Caelian Hill after a fire. These acts failed to win Tiberius a reputation for liberality, however, either because it appeared that he had been forced to perform them or because he seemed to have undertaken them solely in order to enhance his own reputation. He lent money to the state only after the people had demanded that he take action: “populo auxilium flagitante coactus est facere” (*Tib.* 48.1). He undertook the reconstruction of the Caelian Hill *ad mitigandam temporum atrocitatem*, but he derived no reputational benefit from this act of largesse because he himself made so much of it: “quod tamen beneficium tanti aestimavit, ut montem Caelium appellatione mutata vocari Augustum iusserit” (*Tib.* 48.1).²⁸⁸ Tiberius fails to be a liberal emperor, therefore, not merely because he lacks the virtue and possesses the opposing vice but because he also fails to put on the proper show of generosity, to keep up appearances and act the part of a beneficent ruler.

²⁸⁷ Again, it is the exhibition of the virtue, rather than its exercise, with which Suetonius is primarily concerned.

²⁸⁸ Suetonius observes that Tiberius also failed to act in a liberal way toward the soldiers, both the praetorians and the legionaries, and toward the provinces (48.2). As noted above, it is the relationship of the emperor to the city that is of central concern to Suetonius; this focus on Rome does not, however, exclude consideration of the rest of the empire.

It is the appearance of public-minded financial administration, rather than its reality, that the tyrants who ruled at Rome seek to foster. The publication of financial accounts is yet another way in which a tyrant can make his people believe that he is administering the state as a steward seeking to promote the public good.²⁸⁹ Suetonius credits Augustus (*Aug.* 28.1, when he was ill, and 101.4, in his will) with offering detailed accounts of the empire, and credits Gaius with resuming their publication: “rationes imperii ab Augusto proponi solitas sed a Tiberio intermissas publicavit” (*Cal.* 16.1). Suetonius remarks that Tiberius had discontinued the practice of publishing the accounts of his administration. While Dio implies that the practice was a regular one that Tiberius had allowed to lapse during his retirement at Capri, Suetonius instead suggests that the practice had been irregular even under Augustus.²⁹⁰ Whatever the historical reality may have been, Suetonius has created a portrait of Augustus and Gaius as emperors who keep up appearances in the way that a ruler should, while Tiberius, both in his actual expenditures and in his publication of financial records, was not.²⁹¹ That the same practice is used by one of the best and one of the worst emperors suggests that the

²⁸⁹ For the keeping and publishing of accurate financial accounts, see Arist. *Pol.* 5.11, 1314b4-6.

²⁹⁰ As Pike (1903) 209 notes, Dio 59.9.4 suggests that the practice, which was instituted by Augustus, was allowed to lapse only while Tiberius was on Capri. Hurley (1993) 54-5 notes that *solitas* reflects a generalization from the two instances in the reign of Augustus, but takes no position on the actual regularity of the practice.

²⁹¹ Nero expresses contempt for men who keep accurate accounts of their spending: *sordidos ac deparcos esse quibus impensarum ratio constaret*, Nero 30.1. Suetonius does not address whether the emperor failed to publish accounts of the finances of the empire.

means of preserving the reign are available to every emperor, be he a prince or monster, a just king or an avaricious tyrant.

The Building Programs of the Emperors

Suetonius employs the criteria that have traditionally served to distinguish the projects of the tyrant from those of the just ruler when he comes to the building programs of the emperors. Xenophon had observed in the *Hiero* (11.1), for example, that “money spent by a tyrant on public projects comes closer to being essential expenditure than money he spends on himself.” Simonides then posed the rhetorical question to Hiero of “which do you think brings more credit [to the tyrant], a residence gorgeously furnished at extraordinary expense, or the whole city equipped with defensive walls, temples, colonnades, squares, and harbours?” (*Hiero* 11.2). Aristotle observed that a repressive tyrant will undertake extravagant building projects in order to impoverish his subjects (1313b18-25), while a moderate tyrant will essentially follow the advice of Xenophon and implement a building program aimed at adorning and improving his city (κατασκευάζειν ... καὶ κοσμεῖν τὴν πόλιν). In the Greek tradition, a ruler’s program of public building is one way in which he shows himself to be a tyrant, either moderate or repressive.²⁹² Suetonius describes, often in considerable detail, many of the building projects that the emperors undertake.²⁹³ He consistently adopts the traditional criteria set out in Aristotle and Xenophon and evaluates not only whether these programs served a

²⁹² For the building programs, and particularly for a critique of Aristotle’s treatment of them, see Andrewes (1963) 51.

²⁹³ See *Jul.* 28 and 44, *Aug.* 29, *Cal.* 21, *Claud.* 21, *Nero* 31, *Ves.* 8.5-9.1, and *Dom.* 5.1.

public or private purpose but also whether they served to impoverish or to adorn the city, the provinces, and the empire.

Suetonius brings out these two dimensions when he focuses on the first imperial building program that was undertaken by Caesar. Caesar adopted building programs both in the provinces (*Jul.* 28) and at Rome (*Jul.* 44). Suetonius leaves no doubt that these programs served to advance his political agenda. Caesar adorns the principal cities of Asia, Greece, Gaul, and Spain with magnificent buildings (“praecipuis operibus exornans,” *Jul.* 28.1) specifically in order to win over those provinces and their rulers (“reges atque provincias ... adliciebat,” *Jul.* 28.1). At Rome, he made similar plans to adorn and improve the city (“de ornanda instruendaque urbe,” *Jul.* 44.1), but these were cut short by his assassination (*Jul.* 44.4). The adornment of the city is the aim of the tyrannical building program, and that aim in turn serves the purpose of winning the loyalty of the people by persuading them of the public mindedness of the ruler. Caesar’s programs advance these aims in these ways.

Suetonius describes Augustus’ program at length and in detail (*Aug.* 29.1-4). He notes that the emperor encouraged other prominent men to build new monuments and refurbish old ones: “Sed et ceteros principes viros saepe hortatus est ut pro facultate quisque monimentis vel novis vel reffectis et excultis urbem adornarent” (*Aug.* 29.4-5). The willingness to share credit with others confirms that his intention was to show himself to be concerned with the good of the city, rather than with its impoverishment. He is behaving as a moderate tyrant.

Tiberius, as one would expect given his reputation for parsimony, is faulted for failing to construct any magnificent works (“princeps neque opera ulla magnifica fecit,”

Tib. 47). Tiberius' shortcomings as a builder are described immediately after his frugality ("pecuniae parcus ac tenax," *Tib.* 46) and his unwillingness to carry out such a program is followed immediately by his failure to give or even attend any public spectacles (*Tib.* 47). Suetonius explains this refusal to attend the games as the result of the emperor's avoidance of all locations where he might be forced to grant public requests. Frugality cripples the emperor in his financial affairs, his building programs, and even his participation in public life.

Gaius' building program is not a cause for explicit censure, but is nevertheless one way in which Suetonius unmistakably casts the emperor as a tyrant in the Greek mould. On what would appear to be the positive side of the ledger, for example, Gaius completes the two building projects that Tiberius had left unfinished; he also begins an aqueduct and a theatre at Rome (*Cal.* 21). These actions appear positive, but one should recall that Tarquinius Superbus completed the program that his father had begun. Outside the city, Gaius' building program places him squarely in the tyrannical tradition. Just as he had completed the building program of Tiberius at Rome, Gaius undertook projects to restore the palaces and projects of past tyrants abroad. He rebuilt the walls, which had collapsed from age, and the temples of the gods at Syracuse. He had resolved to rebuild the palace of Polycrates on Samos, to complete the temple of Didymaeon Apollo at Miletus, to found a city in the Alps and, before all of his other projects, to dig a canal at the Isthmus at Corinth.²⁹⁴ In each case, there might have been practical reasons for

²⁹⁴ *Cal.* 21: "Syracensis conlapsa vetustate moenia deorumque aedes refoetae. Destinaverat et Sami Polycratis regiam restituere, Mileti Didymeum peragere, in iugo Alpium urbem condere, sed ante omnia Isthmum in Achaia perfodere, miseratque iam ad dimetiendum opus primipilarem." That the project which held pride of place among these had reached

undertaking these projects.²⁹⁵ Suetonius might well have chosen to omit these reasons in order to create his portrait of Gaius as a tyrant.

This would have been a building program that paid homage to tyrants past. Syracuse is the home of Sicily's most notable tyrants.²⁹⁶ Polycrates was a sixth-century tyrant on the island of Samos. Herodotus describes three marvels on Samos – a tunnel nearly a mile long driven through a hill 900 feet high, with an accompanying channel for water; an artificial harbor; and the largest of all Greek temples known – that may well have comprised the building program that Polycrates used to impoverish and subjugate his people.²⁹⁷ The digging of a canal through the Isthmus recalls the hubris of Xerxes seeking to dig a canal through Athos. The hubris of Gaius is brought out, finally, both by his intention to build a city in the Alps, a western Olympus for the new Zeus, and by his desire to build a temple at Miletus; this last detail recalls the fact that a cult of Gaius had been established there. A building program may be one way for a tyrant to win over his people, but, as Suetonius here shows, it can also be a way for an emperor to emulate tyrants and even rival the gods. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that it is with

only the surveying stage suggests that these parts of Gaius' building program are more products of the emperor's imagination than projects of the imperial administration.

²⁹⁵ For a sampling of these reasons, see Hurley (1993) 82-3.

²⁹⁶ For the association of Sicily and Syracuse with a rich and long history of tyranny, see Dunkle (1967) 160-2.

²⁹⁷ See Hdt. 3.60. Aristotle includes Polycrates among the four tyrants he offers as examples of this strategy. *Pol.* 5.11, 1313b24. See also How and Wells (1912) 345-6, for the tyrannical aspects of Polycrates' building program.

Gaius' building program that Suetonius makes the transition from Gaius the *princeps* to Gaius the monster (*Cal.* 22.1).²⁹⁸

Claudius undertakes public works that are “magna potius et necessaria quam multa” (*Claud.* 20.1). All of these building projects involve water in one way or another. The emperor builds the Claudian aqueduct. He constructs a new harbor at Ostia. He sought to drain the Fucine Lake, tunneling an outlet three miles long under a mountain. Claudius' program has a mix of good and bad, tyrannical and monarchical elements. That he acts for a public purpose (*necessaria*) renders his actions consistent with the way of moderation. That his program seeks to manipulate nature – turning land into water and water into land – would seem to cast his actions in a less positive, and more specifically tyrannical, light. That Suetonius makes reference to the tunnel that formed part of the project to drain the Fucine Lake along with the construction of a new harbor at Ostia would, finally, recall the tunnel and harbor that Polycrates constructed on Samos.

Nero's building program is mixed, serving the public good at times, but indulging the private appetites of the emperor at other times. He devised a new form of building, designed to render the city less vulnerable to fire. He also planned to extend the city walls to Ostia and to dig a canal from Rome to its port. This extension of the Roman city walls recalls the program of Dionysius I, who built the circuit wall at Syracuse. Early in the biography, he is reported to have been willing to use his own money for the public good (“easque sumptu suo exstruit,” *Nero* 16.1).

²⁹⁸ For the historical bases for Suetonius' depiction of each element of Gaius' building program, see Hurley (1993) 82-3. For the tyrannical precedents for Gaius' program, see Elsner (1994) 116.

Suetonius later asserts, however, that there was no affair in which Nero was more ruinous (“non in alia re tamen damnosior,” *Nero* 31.1) than in his building of the *Domus Aurea*. He constructed this palace on an inhuman scale; its vestibule was surrounded by a triple colonnade that was a mile long and held a statue of the emperor 120 feet tall. Nero’s palace transformed public land into private space, land into water, and city into countryside (*Nero* 31.1):

item stagnum maris instar, circumsaepum aedificiis ad urbium speciem;
rura insuper aruis atque uinetis et pascuis silisque uaria, cum multitudine
omnis generis pecudum ac ferarum.

There was also a pond, an imitation of the sea, girt round with buildings so as to resemble cities; there was also countryside, varied with tilled fields and vineyards and pastures and woods, with a multitude of all type of animals both wild and domesticated.

The ceiling of the dining room rotated in imitation of the heavens (*Nero* 31.2), confusing inside and outside as well as heaven and earth. Suetonius here highlights the preference of the tyrant for the extravagant, the unnatural, the impossible, and the inverted.²⁹⁹ These inversions and transformations of the natural order are evidence of the tyrant’s descent into vice. As Gaius did with his building program, Nero aspires in his building program not only to tyranny, but to divinity, an aspiration revealed by the colossal statue he erects of himself, and reflected ironically by his remark that, in this palace, he could at last begin to live like a human being: “quasi hominem tandem habitare coepisse” (*Nero* 31.2).

²⁹⁹ See Woodman and Martin (1996) 127, noting that “houses which threatened the boundary between public and private life, or which were perceived to be over-ambitious or otherwise potentially tyrannical, reflected dangerously on their owners and risked eventual destruction.”

Suetonius demonstrates that Vespasian distinguished himself from Nero by means of his munificent building program (*Ves.* 9.1). He builds a temple of Peace, rebuilds the temple to Claudius that Nero had razed, and builds the Flavian amphitheatre on the site of Nero's *Domus Aurea*. The emphasis is on peace, on reestablishing the continuity with the line of Augustus that been interrupted by Nero, Galba, Otho, and Vitellius, and on returning the city of Rome to the Roman people. The amphitheatre, Suetonius remarks, had been a project that Augustus had hoped himself to undertake. Vespasian is not only distancing himself from Nero but also aligning himself with Augustus.

The sons of Vespasian, finally, exhibit the good and bad qualities of Nero and Tiberius. Titus, like Nero before his turn to tyranny, uses his own funds for public purposes; when a fire strikes Rome, he declares that the loss is his own, and even uses the decorations from his own residences to decorate public works and temples (*Tit.* 8.4). The sincerity of his sense of loss after this fire compares with the feigned sympathy of Tiberius when fire had damaged the Caelian Hill. Domitian's program of building follows Tiberius in its most significant shortcoming: in all cases where he rebuilds a structure destroyed by fire, he includes only his own name on the inscription, with no mention of the original builder (*Dom.* 5). Domitian is transparent in his desire to build credit with the people.

Public Spectacles

Suetonius' discussions of games and spectacles generally accompany his discussions of public works and finances.³⁰⁰ They do so because they serve the same

³⁰⁰ For example, spectacles (*Aug.* 43) follow the discussion of public finances (*Aug.* 41-42) in the *Augustus*, but follow the section on public works (*Claud.* 20, public works; 21,

purpose of demonstrating the concern of the emperor for the city and its people.³⁰¹ They offer the emperor an opportunity to exhibit his concern for the common good and to ingratiate himself with the masses.³⁰² It has been argued that Suetonius reveals his antiquarian taste for detail when he describes the innovations and the restorations that the emperors made in this area of public life.³⁰³ Yet, while the knowledge Suetonius derived

games and shows) in the *Claudius*. In the *Caligula*, the discussion of the gladiatorial games (*Cal.* 18) and other public entertainments (19-20) immediately precedes the description of his building program (21). Spectacles and building programs are juxtaposed, however, even when it is their neglect that is being discussed. For example, after describing Tiberius' frugality (*Tib.* 46), Suetonius observes in the following chapter, first, that the emperor constructed no magnificent public works and, second, *neque spectacula omnino edidit* (*Tib.* 47).

³⁰¹ The discussion of spectacles in the *Hiero* of Xenophon is both specific to the context of the Greek world and concerned with the happiness of the tyrant himself rather than with the happiness of his people. The tyrant was not free to attend the festivals, Xenophon explained, because of the dangers he would face outside of his city (1.12). He could have sights and sounds brought to him, but would be expected to pay extravagantly for the privilege of private exhibitions (1.13).

³⁰² Suetonius devotes rubrics to *spectacula* in the *Julius* (39), *Augustus* (43-45), *Caligula* (18-20), *Claudius* (21), *Nero* (11-13) and *Domitian* 4. Not all of the lives contain a rubric devoted to such entertainments, either because the emperor did not provide such entertainments, as in the case of Tiberius, or because their reigns were too short.

³⁰³ Wallace-Hadrill (1983) 126-9 discusses the antiquarian view that Suetonius takes with regard specifically to public games, a subject on which Suetonius is known to have written a scholarly work. I agree that many of the details Suetonius chooses to include often reflect, or are at least a probable product of, his antiquarian and scholarly interests. I do not agree, however, that Suetonius includes such information about games and public buildings solely because of this interest and not because he believed that games mattered

from his antiquarian investigations is almost certainly reflected in the *Caesares*, those interests do not dictate the range of subjects that he chose to cover in his biographies; Suetonius did not describe the public spectacles of the emperors, in other words, simply because he chanced to have already done the research. These games and spectacles play an integral role in the *Caesares*. Specifically, they demonstrate the civic-mindedness of the emperor and show that the expenditures that he makes are made for the public good.

Augustus set the standard for public spectacles, in terms of their frequency, their variety, and their magnificence: “spectaculorum et assiduitate et uarietate et magnificentia omnes antecessit” (*Aug.* 41.1). Although no other emperor will match Augustus’ record, Suetonius will take note of the quantity and the variety of the spectacles that each emperor exhibited. Nero, for example, is reported to have raced four-camel chariots (*Nero* 11.1) and to have staged a sea-fight on an artificial lake with sea monsters swimming in it (*Nero* 12.2). At the *Ludi Maximi*, moreover, he scattered all sorts of gifts among the people, including 1,000 assorted birds each day, food parcels, and vouchers for grain, gold, silver, paintings, slaves, and even ships, tenements, and farms (*Nero* 11.2).³⁰⁴

Augustus put on games in his own name on 24 occasions, and in the name of magistrates, who either were absent or lacked the financial wherewithal to do so

as much as wars. Suetonius, like Aristotle, conducts a political analysis that is focused on the ruler’s maintenance of power at home; in furtherance of this analysis, games often do matter more than war. For the relationship between Suetonius’ *ludicra historia* and the *Caesares*, see also Warmington (1977) 64.

³⁰⁴ Gaius (18.2) and Domitian (4.5) also make such gifts. For the political function of such gifts, see Yavetz (1969) 103-4; Bradley (1978) 84-5.

themselves, on 23 occasions (*Aug.* 43.1). Although, as with public building projects, the emperor is willing to share credit for these public entertainments with other men, it is not an insignificant detail that Augustus is reported to have put on one more game in his own name than he did in the name of all of the magistrates combined. He is willing to share credit and honor with the nobles, but he guards his status as first citizen jealously. This contrasts sharply with the failed generosity of Tiberius, who spoiled his few acts of largesse by claiming excessive and exclusive credit for his good deeds, and Domitian, who insisted that the names of the dedicators on buildings be replaced with his own name after he had repaired them.

Suetonius includes details that tend to confirm Augustus' concern for the common good in this discussion of his games and spectacles. The emperor made a point, for example, of putting on these shows throughout the city; he also posted guards to prevent robbers taking advantage of people being at the games (*Aug.* 43.1). He displays to the public on game days unfamiliar things that are worth seeing (*Aug.* 43.4). That Augustus displays both the unfamiliar and the spectacular to the public recalls the discussion of spectacles in the *Hiero*, but also transforms the tyrant's private desire to enjoy those spectacles into a civic-minded desire to promote the public good. The emperor also puts the safety of the people ahead of his own. He attends the games when he is sick (*Aug.* 43.5). When a rumor spreads that a theatre is at risk of collapsing, moreover, he takes a seat in the area subject to danger in order to calm the crowd (*Aug.* 43.5).³⁰⁵

³⁰⁵ Public spectacles are one area in which Suetonius has adapted and, indeed, added to the traditional portrait of the tyrant in order to reflect the political reality of his day. The public spectacles of Augustus, as described by Suetonius in these three chapters, offer a microcosm of the properly ordered city gathered hierarchically under its good and just

The games provide the emperor with an opportunity to win the goodwill of the people and to appear to be ruling moderately rather than as a tyrant. Public spectacles, and the emperor's attendance at them, also provided the people with an opportunity to interact with, and petition, their emperor directly.³⁰⁶ Tiberius, as we have already noted, is in fact said to have refrained from providing and from attending such *spectacula* in order to avoid receiving petitions from the people (*Tib.* 47). Julius attended the games, but was faulted for reading correspondence during them, a fault from which Suetonius expressly exempts Augustus. Nero watched some of these events from the top of the proscenium (*Nero* 12.1), a detail that may suggest his pretensions to a status more than human or reflect instead the fear that Xenophon, for one, had said that a tyrant would feel when attending public spectacles. Nero is later said to have reclined in an enclosed platform and to have watched through a small window, which he later opened up to public view (*Nero* 12.2). In this portrait of the "good" Nero, therefore, he is an emperor who makes himself increasingly visible to his people.

Suetonius records the efforts that the emperors each made at the games to maintain the distinctions between the orders. It was not only the lower classes who

emperor. He restores order to the seating arrangements at the games, so that senators and women will have their proper places (*Aug.* 44). He shows interest in the games and, unlike Julius, devotes his full attention to them whenever he is in attendance (*Aug.* 45). He disciplines actors who do not show proper respect toward citizens (*Aug.* 45).

³⁰⁶ See Millar (1977) 368-75, who describes the opportunity that the games afforded to the people to interact with their emperor. In commenting on Nero's attendance at the games, Bradley (1978) 81 observes that "the assembly of people in theatre and circus superseded to some extent the Republican comitial assemblies and permitted opportunities for popular opinion to reach the emperor directly."

attended these spectacles; both senators and *equites* did as well. Suetonius remarks on those emperors who ensured that the assigned seating arrangements were respected. After the civil wars, for example, when many of the knights had seen their estates reduced below the statutory minimum, Augustus waived the requirement so that the members of the order could assume their proper place at the games. He does not provide them with funds so that they might meet the requirement; at the games, as in his reign generally, Augustus seeks to bring about only the appearance of a return to the *status quo ante*.³⁰⁷

An emperor can also use the games to set the orders against each other and to express his contempt for them and for the people generally. Gaius, for example, drives away with clubs those who seek out the cheap seats in the circus at midnight, an action that results in the deaths of twenty knights, as many matrons, and a great crowd of people (*Cal.* 26.4). In order to sow discord between the plebs and the knights (“inter plebem et equitem causam discordiarum ferens,” *Cal.* 26.4), he also distributes vouchers early in the theatre so that the plebs occupy the seats of the knights (“ut equestria ab infimo quoque occuparentur,” *Cal.* 26.4). When it became especially hot at a gladiatorial contest, he withdrew the awnings and forbade the people from leaving. He pretends to exercise control over the sun, showing again his hubris and divine pretensions. He then puts on second-rate fights (*Cal.* 26.5). By his caprice, Gaius shows his contempt. Domitian will later redress the situation in the theatre that Gaius had created and take steps to restrain the license of the people in sitting among the knights in the theatre (*Dom.* 8.3).

³⁰⁷ Nero, likewise, is said to have allotted seats for the knights at the circus (*Nero* 11.1: *loca equiti secreta a ceteris tribuit*).

Suetonius also includes among the catalogue of Gaius' spectacles one of the most patent examples of an emperor taking his place in the tyrannical tradition. It is in this catalogue that Suetonius offers his account of Gaius's bridge from Baiae to Puteoli.³⁰⁸ Gaius built this bridge by anchoring merchant ships in a double row and then heaping earth onto them *in Appiae viae formam* (19.1). The emperor rides back and forth over the bridge, dressed in regal and military attire, accompanied by the praetorians and by his friends in Gallic chariots, all the while showing off a Parthian boy named Dareus (19.2).³⁰⁹ Suetonius refers to this feat as a novel (*novum*) and unheard of (*inauditum*) spectacle (19.1).

Suetonius acknowledges that Gaius' bridge almost inevitably invited a comparison with Xerxes' bridge across the Hellespont.³¹⁰ He reports that there were some who had believed that Gaius had in fact built his bridge "aemulatione Xerxis" (*Cal.* 19.1). Dio relates that Gaius had in fact mocked Darius and Xerxes because he had built a far bigger bridge than Xerxes had built (59.17.11). Not everyone, however, had concluded that Gaius sought to rival Xerxes. Suetonius records that there were some who believed that Gaius had built his bridge in order to intimidate the Germans and Britains (*Cal.*

³⁰⁸ Hurley (1993) 74-8 provides a historical commentary on this passage and compares Suetonius' account with those in Pliny, Dio, Josephus, and Philo.

³⁰⁹ Darius was, in fact, the son of Artabanus III, one of the Parthian hostages sent to Rome after the settlement between Parthia and Rome. See Hurley (1993) 77. The inclusion of a Parthian named Dareus leaves little doubt about the association Suetonius intended for his reader to make.

³¹⁰ Hurley (1993) 77-8 concludes that it "is unthinkable that Gaius himself, whatever else he was doing, did not realize that he was actualizing a metaphor." Xerxes' bridging of the Hellespont was a pervasive cliché of which Gaius would certainly have been aware.

19.3). Suetonius himself had privileged information; Gaius had built his bridge to prove an astrologer's prediction wrong (*Cal.* 19.3):

Sed avum meum narrantem puer audiebam, causam operis ab interioribus aulicis proditam, quod Thrasyllus mathematicus anxio de successore Tiberio et in verum nepotem proniori affirmasset non magis Gaium imperaturum quam per Baianum sinum equis discursurum.

But, as a boy, I would hear my grandfather telling of how he had learned that the emperor's motivation for the project from members of the emperor's inner circle was that Thrasyllus the astrologer had assured Tiberius, when he was concerned about his successor and was inclined toward his natural grandson, that Gaius was no more likely to rule than he was to cross over the bay of Baiae on horses.

Suetonius does not deny that there is a resemblance between the bridges of Gaius and Xerxes; he asserts only that Gaius did not intend to rival Xerxes. The reader is left to draw a comparison between the behavior of the Roman Emperor and the Persian king. Gaius has acted just like a tyrant, but without even intending to act that way.³¹¹

The Emperor in the Arena and on the Stage

While games and spectacles would have been a part of each emperor's reign, several emperors do more than sponsor them: Gaius and Nero step onto the stage and into the arena. By so doing, these emperors place themselves in tension with the traditional discourse on the proper behavior of a tyrant. As we have seen, the tyrant is a figure who

³¹¹ Suetonius reveals in chapter 32 that the construction of this bridge provided Gaius with an opportunity to emulate not only eastern potentates, but his predecessor Tiberius. Gaius invited several of those whom he had invited to accompany him to Baiae to cross his bridge. As these men were crossing, Suetonius reports, Gaius suddenly had them thrown overboard into the sea. He prevents them from regaining the bridge by pushing them off *contis remisque* (*Cal.* 32.1). The emperor Tiberius, when he threw men headlong into the sea from the cliffs of Capri, had ships below waiting to finish off his victims *contis atque remis* (*Tib.* 62.2).

is portrayed as a law unto himself, who seeks always to transgress social norms, natural boundaries, and laws both human and divine. For the emperor to appear as a gladiator, a singer, or a charioteer places him within this tradition of tyrannical transgression. On the other hand, the tyrant is portrayed as the ruler from without, who fears to appear before his people and who seeks always to maintain distance and preserve his seclusion in order to set himself apart from his people; the tyrant does not make a spectacle of himself. There is no benefit to the tyrant in competing with his people. As Hiero explains to Simonides in Xenophon's dialogue, to compete with ordinary citizens inspires only malice or ridicule: "For if you should win, you would not be the subject of wonder but of envy, for how you had the expenditures from many estates, but if you should lose, you would make a complete laughing stock of yourself."³¹² In satisfying their tyrannical desire to transgress, therefore, these two emperors would run the risk of ridicule and contempt. Suetonius makes the most of the opportunity with which the reports of the reigns of these emperors presented him.

Suetonius reports that Gaius drove a chariot, fought as a gladiator, sang, danced, and fought using weapons without foils. All of these are roles an emperor, indeed any noble, should not play. Gaius is not said to have taken to the public stage – that is one line left for Nero to cross – but he is so carried away by his passion for acting and singing ("ita efferebatur," *Cal.* 54.1) that he is not able to restrain himself from singing and

³¹² Xen. *Hiero* 11.6: ἐγὼ μὲν γὰρ οὐδὲ προσήκειν φημὶ ἀνδρὶ τυράννῳ πρὸς ιδιώτας ἀγωνίζεσθαι. νικῶν μὲν γὰρ οὐκ ἂν θαυμάζοιο ἀλλὰ φθονοῖο, ὥς ἀπὸ πολλῶν οἴκων τὰς δαπάνας ποιοῦμενος, νικώμενος δ' ἂν πάντων μάλιστα καταγελῶ.

gesturing along with the actors.³¹³ That the tyrant must separate himself from his people, and set himself above them, in order to survive is a commonplace found in authors from Herodotus onwards.³¹⁴ Suetonius' remark that, on the very day of his assassination, Gaius was planning to hold an all-night festival so that he might appear on the stage reminds the reader of the relationship between the contempt his acting aroused and the power of that contempt to inspire men to attack their emperor.³¹⁵

Nero races chariots, competes as a gladiator, and sings in competition at Rome, in Italy, and on a tour of Greece. His chariot-racing as emperor at Rome is the culmination of a love of horses that he had felt since his boyhood (*Nero* 22.1). This passion of the child grows and gains the upper hand over the adult. First, "inter initia imperii," he plays with ivory chariots at home. He then begins to attend the races, "primo clam, deinde propalam" (*Nero* 22.1). He extends the races, so that they become full-day affairs. Finally, Nero mounts his own chariot (*Nero* 22.2):

Mox et ipse aurigare atque etiam spectari saepius voluit positoque in hortis inter servitia et sordidam plebem rudimento universorum se oculis in Circo Maximo praebuit, aliquo liberto mittente mappam unde magistratus solent.

³¹³ *Cal.* 54.1: "ut ne publicis quidem spectaculis temperaret quo minus et tragoedo pronuntianti concineret et gestum histrionis quasi laudans vel corrigens palam effingeret."

³¹⁴ The confusion of public and private, a defining failure of the tyrant, is in evidence in Gaius' decision to summon senators to the palace late at night as if on important business, only to then dance in their presence. *Cal.* 54.2. See Pike (1903) 234, who here notes the confusion of public business and private entertainments.

³¹⁵ *Cal.* 54.2: "Nec alia de causa videtur eo die, quo periit, pervigilium indixisse quam ut initium in scaenam prodeundi licentia temporis auspicaretur."

Finally, he himself also wished to race a chariot and even to be seen more frequently. Having made a test run in his gardens before slaves and the more sordid sort of commoner, he offered himself before the eyes of all in the Circus Maximus, with a certain freedman releasing the kerchief from the place where the magistrates are accustomed to do so.

Suetonius has offered another example of the progressive revelation and degeneration of the tyrant. Nero first plays with toys, then attends as a spectator, then takes to a chariot himself. This incremental degeneration is paralleled by growing disclosure: the emperor first plays in the privacy of the palace, then enters the public sphere – first secretly and then openly – and attends the circus, and then, finally, races himself, first privately and then before the eyes of all. The emperor’s chariot racing is noted by the other ancient sources.³¹⁶ Suetonius, however, highlights the specifically transgressive nature of what Nero is doing; for example, the detail that a *libertus* drops the *mappa* from the *carceres*, a role that would ordinarily have been performed by the praetor, suggests Nero’s desire to redefine the traditional roles in Roman society.³¹⁷ This is not merely a harmless adult indulgence of a boyhood passion; the emperor wishes to be seen crossing societal boundaries and doing so in spectacular fashion.

Suetonius’ account of Nero’s Greek campaign is a prime example of the farcical nature of competition between a tyrant and ordinary citizens. The emperor acts, at every stage of the tour, as if he were engaged in a real competition, as if the winner were not always predetermined. He treats the other contestants “quasi plane condicionis eiusdem”

³¹⁶ See Tac. *Ann.* 14.14.1: *vetus illi cupido erat curriculo quadrigarum insistere*; Dio 62.15.1; 63.1.1.

³¹⁷ Bradley (1978) 137: “The point of Suetonius’ feeling here is perhaps that the *libertus* has usurped the position of the praetor, thus compounding the reversal of values represented by Nero’s appearance as auriga.”

(*Nero* 23.2). He addresses the judges *reverentissime* (*Nero* 23.2). He fears that their *taciturnitas* and *pudor* is a sign of *tristitia* and *malignitas* toward him. He obeys the rules in the contest; in the upside-down world of the tyrant, it is only when the rules are a farce that the ruler takes them seriously. As to the duties of his office, Nero places his own interests above those of the state, a behavior that is the defining characteristic of the tyrant. Suetonius observes that, when reminded that he was needed to deal with the business of the city, Nero responds that he must first ensure that he returns to Rome in a way worthy of Nero.³¹⁸

Suetonius provides several details to confirm that this is no true contest. First, he notes at the outset of the account that Nero had ordered the festivals to be held all at the same time; this detail not only confirms that Nero is going against the order of things, but also reveals that the emperor will be competing in contests over which he is the ultimate authority (*Nero* 22.3). Second, Nero arranged for a musical contest to be held at Olympia *praeter consuetudinem* (*Nero* 23.1); again, the emperor is transgressing custom and law. Third, he refuses to allow anyone to leave the theatre while he is performing (*Nero* 23.2); the emperor performs before a literally captive audience. Fourth, at the conclusion of each contest, it is Nero who announces himself the winner (*victorem autem se ipse pronuntiabat*, *Nero* 24.1); Nero announces the verdict in his own case. Finally, on his departure, he grants the entire province its freedom and awards the judges Roman citizenship and money. From beginning to end, these are Nero's contests and, hence, no

³¹⁸ *Nero* 23.1: "cum praesentia eius urticas res egere a liberto Helio admoneretur, rescripsit his verbis: "Quamvis nunc tuum consilium sit et votum celeriter reverti me, tamen suadere et optare potius debes, ut Nerone dignus revertar."

contests at all. His victories are not merely implicitly commanded, but bought and paid for.

Suetonius' decision to include Nero's artistic exploits in his biography could be explained well enough by reference to the simple strangeness of his undertakings. That Nero abandoned his duties at Rome in order to compete on the stage in Italy and abroad would certainly be worthy of note simply for their oddity. The extent of the treatment that Suetonius affords to Nero's public singing in Italy and to his campaign through the theaters of Greece suggests, however, that this was not an amusing anecdote, but a particularly revelatory piece of evidence about the emperor. On the one hand, it reveals his inclination to transgression and to inversion – the *imperator* is now the heroic commander of an artistic army set on culturally subduing Greece. On the other hand, the emperor is making a mockery of himself, engaging in competition with artists over whom he holds the power of life and death. At no point does Suetonius critique the quality of the emperor's performance; that was not the power that Nero's voice had at these competitions. Instead, it is Nero's power to order the games, hold captive the audience, and command and reward the judges, that is at the center of the portrait. Nero does not appear on the stage as an artist in an competition, but as a tyrant who cannot lose the contest and cannot but appear absurd.

The Emperor and the Social Classes

A tyrant does not reign in a social vacuum. He must take cognizance of the existence in the state of both rich and poor.³¹⁹ He must convince the classes and orders of society that they depend on the regime for their safety and prosperity. The tyrant should

³¹⁹ See, e.g., Arist. *Pol.* 5.11, 1315^a32-33.

also make the stronger of these parties his allies. There may also be times when he will have to pursue a strategy of divide and rule, making allies of one class to overcome the opposition of another, or setting the classes against each other.

It should come as no surprise, therefore, that the emperors in the *Caesares* care not only for the seating arrangements of the orders in the theatre and at the games.³²⁰ Each emperor must also establish his relationship with the orders of Roman society, securing the support of some and diminishing the power of others. The roles that the various segments of Roman society each play under the principate evolve during the time between the accession of Augustus and the death of Domitian. How the emperor relates to senators and knights, to the army and the people, remains significant. The emperor in Suetonius is shown to have manipulated these relationships in the way tyrants, from Peisistratus to Sulla, have always manipulated the classes of society to secure and maintain their power.

Scholars have argued about whether Suetonius expressed the views of a particular social or political class in his writings. Some have discerned the point of view of the equestrian order in the *Lives*; others have maintained that Suetonius essentially shared the social standpoint of the senatorial order; still others affirm that Suetonius provides us with the view of the Roman “man in the street.” My contention is that all of these arguments reflect the larger truth that they each individually miss: that the emperors in the *Caesares* treat the different orders, groups, and classes in society differently

³²⁰ For seating arrangements at the theatre or games, see Woodman and Martin (1996) 280-1. For the role played by these arrangements in maintain social hierarchies at Rome, see Levick (1983) 115; Rawson (1987) 83-114. For the custom of rising to magistrates, Oakley (2005) 628 (commenting on Livy 9.46.9) and sources cited therein.

depending upon the particular needs, perceived or actual, of the emperor. The emperors manage Roman society, to reiterate, in the way tyrants have always managed their peoples.

Suetonius casts the life of Caesar as a struggle between the emperor and a single class of Roman society. As the analysis in the next chapter of the account of his death will show, the disrespect that Caesar showed to the senate led to his demise. Caesar's failure to rise from his seat is one sure sign that Suetonius offers of the emperor's hostility to the Senate. Augustus did not repeat this mistake. Suetonius reports, almost belaboring the point, that Augustus greeted even the individual senators, whom he allowed to remain seated, by name, without relying upon the help of a nomenclator, both as he entered and as he left the Senate house (*Aug.* 53.2). Augustus kept up active social relations with the senators until, having been almost overwhelmed by a mob at a wedding, he was forced to stop the practice (*Aug.* 53.2). When one senator considers starving himself to death, the emperor personally intervenes to dissuade him. He permits considerable freedom of speech to senators (*Aug.* 54).

The full range of societal relationships that an emperor must foster is made clear in the *Augustus*. Suetonius here catalogues the signs of how beloved the emperor was by each order ("pro quibus meritis quanto opere dilectus sit, facile est aestimare," *Aug.* 57.1). He says nothing of the senate, he explains, because its decrees, as Xenophon had perceived, might well be the result either of necessity or of deference.³²¹ He begins

³²¹ *Aug.* 57.1: "omitto senatus consulta, quia possunt uideri uel necessitate expressa uel uerecundia." Xenophon had observed that gifts given and honors paid from fear or under compulsion reveal nothing about the beliefs of the people; he even uses the rising or failing to rise from one's seat as one of his examples. *Xen. Hiero* 7.6-8: ὥσαύτως τοῖνον

instead by recording that the knights had devoted two days to celebrating the emperor's birthday.³²² All the orders, however, each year tossed coins into the *Lacus Curtius* for Augustus' health.³²³ The emperor is beloved not only by the people in their respective orders but by society as a whole and by individual citizens. When his house on the Palatine burned down, Suetonius relates, every segment of Roman society responded: veterans, judges, the tribes, and individual citizens from every class of people gave money to restore it, willingly and as they were able (*Aug.* 57.2). Augustus, Suetonius caps the anecdote, refused to take more than a single denarius from any one individual (*Aug.* 57.2); the emperor remains beneficent, even when he receives largesse. The power of Augustus, Suetonius has here indicated, rested upon a firm and broad foundation of support from all segments of society.

Gaius offers a sharp contrast. After discussing the behavior of the emperor toward his family, Suetonius reviews his treatment of the orders, beginning with the Senate (*Cal.* 26.1). He forces senators to run alongside his litter. He permits others to wait on him at dinner. He removes two consuls who forgot to give public notice of his birthday (*Cal.*

οὐδὲ αἱ ὑπουργαί αἱ ὑπὸ τῶν φοβουμένων τιμαὶ εἰσι. πῶς γὰρ ἂν φαίμεν ἢ τοὺς βίᾳ ἐξανισταμένους θάκων διὰ τὸ τιμᾶν τοὺς ἀδικοῦντας ἐξανίστασθαι, ἢ τοὺς ὁδῶν παραχωροῦντας τοῖς κρείττοσι διὰ τὸ τιμᾶν τοὺς ἀδικοῦντας παραχωρεῖν; καὶ δῶρά γε διδόασιν οἱ πολλοὶ τούτοις οὓς μισοῦσι, καὶ ταῦτα ὅταν μάλιστα φοβῶνται μὴ τι κακὸν ὑπ' αὐτῶν πάθωσιν.

³²² *Aug.* 57.2. Louis (2010) 395 observes that Suetonius prefers the spontaneous display of affection to the more formally expected, if not required, displays of the senate. For the probable source of this information, see Gascou (1984) 207-8.

³²³ *Aug.* 57.1: "omnes ordines." For the origins of the custom, see Varro *L.L.* 5.148-50. See also Louis (2010) 396 for a discussion of its origins and significance.

26.2-3).³²⁴ He treats the other orders with similar hubris and violence (“simili superbia uiolentiaque ceteros tractauit ordines,” *Cal.* 26.4). He deprives the people of shade at the games, as we saw above. He causes people famine by closing the granaries (“ac nonnumquam horreis praeclusis populo famem indixit,” *Cal.* 26.5).³²⁵ The emperor shows to his people, in the manner of a true tyrant, that he controls not only them and their entertainment, but their food, their sun, and ultimately their very lives.

Vespasian sought to restore the empire after the tumultuous reigns of Nero, Galba, Vitellius, and Otho by restoring the social orders (*Vesp.* 9.2).³²⁶ At that time, both the equestrian and senatorial orders were “et exhaustos caede uaria et contaminatos ueteri neglegentia,” reflecting the state of the empire itself; the emperor purges them and

³²⁴ As Hurley (1993) 108 observes, the first anecdote is recast elsewhere in the lives so as to serve as an example of Galba’s endurance (*Gal.* 6.3). In the *Galba*, the future emperor runs besides the litter of the emperor with his shield; here, the shield has disappeared and the new group of senators wears togas. The anecdote of the senators waiting on Gaius “appears to be a metaphor for the detested slave-master relationship and as such implicates Gaius as a *dominus* again” (108). The consuls, according to Dio (59.20.1), were removed not for forgetting the emperor’s birthday, but for celebrating it in a routine fashion; once again, Suetonius has made use of an account that serves his purposes.

³²⁵ Cf. Xen. *Hiero* 5.4: ἀλλὰ μὴν οὐδ’ ἂν εὐετηριῶν γενομένων ἀφθονία τῶν ἀγαθῶν γίγνηται, οὐδὲ τότε συγχαίρει ὁ τύραννος. ἐνδεεστέροις γὰρ οὔσι ταπεινότεροις αὐτοῖς οἴονται χρῆσθαι.

³²⁶ As Jones (1996) 72 observes, Domitian also purified the orders by removing certain members (*Dom.* 8.3). His means are, however, often more dramatic. The equestrian order had been reviewed by Augustus, Gaius, and Claudius; in each case, the review is treated as among the emperor’s positive actions. See *Cal.* 16.2; *Claud.* 16.1. For a historical review of Domitian’s and these other reviews of the knights and senators, see Jones (1996) 72-5.

supplies new members: “purgauit suppleuitque recenso senatu et equite, summotis indignissimis et honestissimo quoque Italicorum ac prouincialium allecto” (*Vesp.* 9.2).

Suetonius also offers an anecdote about how Vespasian settled a dispute between a senator and a knight by ruling that the two orders differed not in *libertas* but in *dignitas* (“utrumque ordinem non tam libertate inter se quam dignitate differre,” *Vesp.* 9.2):

senators ought not be verbally abused, he concluded, unless they are the initial aggressors, in which case it is fair to return the abuse in kind (*Vesp.* 9.2).³²⁷ The emperor can recognize differentiations in degrees of *dignitas* among his people. It is a telling detail, however, that the tyrant sees the orders of his society as equals in terms of their *libertas*.

Awards and Honors

A tyrant must select men to assist him in the administration of the state. Many will expect to receive honors from their ruler, either in recognition of their nobility and their virtue or to honor their performance of the duties of the office. Talented and powerful citizens pose a significant risk to the tyrant and the ways in which tyrants can either encourage or dissuade such men from rising against them were familiar topics for historians and philosophers. The tale of Candaules told by Herodotus provides an early

³²⁷ Murphy (1991) 3783 takes this anecdote as reflecting “a sort of leveling spirit and sympathy for the common man. That democratic spirit befitted an emperor with Vespasian’s undistinguished background. ... Vespasian disliked bickering and back-biting, but answering in kind is suitable for all citizens.” This discovering of a democratic spirit befitting an emperor seems to miss the point of the anecdote: Vespasian has resolved a dispute between a senator and a knight by reaffirming the relative dignity of the two orders while affirming their equality in *libertas*.

example of how a servant of a ruler may one day be given the chance, if not the choice, to replace that ruler. How a tyrant apportions offices and honors may, therefore, determine whether these citizens are more or less inclined to revolt.

The repressive tyrant will remove these outstanding citizens from his city.³²⁸ Herodotus and Aristotle both tell of how Periander advised Thrasybulus to maintain his tyranny by cutting off the tops of the taller stalks of grain.³²⁹ These more radical measures of excision are coupled with other moderate means, such as preventing the formation of cultural and social associations within which such men might grow confident and win followers.³³⁰ Livy imports this anecdote to Rome, having Tarquin send the same advice to his son Sextus in response to his request for advice on how to subdue, and maintain control over, the people of Gabii.³³¹

The more moderate tyrant should still be cautious in his dealings with men who could replace him. Xenophon and Aristotle advised the tyrant to honor these individuals, but in such a way that they will come to believe that they would not be more highly honored if the tyrant were removed from office and their fellow citizens left free to confer the honors (Xen., *Hiero* 9.3-4; Arist., *Pol.* 5.11, 1315^a4-6). The tyrant should always confer honors personally, so that the subjects know that he is the source of their rewards (Xen., *Hiero* 9.3; Arist., *Pol.* 5.11, 1315^a6-7). In order to avoid encouraging

³²⁸ See *Pol.*, 5.11, 1313a39-41: ἔστι δὲ τὰ τε πάλαι λεχθέντα πρὸς σωτηρίαν, ὡς οἶόν τε, τῆς τυραννίδος, τὸ τοὺς ὑπερέχοντας κολοῦν καὶ τοὺς φρονηματίας ἀναιρεῖν.

³²⁹ See Hdt. 5.92; Arist. *Pol.* 3.13, 1284^a26-30 and 5.10, 1311^a20-22.

³³⁰ Arist. *Pol.*, 5.11, 1313^a41-1313^b6.

³³¹ Livy 1.54.6. See also Ogilvie (1965) 205-6, who analyzes how stories and details were imported from the Greek tradition to add color to the story of the deposition of Tarquin.

resentment, finally, he should leave punishment to the magistrates and the courts (Xen., *Hiero* 9.3, Arist. *Pol.* 5.11, 1315^a7-8). The agreeable aspects of his reign should be attributable to the ruler; the disagreeable aspects should be left to others (Xen., *Hiero* 9.4). In appointing men to office, finally, the tyrant should take care not to confer too much power on any single individual (Arist. *Pol.* 5.11, 1315^a8-14):

κοινὴ δὲ φυλακὴ πάσης μοναρχίας τὸ μηθέναι ποιεῖν ἓνα μέγαν, ἀλλ' εἴπερ, πλείους (τηρήσουσι γὰρ ἀλλήλους), ἐὰν δ' ἄρα τινὰ δέη ποιῆσαι μέγαν, μὴ τοι τό γε ἦθος θρασύν (ἐπιθετικώτατον γὰρ τὸ τοιοῦτον ἦθος περὶ πάσας τὰς πράξεις), κἂν τῆς δυνάμεώς τινα δοκῇ παραλύειν, ἐκπροσαγωγῆς τοῦτο δρᾶν καὶ μὴ πᾶσαν ἀθρόαν ἀφαιρεῖσθαι τὴν ἐξουσίαν.

A common protection of every monarchy is to make no one man powerful, but when power must be conferred, then on many (for they will keep watch on each other), and if it proves necessary to make some individual powerful, let it not be a man with a bold character (for such a nature is quick to attack in every field of endeavor), and if he should decide to remove someone from power, do this gradually and do not take away his power all at once.

The tyrant should not allow power to become concentrated in hands other than his own; when it proves necessary to grant power to an individual, however, that individual should never be the sort of man who could use that power to launch an attack against the tyrant.

The first century of the principate was a period that did not lack for men with the power and the personality to be a cause for concern. The distribution of power among the various prefects and proconsuls through whom the emperor administered the empire created the risk that men would be tempted to seize power for themselves. On more than one occasion, the emperor would allow individual men of bold character to hold power that rivaled his own. In this section, we consider how Suetonius described the emperor's appointment of administrative officials, awarding of honors, and infliction of punishments.

In the apportioning of offices and honors, Augustus is the model of a good emperor. He devises new offices so that more men may take part in the government: “quoque plures partem administrandae rei p. caperent, nova officia excogitavit” (*Aug.* 37.1). Although the government had certainly grown and there was a need for an ever larger number of administrators, Suetonius nevertheless attributes the creation of these new offices solely to the emperor’s desire to permit more men to play a part in the government.³³² The reviving of the office of censor, and Augustus’ desire to take two colleagues in the consulate confirm that the emperor is concerned as much with the proper apportionment of honor as with the efficient administration of the empire. It is only the emperor’s *maiestas*, and not any practical or constitutional concern, that prevents the senators from granting this last request: “reclamantibus cunctis satis maiestatem eius imminui, quod honorem eum non solus sed cum altero gereret” (*Aug.* 37).

Suetonius makes clear that honor, not administrative efficiency, is Augustus’ concern by following this report of the creation of additional offices with a report of how generous he was in awarding triumphs: “Nec parcior in bellica virtute honoranda” (*Aug.* 38.1). The reader learns that Augustus awarded triumphs to thirty generals and triumphal regalia to a slightly larger number.³³³ He also took steps to ensure that the sons of

³³² See Carter (1982) 148-51, who attributes the increase in the number of offices in the imperial administration to an increase in the growth of the state and, quite simply, to a need for a greater number of administrators.

³³³ As we will see below in the discussion of the emperors and the army, Augustus was more willing to confer money rather than honor upon his soldiers and his generals, recognizing, perhaps, the greater role played by *dignitas* than *pecunia* in politics. See *Aug.* 25.3.

senators would be able to move quickly on the path of advancement in public office (*Aug.* 38.2). The emperor takes precisely those steps that the moderate tyrant traditionally took, steps that would have led both generals and senators to conclude that they would receive no greater honor from another government or another ruler than they are receiving under the government of Augustus. He does so, moreover, in ways that render power more diffuse – by increasing the number of offices, for example, and by appointing two, rather than one, senator's sons to command each division in a legion (*Aug.* 38.2) – rather than more concentrated.

The emperor is aided in administering the state not only by these officials and nobles, but also by his friends and intimates. For Suetonius, Augustus provides the model not only of how an emperor should apportion these honors and offices, but also of how the emperor should choose these friends and intimates. Suetonius' discussion of *amicitia* in the *Augustus* is the most extensive to be found in the *Caesares*. Suetonius reports that the emperor was slow to form friendships, but remained constant in the friendships he formed (*Aug.* 66.1):

Amicitias neque facile admisit et constantissime retinuit, non tantum uirtutes ac merita cuiusque digne prosecutus, sed uitia quoque et delicta, dum taxat modica, perpessus.

He did not form friendships easily, but was most constant in keeping those friendships he did form, not only worthily honoring the virtues and merits of each of them, but enduring their vices and their faults, provided they were moderate.

These friendships of Augustus are not the type of purely private camaraderie that is typical of a modern friendship; they are friendships between unequal partners.³³⁴ They are based on awards, honors, and the willingness of the more powerful party to overlook moderate vices and small sins of his friends; these are not sentimental friendships, but they are friendships.³³⁵

Suetonius offers two examples of how the emperor responds to friends who fall short of the ideal of *amicitia*. Two of the friends of Augustus, Salvidienus Rufus and Cornelius Gallus, fell into disgrace. Suetonius observes that both of these men had been low-born (*ex infima*), emphasizing the distance between the emperor and the friends who failed him. He had awarded both men high office, making Rufus a consul and Gallus the prefect of Egypt. The elevation of these two men to offices of power produced the risks of which Aristotle, Herodotus, and many others had warned. Just as the tyrant Dionysius had to condemn his friend and drinking partner Philoxenus to the quarries, so too Augustus cannot let personal friendship stand in the way of what he must do as emperor. He hands Rufus over to the senate for condemnation after he is discovered plotting a rebellion, while he banishes Gallus from the imperial palace and provinces “ob ingratum

³³⁴ Louis (2010) 436: “il englobe les amis politiques et les amis privés.” See also Mooney (1930) 485, who distinguishes between *amici* and *consilarii* in his discussion of the *amicitia* of Titus.

³³⁵ Titus follows Augustus’ practice of choosing his friends carefully. He selects men of such a high caliber that subsequent emperors continued to use them on account of their utility for themselves and the state: “Amicos elegit, quibus etiam post eum principes ut et sibi et rei p. necessariis adqueverunt praecipueque sunt usi” (*Tit.* 7.2). Titus, like Augustus, is a man who knows how to pick his friends and knows the criteria he should use when choosing them.

et maliuolum animum” (*Aug.* 66.2). Tyrants cannot enjoy friendships in the way that other men do. This is amply revealed by Augustus’ remark “quod sibi soli non liceret amicis, quatenus uellet, irasci” (*Aug.* 66.2). An emperor alone cannot forgive his friends.³³⁶ Suetonius does not hold that the emperors are incapable of having friends, therefore, but he does recognize that they must form their friendships with care and hold their friends close.

Many of Augustus’ successors, however, do not exercise such care in the selection of their friends. Suetonius’ negative appraisal of the bulk of the emperors’ friendships and friends is in line with the traditional understanding of the role of friendship in the life and reign of a tyrant. The record of the Persian kings and the Greek tyrants had taught the Greeks that friendship is something a despot simply cannot enjoy.³³⁷ Herodotus records how Deioces cut himself off from his boyhood friends so that they would come to believe that he was of another class of man from them (ἀλλ’ ἑτεροῖός σφι δοκέει εἶναι μὴ ὁρῶσι, *Hdt.*, 1.99.1). The tale of Intaphernes coming to visit Darius unannounced reveals another way in which friends who become tyrants no longer remain friends (*Hdt.* 3.118-19).³³⁸ Plato concludes that the tyrant can have no friends (*Pl. Rep.*

³³⁶ For the significance of Augustus’ statement, see Westcott and Rankin (1918) 332 (“The emperor’s anger needs be fatal, while men in private station could effect a reconciliation after quarrels with their friends.”); Louis (2010) 439.

³³⁷ *Xen., Hiero* 3.6: καὶ τούτου τοίνυν τοῦ κτήματος τοιούτου ὄντος μειονεκτοῦσιν οἱ τύραννοι πάντων μάλιστα. See also *Pl. Gorg.* 510b3; *Rep.* 575e-576a.

³³⁸ Aristotle concludes in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (8.8, 1158^b16-21) that friendship between those who are unequal, e.g., parents and their children, as well as rulers and their subjects, will be asymmetrical; this principle finds one practical application in the philosopher’s analysis of tyranny and monarchy in the *Politics*.

9.576a).³³⁹ The tyrant “has not a friend in the world; he is sometimes master, sometimes slave, but never knows true friendship or freedom.” Xenophon’s Hiero affirms that, while he had had friends when he was a private citizen, as a tyrant he enjoys only the company of slaves. He no longer experiences the warmth of genuine friendship. A drinking party

³³⁹ Keitel (2011) 443-4 argues that a “central theme” of Tacitus’ portrait of Vitellius as a tyrant is “his inability to tell friend from foe.” She maintains that Plato concludes that the tyrant’s distorted sense of perception renders him unable to make a distinction between friend and foe and that Cicero follows him in this conclusion. Plato’s conclusion is, in fact, more sweeping: the tyrant cannot have friends. See Pl. *Rep.* 576a: ἐν παντὶ ἄρα τῷ βίῳ ζῶσι φίλοι μὲν οὐδέποτε οὐδενί, ἀεὶ δέ του δεσπόζοντες ἢ δουλεύοντες ἄλλῳ, ἐλευθερίας δὲ καὶ φιλίας ἀληθοῦς τυραννικὴ φύσις ἀεὶ ἄγευστος. Plato affirms that the tyrant never experiences friendship. Cicero makes much the same point in the *de Amicitia* (52-3): “Nam quis est, pro deorum fidem atque hominum! qui velit, ut neque diligat quemquam nec ipse ab ullo diligatur, circumfluere omnibus copiis atque in omnium rerum abundantia vivere? Haec enim est tyrannorum vita nimirum, in qua nulla fides, nulla caritas, nulla stabilis benevolentiae potest esse fiducia, omnia semper suspecta atque sollicita, nullus locus amicitiae. Quis enim aut eum diligat quem metuat, aut eum a quo se metui putet?” It is not so much that the tyrant cannot recognize his true friends – the tyrant has no friends – but that the tyrant cannot tell when someone is flattering him and seeking to take advantage of him. It is this fact that renders him susceptible to being deceived by flatterers and men pretending to be true friends. See, e.g., Cic. *de Amic.* 53: “Coluntur tamen simulatione dumtaxat ad tempus. Quod si forte, ut fit plerumque, ceciderunt, tum intellegitur quam fuerint inopes amicorum. Quod Tarquinius dixisse ferunt, tum exsulantem se intellexisse quos fidos amicos habuisset, quos infidos, cum iam neutris gratiam referre posset.” It is this tradition of which Suetonius is a part. The innate inability to distinguish true friends from false that Tacitus attributes to Vitellius is a different matter.

now presents him with nothing more than an opportunity to be ambushed.³⁴⁰ Cicero tells the tale of how Dionysius was moved by the loyalty of the two Pythagorean friends in order to illustrate the tyrant's desire for friendship: "quam huic erat miserum carere consuetudine amicorum, societate victus, sermone omnino familiari" (Cic. *Tusc. Disp.* 5.22.63). The rhetorical tyrant had, by the time of Suetonius, therefore, become a man with no genuine friends who surrounds himself with the vicious, the low, and the vulgar; the tyrant does not have friends, but henchmen.³⁴¹

Aelius Sejanus receives substantial treatment in the *Tiberius*. Just as Suetonius in the *Augustus* takes the first available opportunity to set forth the model for how an emperor should govern through his friends, so too in the *Tiberius* he makes full use of the opportunity with which Sejanus presented him to paint a portrait of the typical friend of a tyrant. Tiberius is reported to have at first drawn aides and administrators from amongst his friends and acquaintances and, when the need proved still greater, from among the leading men of the city; on the whole, these men often did not outlive their emperor (*Tib.* 55):

Super veteres amicos ac familiares viginti sibi e numero principum civitatis depoposcerat velut consiliarios in negotiis publicis. Horum omnium vix duos anne tres incolumis praestitit, ceteros alium alia de causa

³⁴⁰ Xen., *Hiero* 6.3: νῦν δὲ ἀπεστέρημαι μὲν τῶν ἡδομένων ἐμοὶ διὰ τὸ δούλους ἀντὶ φίλων ἔχειν τοὺς ἐταίρους, ἀπεστέρημαι δ' αὖ τοῦ ἡδέως ἐκείνοις ὁμιλεῖν διὰ τὸ μηδεμίαν ἐνορᾶν εὖνοιαν ἐμοὶ παρ' αὐτῶν: μέθην δὲ καὶ ὕπνον ὁμοίως ἐνέδρα φυλάττομαι.

³⁴¹ For the tyrant's tendency to eliminate good men and to surround himself with wicked men, see Pl. *Rep.* 567b-c; Xen. *Hiero* 5.2; Arist. *Pol.* 5.11, 1314^a4-5; Walker 214, 242 n.1; and Woodman and Martin (1996) 121 (observing that "it is typical of a tyrant to eliminate good men and to be surrounded by those like himself").

perculit, inter quos cum plurimorum clade Aelium Seianum; quem ad summam potentiam non tam benivolentia provexerat quam ut esset cuius ministerio ac fraudibus liberos Germanici circumveniret, nepotemque suum ex Druso filio naturalem ad successionem imperii confirmaret.

Besides his old friends and acquaintances, he sought out twenty of the best men in the state to act as his counselors in public business. Of all of these, hardly two or three survived unharmed, the others he destroyed for one reason or another, amongst whom, and taking many down with him in his fall, was Aelius Sejanus; Tiberius had raised him to the heights of power not so much from benevolence, as because by his aid and his devices he might entrap the children of Germanicus, and confirm the succession to the principate of his adopted grandson, the natural son of Drusus.

Sejanus is the only figure who is named among these friends and aides of the emperor.

Suetonius explains that Tiberius took him for a friend for all of the wrong reasons.

Tiberius raised Sejanus to the heights of power without regard for his benevolence, but because he was devious and would be able to aid the emperor in setting traps for the children of Germanicus. Augustus had considered the *virtutes ac merita* of those he elevated and rewarded; Tiberius elevates a man whose vices might further his cause for the moment.

Suetonius casts Sejanus in the role of a procurator in the service of the imperial vices. His office is not to help rule the empire, but to help satisfy the appetites of the emperor. At one point, Suetonius seems to correct the view that Sejanus was a *concitator vitii*, who stirred up the passions of anotherwise mild ruler. Suetonius affirms that Sejanus only supplied opportunities to satisfy the innate cruelty and lust of the emperor.³⁴² This auxiliary role is confirmed, Suetonius contends, by the fact that Tiberius gave full vent to his cruelty following the execution of his *sumministrator*. Sejanus had

³⁴² *Tib.* 61.1: “non tam ipsum ab Seiano concitari solitum, quam Seianum quaerenti occasiones sumministrasse.”

neither restrained nor incited the beast, but had kept his appetites in check by keeping them satisfied.

Tiberius removes Sejanus from office in the manner in which tyrants traditionally remove upstart nobles and former friends from positions of influence: slowly and under the pretext of conferring additional honors upon them. Tiberius first makes Sejanus his colleague in the consulship; he does so, however, in order to remove Sejanus from his presence.³⁴³ Sejanus is being promoted out of power. Then, just before denouncing him to the senate, Tiberius puts Sejanus at ease by giving him a hope of marrying into the imperial family and of receiving the tribunician power: “deinde spe affinitatis ac tribuniciae potestatis deceptum inopinantem criminatus est” (*Tib.* 65.1). Suetonius has crafted a portrait in which Tiberius removes Sejanus from power only incrementally and slowly, putting him more and more at ease until the hammer falls. The depiction reflects the traditional to the tyrant to remove men from power little by little.³⁴⁴ That he fosters the hopes of greater honors in power in the man he is about to destroy, finally, places the emperor and Sejanus in the same tradition of tyrannical punishments with the likes of Astyages and Harpagus. Tiberius does not know how to select his friends. He does not know how to confer offices wisely. He is not a wise monarch like Augustus. He does, however, know how to remove powerful threats from office and maintain his hold on power. He is, in short, a tyrant.

³⁴³ *Tib.* 65.1: “ut a se per speciem honoris dimitteret, collegam sibi assumpsit in quinto consulatu.”

³⁴⁴ Arist. *Pol.*, 5.11, 1315^a12-14: κἂν τῆς δυνάμεώς τινα δοκῇ παραλύειν, ἐκ προσαγωγῆς τοῦτο δρᾶν καὶ μὴ πᾶσαν ἀθρόαν ἀφαιρεῖσθαι τὴν ἐξουσίαν.

Tiberius was able to avoid being ruled by his henchman. Not all emperors succeeded in maintaining their independence. An emperor errs when he puts in power not only those who will seek the supreme office for themselves, but also those who will exercise power in the name of the emperor not for the good of the empire, but for their own private benefit. This was the error of Claudius. Suetonius faults Claudius for making himself the servant, rather than the master, of his courtiers.³⁴⁵ Claudius does not use his friends and freedman to administer the state in the public interest, but is rather used by these individuals to direct the rewards of the empire into the service of private interests.

Nero, acting in character, awards friendships based not on a careful consideration of the virtues and merits of men, but on whether they had applauded him generously or sparingly after his performances.³⁴⁶ Nero does not know how to select his friends; he will die almost entirely alone. The lesson Nero learned from his henchmen Tigellinus and Halotus is the same lesson that Suetonius' reader learned from Sejanus and is, therefore, not repeated. These two characters are mentioned only in the *Galba*.

Galba presents another study in how an emperor can be captured by his henchmen. Galba begins his reign by offering protection to his predecessor's henchmen. In response to the demands of the Roman people that these *emissarii* be punished for their crimes, he makes Halotus a procurator and reprimands the people for their cruelty toward Tigellinus (*Galba* 15.2). His leniency toward these Neronian henchmen is of a

³⁴⁵ *Claud.* 29.1: "his, ut dixi, uxoribusque addictus, non principem, sed ministrum egit, compendio cuiusque horum vel etiam studio aut libidine honores exercitus impunitates supplicia largitus est, et quidem insciens plerumque et ignarus."

³⁴⁶ *Nero* 25: "multisque vel amicitiam suam optulerit vel simultatem indixerit, prout quisque se magis parciusve laudasset."

piece with his own dependence on his three *paedagogi*: Titus Vinus, Cornelius Laco, and the freedman Icelus (*Galba* 14.2). Galba so entrusted himself and the conduct of his reign to these men, Suetonius reports, that his behavior began to seem erratic. He was at one moment too harsh and mean, at another moment too lax and negligent, both for a man of his age and for one who had been elected to the principate (“modo acerbior parciorque, modo remissior ac neglegentior quam conueniret principi electo atque illud aetatis,” *Galba* 14.2). Galba, like Claudius, has effectively abdicated his reign; the character of his rule comes to reflect the character of those who should be serving him, but who are instead serving themselves through the offices the emperor has conferred on them. This abdication of authority to the intimates and inner circle of the tyrant is one traditional path to the tyrant’s demise.

In addition to awarding honors and offices to friends and nobles, each emperor must arrange for the meting out of punishments. As we saw above in our discussion of imperial cruelty, these punishments can be severe. The tyrant had traditionally been advised, however, to leave the handing down of sentences to the courts and to his administrators. By so doing, he can avoid incurring the resentment of the people himself. Augustus, once again the model of proper imperial behavior, left the punishing of Rufus to the senate. Titus learns from his mistakes. He had, before coming to power, murdered A. Caecina — after he had, in good tyrannical fashion, put him at ease by entertaining him at dinner — because Caecina had been discovered plotting against the future emperor. This action ensured Titus’ own security, but immediately made him an object of hatred: “Quibus rebus sicut in posterum securitati satis cavit, ita ad praesens plurimum contraxit invidiae” (*Tit.* 6.2). Titus does not repeat his mistake. When he becomes

emperor, and begins to serve as Pontifex Maximus, he announces that he would from now on keep his hands undefiled by blood. He was involved in the death of no man thereafter, either as the author or the accomplice: “nec auctorem posthac cuiusquam necis nec conscius” (*Tit.* 9.1).

The bad emperors take matters into their own hands. Claudius personally devises new forms of punishment (*Claud.* 23.2). Tiberius punishes a soldier for stealing a peacock (*Tib.* 60.1). The punishments that Tiberius had decreed were carried out, in the absence of Gaius, even after his death. The enduring cruelty of the tyrant, even after his death, only added to the hatred the people felt toward him: “Crevit igitur invidia, quasi etiam post mortem tyranni saevitia permanente” (*Tib.* 75.3). Tiberius is a cruel tyrant. The punishments he inflicted left no doubt of that for Suetonius.

The Emperor and The Army

No Greek tyrant had to interact with a professional and permanent institution comparable to the Roman army. The citizens of the Greek city provided it with an army when and as needed. The tyrant naturally had an aversion to arming and training his subjects to bear arms. He tended to rely, in matters of war as in matters of friendship, on foreigners and former-slaves. He trained this foreign militia, rather than the citizens of his city, to fight his wars.

This mercenary militia also forms the personal bodyguard that the tyrant uses to acquire and hold on to power over the city.³⁴⁷ For the Greek tyrant, the obtaining of a

³⁴⁷ See Xen. *Hiero* 5.3-4: “ἡ δὲ τυραννὶς ἀναγκάζει καὶ ταῖς ἑαυτῶν πατρίσιν ἐνοχλεῖν. οὔτε γὰρ ἀλκίμους οὔτ’ εὐόπλους χαίρουσι τοὺς πολίτας παρασκευάζοντες, ἀλλὰ τοὺς ξένους δεινότερους τῶν πολιτῶν ποιοῦντες ἡδονταὶ μᾶλλον καὶ τούτοις χρῶνται δορυφόροις”. See also Pl. *Rep.* 566b: “τὸ δὴ τυραννικὸν αἶτημα τὸ πολυθρόνητον ἐπὶ

bodyguard was the traditional first step on the path to power. The traditional account of Peisistratus' rise begins with his pretending to have been wounded by his political enemies in order to obtain a bodyguard. For Aristotle, a request for a bodyguard can create a rhetorical presumption that a man is seeking to make himself a tyrant; because Peisistratus and Theagenes of Megara had asked for bodyguards and then made themselves tyrants, it would be reasonable to presume that Dionysius would be seeking to make himself a tyrant were he to request a bodyguard. The presumption that a tyrant would have a bodyguard was so strong, in fact, that Aristotle deemed it to be worth mentioning that Cypselus of Corinth had not had a bodyguard.³⁴⁸

There developed early on a convention that a tyrant should be a man of martial virtue. Aristotle indeed advised the tyrant to cultivate such a reputation. The concern is not, however, with the tyrant's actual ability to wage wars, but with the perceptions of his people: the tyrant should appear worthy of respect (σεμνόν) and should seek to arouse

τούτω πάντες οἱ εἰς τοῦτο προβεβηκότες ἐξευρίσκουσιν, αἰτεῖν τὸν δῆμον φύλακάς τινας τοῦ σώματος, ἵνα σῶς αὐτοῖς ᾖ ὁ τοῦ δήμου βοηθός"; *Rep.* 567e (tyrant enlists foreigners and freed slaves in his bodyguard). See also *Hdt.* 1.59.5 (Peisistratus requests bodyguard); *Hdt.* 1.98.2 (Deioces persuades Persians to grant him a guard); *Arist. Pol.* 5.12, 1513^b27-9 (Cypselus chooses to forgo bodyguard); Pelling (2011) 429.

³⁴⁸ For the bodyguard of Peisistratus, see *Hdt.* 1.59. For the request for bodyguard as a powerful piece of evidence in an inductive argument establishing that a man is seeking to make himself a tyrant, see *Arist. Rh.* 1.2.19, 1357^b31-35: οἷον ὅτι ἐπεβούλευε τυραννίδι Διονύσιος αἰτῶν τὴν φυλακὴν: καὶ γὰρ Πεισίστρατος πρότερον ἐπιβουλεύων ἦτι φυλακὴν καὶ λαβὼν ἐτυράννησε, καὶ Θεαγένης ἐν Μεγάροις: καὶ ἄλλοι ὅσους ἴσασι, παράδειγμα πάντες γίνονται τοῦ Διονυσίου, ὃν οὐκ ἴσασιν πῶ εἰ διὰ τοῦτο αἰτεῖ. For Cypselus and his forgoing a bodyguard, see *Arist. Pol.* 5.10, 1315^b27-28: ὁ μὲν γὰρ Κύψελος δημαγωγὸς ἦν καὶ κατὰ τὴν ἀρχὴν διετέλεσεν ἀδορυφόρητος.

reverence rather than fear.³⁴⁹ Indeed, it is specifically in order to avoid appearing contemptible, Aristotle concludes, that the tyrant must pay attention to military virtue above all other virtues.³⁵⁰

The military successes and failures of tyrants do not bulk large in the historiographical accounts and philosophical analyses of tyranny. The outcome of a war is rarely a cause for a change in the ruling regime.³⁵¹ The main role of war under a tyranny is more Orwellian; military conflict creates a need for a leader. War makes the tyrant needed, even if not wanted.³⁵² For the tyrant, therefore, it is more important that wars be fought than that they be won.

The tyrant himself is often described, therefore, as a man who uses military force to come to power, and then must continue to use force and fight wars in order to maintain his hold on that power.³⁵³ Zeus must first defeat the Titans, for example, in order to

³⁴⁹ *Pol.* 5.11, 1314b18-21: “καὶ φαίνεσθαι μὴ χαλεπὸν ἀλλὰ σεμνόν, ἔτι δὲ τοιοῦτον ὥστε μὴ φοβεῖσθαι τοὺς ἐντυγχάνοντας ἀλλὰ μᾶλλον αἰδεῖσθαι.”

³⁵⁰ *Pol.*, 5.11, 1314b21-23: “διὸ δεῖ καὶ μὴ τῶν ἄλλων ἀρετῶν ἐπιμέλειαν ποιῆται ἀλλὰ τῆς πολεμικῆς, καὶ δόξαν ἐμποιεῖν περὶ αὐτοῦ τοιαύτην.”

³⁵¹ This is not to say that the outcome of a war is of no consequence for the tyrant. If the polity is conquered, or its soldiers defeated on the battlefield, the tyrant may be forcibly removed by that outside power. The reign of the Peisistratids was brought to its end not by assassins, after all, but by the spears of the Spartans.

³⁵² *Pl. Rep.* 566e: “ὅταν δέ γε οἶμαι πρὸς τοὺς ἔξω ἐχθροὺς τοῖς μὲν καταλλαγῇ, τοὺς δὲ καὶ διαφθείρῃ, καὶ ἡσυχία ἐκείνων γένηται, πρῶτον μὲν πολέμους τινὰς ἀεὶ κινεῖ, ἵν’ ἐν χρειᾷ ἡγεμόνος ὁ δῆμος ᾗ.”

³⁵³ Hirtius and Pansa reportedly advised Caesar “ut principatum armis quaesitum armis teneret.” Vell. Pat. 2.57.1. For comparable examples of this idea and phraseology, see

establish his dominance; he must then use might and force to lord it over his opponents.

A tyrant should be a man of military virtue, in order to maintain the respect of his people, and arouse their fear as well. Peisistratus was depicted as a military man who had distinguished himself in the battle of Nicaea during the war with Megara. Orthagoras and Cleisthenes of Sicyon were said to have been men of military virtue.³⁵⁴

At Rome, Tarquin is reported to have waged war almost perpetually while he held power; he then led her enemies against Rome as he sought to restore himself to power by force. Sulla and Marius, two Republican-era figures often associated with tyranny, were

Woodman (1983) 111. Warfare and military might serve to preserve the tyrant in office in two ways. First, the tyrant can use force to suppress, intimidate, and control his own people. This, in addition to protecting the despot, is the role of the tyrant's bodyguard. It is the nature of the advice here given to Caesar by Hirtius and Pansa. Cf. Plut. *Caes.* 57.7, where, while Hirtius and Pansa are not named, the *arma* of which they spoke are identified specifically as those of a bodyguard. Caesar dismissed his guard, in all probability, to avoid the appearance and the charge of being a tyrant (Pelling [2011] 429). Second, the tyrant can keep his kingdom in a state of perpetual war, in order to create a need for a strong leader capable of leading the army in war and preserving the safety of the people and the realm. This reflects Plato's observation on the role of war under a tyranny. Pl. *Rep.* 566e.

³⁵⁴ For the portrait of Zeus as a tyrant in Hesiod and Aeschylus, see Giorgini (1993) 70-1, 166-8. For Peisistratus as a military figure, see Hdt. 59; [Aristotle] *Ath. Pol.* 14. An anonymous "History of Tyranny" (FGrH 105 F2), reports that Orthagoras first distinguished himself as a border guard, and later rose to become *πολέμαρχος*. Aristotle also describes Cleisthenes, the son of Orthagoras, as *πολεμικὸς* and attributes the longevity of the Cypselides in part to this fact. See Arist. *Pol.* 5.10, 1315^b15. He also describes Periander as *πολεμικὸς*. See Arist. *Pol.* 5.10, 1315^b29. See also Andrewes (1963) 36, for the view that the rise of the tyrants was precipitated by the rise of hoplite warfare.

military men. Sallust affirms that the bodyguard that surrounded Catiline was composed of criminals and reprobates, the sort of men from whom the tyrant had traditionally drawn his band of followers.³⁵⁵ That Julius Caesar, the imperator, first came to acquire the principate at Rome, would have made the tyrant's traditional association with military virtue, warfare, and armed bodyguards a natural point of comparison between the emperor and the tyrant. One area in which the emperors would be amenable to being portrayed as tyrants, therefore, would be their relationship with, and use of, the imperial bodyguard and the Roman army.

Suetonius is highly selective when it comes to his treatment of military affairs in the *Caesares*. He often makes little more than a passing reference to the major battles and campaigns of an emperor's reign, focusing instead on administrative minutiae and camp discipline.³⁵⁶ These preferences have been offered as evidence both of his biographical

³⁵⁵ Sall. *Cat.* 14.1-3: "In tanta tamque corrupta civitate Catilina, id quod factu facillimum erat, omnium flagitiorum atque facinorum circum se tamquam stipatorum catervas habebat. Nam quicumque impudicus, ganeo, aleator, manu, ventre, pene bona patria laceraverat, quique alienum aes grande conflaverat, quo flagitium aut facinus redimeret, praeterea omnes undique parricidae, sacrilegi, convicti iudiciis aut pro factis iudicium timentes, ad hoc quos manus atque lingua periurio aut sanguine civili alebat, postremo omnes quos flagitium, egestas, conscius animus exagitabat, ei Catilinae proximi familiaresque erant."

³⁵⁶ Wallace-Hadrill (1983) 129 observes that "military practice is a sphere where, as we have seen, the distance of the *Caesares* from historiography is at its most marked. The author will give little more than the most summary list of campaigns of the reign; and even here the focus is on expeditions in which the emperor participated in person." Suetonius only rarely comments on whether the military campaigns of the emperors were warranted. See Campbell (1984) 396: "Suetonius, or his source, apparently represents a

focus and his antiquarianism. Battles would naturally be of interest to an imperial biographer only when the emperor himself is in command and these are the battles in which Suetonius takes an interest. Military customs, rules, and regulations would be of interest to the antiquarian scholar, and Suetonius provides much information of this sort in the *Caesares*.³⁵⁷

The specific ways in which Suetonius analyzes military virtue and the conduct of military affairs under the Caesars is, however, consistent with the traditional literary depictions of tyrants and their use of an armed bodyguard, conflict and warfare, as well as their own military virtue to maintain and protect their power. The bodyguard, military career, and military skill of the tyrant play a more significant role in the rise of a tyrant than they do in the reigns of his successors. That Julius Caesar was the first emperor, therefore, made the task of depicting the emperors as tyrants all the easier.

Caesar is described as a man of martial virtue. Suetonius emphasizes the character of the man more than the success of his ventures. The beginning of the discussion of his military career sets the tone for the military rubrics that follow in the *Julius*; Caesar is dynamic and capable (*Jul.* 57):

view that depreciated further expansion of the empire and unnecessary campaigns of imperial glory; while the empire should be preserved from insult, there was much to be said for moderation and even retrenchment.”

³⁵⁷ Wallace-Hadrill (1983) 129-30 offers Suetonius’ treatment of matters military as evidence of his antiquarian predilections: “So it comes about that no more than a passing allusion is made to the Armenian wars of Corbulo that bulk so large in Tacitus’ narrative of the reign of Nero (39.1). But when he comes to the antiquarian question of military practice, especially of discipline, Suetonius shows a characteristic sign of interest – precision of detail” (129).

Armorum et equitandi peritissimus, laboris ultra fidem patiens erat. In agmine nonnumquam equo, saepius pedibus anteibat, capite detecto, seu sol seu imber esset; longissimas vias incredibili celeritate confecit, expeditus, meritoria raeda, centena passuum milia in singulos dies; si flumina morarentur, nando traiciens vel innixus inflatis utribus, ut persaepe nuntios de se praeveniret.

He was highly skilled in arms and horsemanship, and had an incredible power to endure work. On the march he led his men sometimes on horse, but more often on foot, with his head uncovered to both the sun and the rain; he completed long marches with incredible speed, traveling without baggage in a hired carriage and making a hundred miles a day; if rivers delayed him, crossing them by swimming or supported on inflated skins, he often arrived before messengers he had sent on ahead.

Suetonius has created a portrait of Caesar that is reminiscent of Sallust's sketch of Catiline. From these balanced pairings of traits – arms and horsemanship, skill and endurance, on horse and on foot, in sun and in rain, on land and in the water – Caesar emerges as the versatile and dynamic leader, who commands from the front rank (*anteibat*) under all conditions and in all respects. Caesar arrives before even the news of his approach.³⁵⁸

In thirteen chapters, Suetonius then breaks down the martial character and military career of Caesar into their component parts. His campaigns and their battles are presented as evidence of his virtues and strengths as a leader. His style of command is reported to have been both cautious and daring (*Jul.* 58). Religious scruples give him no reason to abandon or even delay a campaign (*Jul.* 59). At times, he fights after planning out his movements with care; at other times, he takes advantage of whatever opportunities suddenly present themselves (*Jul.* 60). Suetonius records that Caesar's horse had feet like a human's, a trait that it shared with the horse of Alexander the Great.

³⁵⁸ For the ways in which ancient authors would emphasize the *celeritas bellandi* of an individual, see Woodman (1977) 269.

Caesar is shown rallying his troops from the front in a way that recalls the stories of Alexander's deportment on the battlefield. The focus throughout is on Caesar's military virtues and how these virtues render him a man worthy of being followed.

The power of these virtues for Suetonius lies ultimately in their ability to inspire loyalty among the soldiers. This is confirmed by the placement at the end of the description of Caesar's military exploits of two chapters detailing incidents of mutiny in the army.³⁵⁹ During the Gallic Wars, no legion ever mutinied. Some did mutiny during the civil wars, but these men returned to duty "nec tam indulgentia ducis quam auctoritate" (*Jul.* 69). Caesar called the soldiers back to obedience by standing firm in the face of their revolt, confronting his men directly ("non enim cessit umquam tumultuantibus atque etiam obviam semper iit," *Jul.* 69). Caesar here establishes the model of how a *princeps* should relate to, indeed should command, his soldiers.

Caesar provides the model against which the other emperors and their relationships with the army are measured. Confronted by a rebellion of the legions in Gaul, for example, Nero will present not the unyielding figure able to call his troops back to obedience by means of his *auctoritas*, but a pathetic figure of the theatre. Nero planned to appear before his troops, just as Caesar had done, but to win them with tears: "simul ac primum provinciam attigisset, inermem se in conspectum exercituum proditurum nec quicquam aliud quam fleturum" (*Nero* 43.2). Nero will appear *inermem*. He will appear in tears. Even the verb *prodo*, with its overtones of betrayal and surrender, suggest that Nero is utterly lacking in the military virtues. Nero's consistent and continuous exhibition

³⁵⁹ The description of Augustus' military exploits is likewise interrupted by a discussion of the outbreaks and the attempts at revolution that is found at chapter 19.

of traits and behavior – his “campaign” against the artists of Greece and subsequent triumph at Rome spring readily to mind – that are a parody of those that are proper to the Roman *imperator* and the πολεμικὸς τύρρανος in the Greek tradition, here culminates in a parody of Caesar’s recalling his mutinous legions back to obedience. Nero substitutes the tears of a woman for the stern countenance of a general. The lack of proper military virtue renders the emperor contemptible and ultimately subject to being overthrown.

That war creates a need for a strong leader and, by extension, for the tyrant was reflected in the Roman institution of the dictatorship. Suetonius reports the rumor that Julius intended to offer military need as a pretext for assuming the power of a tyrant. Lucius Cotta had spread the rumor at Rome that Caesar was planning to assume monarchical power because of a prophecy in the Sibylline books that only a king could defeat the Parthians (*Jul.* 79.9). He intended to make himself a tyrant because the state needed a tyrant.³⁶⁰ As the Greeks had long recognized in their literature and philosophy, war creates a need for a tyrant.³⁶¹ For Suetonius, the seemingly perpetual war that Rome

³⁶⁰ For the background Roman understandings and beliefs about kingship and tyranny against which Caesar made his great refusal of (and, perhaps, had developed a desire for) kingship, see Rawson (1975) 148-59. Given the degree to which Caesar would have acquired the odium of the people, without acquiring either more absolute power or more spectacular ceremony, and the belief of best-informed contemporaries that he did not in fact desire kingship, it seems that kingship was best turned down, regardless of whatever temptation it exercised (158-9).

³⁶¹ As the pairing of this rumor with the report that Caesar had intended to relocate the capital to Alexandria or Ilium, the cities of Alexander and Priam, suggests the scope and nature of his ambition: Caesar will make himself tyrant in the Eastern and Greek traditions.

waged with Parthia made this a textbook case of a man using military necessity as a pretext for seizing absolute power.

The account of Augustus' military exploits likewise serves more to establish the virtue of the emperor than to provide a historical record of his battles and campaigns or to catalogue his successes and failures on the battlefield. Suetonius begins by observing that, while Antony had frequently attacked Augustus for failing to exhibit military virtue, Augustus was in fact a worthy successor to Caesar. Antony accused the young *princeps* of having fled the battlefield at Forum Gallorum; Suetonius counters by describing his performance at Mutina (*Aug.* 10.4):

Priore Antonius fugisse eum scribit ac sine paludamento equoque post biduum demum apparuisse, sequenti satis constat non modo ducis, sed etiam militis functum munere atque in media dimicatione, aquilifero legionis suae graviter saucio, aquilam umeris subisse diuque portasse.

At the first battle, Antony wrote that Octavian had fled and had reappeared after two days without his military cloak and his horse; in the subsequent battle, it is generally agreed that he played the part not only of a leader, but even of a soldier, and in the middle of melee, when the eagle-bearer of his legion had been gravely wounded, he took the eagle on his shoulders and carried it for a long time.

Augustus, like Julius, is a good soldier and a good leader, who possesses the full range of military virtues.

Suetonius follows this account of the civil wars with a review of Augustus' conduct of foreign wars that he waged by himself (*per se gessit*, *Aug.* 20) both in his youth, in Dalmatia, and with the Cantabrians after the defeat of Antony. Again, it is not his conduct of the campaign but his personal role as a soldier that is of interest to Suetonius; indeed, he does not even report the outcome of these expeditions. He reports only that Augustus was wounded twice in Dalmatia (*Aug.* 20). The operations of the army

are likewise of relevance only to the extent that they reflect on the generalship of the *princeps*.³⁶² Augustus' motives for fighting and the prudential judgments that he makes regarding whether and when to extend the borders of the empire are also recorded. The emperor does not fight in order to extend the empire, Suetonius explains, nor did he fight to increase either his "imperium vel bellicam gloriam" (*Aug.* 21.2). The two defeats that the legions suffered under Lollius and Varus are recorded, but Suetonius' interest is in how the emperor was personally affected by these defeats – Augustus refused to cut his beard and his hair following Varus' defeat and would bang his head against the door, crying out "Quintili Vare, legiones redde!" (*Aug.* 23.2) – more than in whether and in how they were of consequence for the empire. The end result of Augustus' conduct of military affairs, however, was that he acquired a reputation for virtue and moderation ("virtutis moderationisque fama," *Aug.* 21.3). This *fama* leads the Parthians not only to surrender the standards lost by Crassus, but also to yield Armenia and submit competing claims to their own throne to Augustus for arbitration (*Aug.* 21.3). The military virtue of Augustus leads a tyrannical/monarchical regime to submit claims to the supreme office in their land to the monarch at Rome.

Gaius and, as we have already seen, Nero are two emperors who performed the functions of a commander and of a soldier in only a burlesque fashion. Gaius conducts a military campaign in person. He begins on a sudden impulse and advances *festinanter et rapide* (*Cal.* 43). He lacks the mix of deliberation and speed of Julius. He is severe in his

³⁶² *Aug* 20: "Reliqua per legatos administravit, ut tamen quibusdam Pannonicis atque Germanicis aut interveniret aut non longe abesset, Ravennam vel Mediolanum vel Aquileiam usque ab urbe progrediens."

treatment of the legions (*Cal.* 44), at one point planning to slaughter the legions that had besieged his father Germanicus when Gaius was still a young man (*Cal.* 48). He not only lacks Julius' rapport with the troops, but also inflicts the type of excessive and sweeping punishments characteristic of the tyrant. His actual battles are farcical. There is a staged fight with a group of released captives (*Cal.* 45.1) and a pretend pursuit of hostages taken from a local school (*Cal.* 45.2). The emperor is immoderate even in the performance of these farcical expeditions ("in hoc quoque mimo praeter modum intemperans," *Cal.* 45.2). At the climax of his campaign, he arrays his legions on the beach and launches an attack against the waters of Ocean, and orders his men to collect seashells, the *spolia Oceani* (*Cal.* 46). Xerxes had his men castigate the Bosphorus for impeding his march into Europe. Gaius takes his place among the tyrants and order his soldiers to fight the sea itself.

While Gaius conducted a military campaign against a series of faux enemies, Nero goes a step further and conducts a faux campaign against faux enemies. On his campaign through Greece, Nero engages with and defeats the artists and performers of Greece. He returns triumphant to Rome, where he rides in the chariot that Augustus had used; the crowns that he won in Greece are led in procession before him, each with an inscription recording where and against whom Nero had won it, and announcing the songs that he had sung and the plays in which he had acted in pursuit of his victory (*Nero* 25).

The reports that Nero planned to dig a canal across the Isthmus of Corinth and that he planned to lead an expedition to the Caspian Gates, accompanied by a legion of Italian recruits, all six feet tall, "quam Magni Alexandri phalanga appellabat" (*Nero* 19.3)

adds an unmistakable tyrannical overtone to his Greek campaign. The emperor's intention to dig a canal at the isthmus associates him not only with Xerxes, who dug a canal across Athos during his Greek campaign, but also with the Corinthian tyrant Periander, who was associated with the construction of the *diolkos*, the path that was used to transport ships across the Isthmus.³⁶³ Nero's plan to lead an expedition to the Caspian Gates with his phalanx of Alexander the Great creates an explicit comparison between Nero and Alexander. Suetonius has again suggested by means of these allusions to eastern and western tyrants that Nero has associated himself with these tyrants. Nero may be setting himself up as a tyrant, but he is one who nevertheless possesses only faux artistic virtues, not the real military virtues of a Xerxes, an Alexander, or a Julius. As we will see in the next chapter, his armies of artists will prove no match for the soldiers of the legions; his display of artistic virtue will inspire no loyalty in his men, but only their contempt.

The emperors not only win a reputation for virtue by their conduct of campaigns and their personal bravery exhibited on the battlefield, but also demonstrate their political acumen in their administration of the army. The Greek world of the *polis* had no institution comparable to the Roman army; its political philosophers and historians had no need or even opportunity to consider the proper place of a large standing army within the state or to define the proper political relationship between a ruler and such an army.

³⁶³ Diogenes Laertius (1.99) reports that Periander also planned his own canal across the Isthmus.

Aristotle had recognized that a military leader could rival a tyrant.³⁶⁴ The tyrant should be prudent both in appointing and in honoring his military men because any dynamic commander at the head of a large body of armed followers would create a natural risk to the regime. A Greek tyrant would have to have managed the risk posed by the commander of the local militia or his own bodyguard; a Caesar would have had to manage the danger posed not only by the Praetorian Prefect, but from generals in command of professional legions deployed from Britain to Palestine. The Roman army created risks that the Greek tyrants had never had to confront. In this regard, therefore, Suetonius must expand the traditional portrait of the tyrant to fit the changed circumstances of Imperial Rome.

The peacetime practices of Augustus reveal an emperor who is aware both of the risks posed by his own generals and of the ways in which that risk could be minimized. Suetonius reports, for example, that he is more willing to confer money than honor upon both his soldiers and his generals (*Aug.* 25.3):

Dona militaria, aliquanto facilius phaleras et torques, quicquid auro argentoque constaret, quam vallares ac murales coronas, quae honore

³⁶⁴ Aristotle remarks on this danger in the *Politics*; all forms of monarchy are threatened by men who are bold by nature and who hold military office (οἱ τὴν φύσιν μὲν θρασεῖς, τιμὴν δ' ἔχοντες πολεμικὴν, *Pol.* 5.11, 1312^a17-8), he explains, because boldness is courage combined with power (ἀνδρεία γὰρ δύναμιν ἔχουσα θράσος ἐστίν, *Pol.* 5.11, 1312^a19). The danger of courage combined with power seems to have been supported by data in the collection of Aristotelian constitutions. For example, at the conclusion of an anecdote about political turmoil on the island of Naxos, the *Constitution of the Naxians* reports how Lygdamis, who had been a general in the ensuing fighting, became tyrant over the land (Rose fr. 558 = Athenaeus 348C: προστατοῦντος τῶν Ναξίων Λυγδάμιδος, ὃς ἀπὸ ταύτης τῆς στρατηγίας τύραννος ἀνεφάνη τῆς πατρίδος).

praecellerent, dabat; has quam parcissime et sine ambitione ac saepe etiam caligatis tribuit.

He would more readily give phalerae and collars, and whatever consisted of gold and silver, as military awards, than crowns for scaling ramparts or walls, which conferred honor. These he conferred sparingly and without thought for currying favor and often even to common soldiers.

The origin of the practice of conferring phalerae and collars may be of interest to the antiquarian scholar.³⁶⁵ Suetonius is interested not in the origins of these honors, but in Augustus' reasons for choosing to confer one honor rather than another on not only generals, but common soldiers as well. The emperor was more willing to award prizes of gold and silver, prizes of economic value, than crowns that confer honor. Suetonius has here demonstrated that Augustus recognized the comparative political power of money and honor in a tyranny. When he does confer crowns, however, he does so not only on generals, but common soldiers as well. This practice limits the power of these crowns to confer honor and, by so doing, limits the risk that he might create a potential rival. Crowns that had raised generals above their fellow generals and up toward the plane of the emperor himself now serve only to bring generals closer to the level of the common soldier in the hierarchy of honor.

Julius and Augustus comported themselves in different ways with the common soldiers whom they commanded. Suetonius depicts Julius as a commander who fostered a more affable relationship with his soldiers, addressing his men as comrades-in-arms

³⁶⁵ Wallace-Hadrill (1983) 129 offers precisely these sections on military matters as a sign of what he perceives to be Suetonius' antiquarian interests.

(*commilitones*) rather than soldiers (*milites*).³⁶⁶ Suetonius will reveal the power that the form of address a commander uses with his troops when he has Caesar, faced with a legion clamoring for its discharge, bring his men back into obedience simply by addressing them as citizens rather than soldiers (“qua ‘Quirites’ eos pro militibus appellarat,” *Jul.* 70). The genial familiarity that Caesar cultivates with his soldiers follows the practice of the tyrant, not only in that he cultivates the military power in the state, but also inasmuch as he maintains a friendly face during his rise to power.³⁶⁷

Augustus adopts a different practice once the civil wars are over (*post bella civilia*). He now begins to address his men not as comrades (*commilitones*) but as soldiers (*milites*) (*Aug.* 24.1):

neque post bella ciuilia aut in contione aut per edictum ullos militum commilitones appellabat, sed milites, ac ne a filiis quidem aut priuignis suis imperio praeditis aliter appellari passus est, ambitiosius id existimans, quam aut ratio militaris aut temporum quies aut sua domusque suae maiestas postularet.

After the civil wars, he would not address any of his men either in their assemblies or through edict as comrades, but as soldiers; and he did not allow them to be called otherwise by his sons or his stepsons to whom commands had been entrusted, deeming it more flattering than was required by military discipline or the peace of the times or either his own or his family’s dignity.

While at first blush this may appear to be the sort of anecdotal information that Suetonius included on account of his scholarly bent, it becomes clear upon a closer reading not only

³⁶⁶ *Jul.* 67.2: “nec milites eos pro contione, sed blandiore nomine commilitones appellabat.”

³⁶⁷ See, e.g., *Pl. Rep.* 566d-e: ἄρ’ οὖν, εἶπον, οὐ ταῖς μὲν πρώταις ἡμέραις τε καὶ χρόνῳ προσγελᾷ τε καὶ ἀσπάζεται πάντας, ᾧ ἂν περιτυγχάνῃ, καὶ οὔτε τύραννός φησιν εἶναι ὑπισχεῖται τε πολλὰ καὶ ἰδίᾳ καὶ δημοσίᾳ, χρεῶν τε ἡλευθέρωσε καὶ γῆν διένειμε δῆμῳ τε καὶ τοῖς περὶ ἑαυτὸν καὶ πᾶσιν ἴλεως τε καὶ πρῶτος εἶναι προσποιεῖται;

that this practice reveals Augustus' political acumen but also that it has been included here precisely because of its political significance. Augustus may have been interested in restoring military discipline, but Suetonius subtly suggests that his reasons were not entirely military. He does not require all of his commanders to address their troops as *milites*; he commands only his sons and sons-in-laws, to whom *imperium* has been entrusted, to use the more formal address. If military discipline had been his exclusive concern, then he would have required all of his commanders to adopt the new practice. Augustus is concerned, not with discipline, but with his *maiestas* and with that of his house.³⁶⁸

Galba was a general who did not successfully make the transition to emperor. As we will see in the next chapter, his failure to establish an appropriate relationship with the army ultimately resulted in his downfall. For the moment, it will suffice to note that the plea he made to his soldiers to spare his life revealed an emperor who is convicted, by his own words, of having failed to establish his own *maiestas* in the eyes of his troops: "Quid

³⁶⁸ See Carter (1982) 119 ("His power depended on his soldiers, but like every other part of society, they had to be in their place"). But see Louis (2010) 221, who concludes that Augustus' practice reflects only the personality of Augustus and his personal desire to reassert discipline following its relaxation during the war. For the significance of *ambitiosus*, see Westcott and Rankin (1918) 260 ("*Ambitiosus* means 'smacking too much of a desire to win popular favor', and so 'too condescending'"). I believe that Suetonius has here suggested that this desire to protect the *maiestas* of his house is Augustus' primary concern, not only because he applies this rule only to the members of his own house, but also because of the placement of imperial *maiestas* in final position within the tricolon of reasons Suetonius offers to explain the practice.

agitis commilitones? Ego vester sum et vos mei.” (*Galba* 20.1).³⁶⁹ The emperor not only uses the form of address, *commilitones*, that Augustus had deemed unworthy of his own *maiestas*, but reveals by his own words that he has not set himself apart from, and by extension above, the men under his command. Tyranny means never having to say “ego vester sum.”

The emperors also follow the tyrannical practice of employing a bodyguard for their own protection. Augustus, as we have seen, was said to have raised a small group of former veterans after his plot to assassinate Antony had been discovered (*Aug.* 10.3). He later maintained troops at Rome, both for the defense of the city and for the protection of his own person (*Aug.* 49.1). As in much else, Suetonius casts Augustus as the paradigm of the emperor who avoids the vices of the tyrant. In the case of his personal bodyguard, for example, Suetonius notes that Augustus had soon after dismissed the foreign soldiers upon whom he had relied in the earlier phase of his reign.³⁷⁰ Augustus may need the bodyguard of the tyrant, but, unlike the traditional tyrant, he need not rely on foreigners for his protection.

Tiberius assumes a bodyguard of soldiers (“statione militum,” *Tib.* 24.1) immediately after his accession to the principate; this guard gives him the power and appearance of power (“vi et specie dominationis assumpta,” *Tib.* 24.1). Gaius too has a bodyguard, which Suetonius notes was composed of Batavians (“admonitus de supplendo

³⁶⁹ For the comparison of Augustus’ practice with Galba’s pathetic appeal, see Westcott and Rankin (1918) 259.

³⁷⁰ *Aug.* 49.1: “Ex militaribus copiis ... ceterum numerum partim in urbis partim in sui custodiam adlegit dimissa Calagurritanorum manu, quam usque ad devictum Antonium, item Germanorum, quam usque ad cladem Varianam inter armigeros circa se habuerat.”

numero Batavorum, quos circa se habebat,” *Cal.* 43.1); his Germans will come to his aid, too late to save him, but not too late to kill several of his assassins (*Cal.* 59.3). Galba is said to have disbanded this German bodyguard, and sent them back to Germany without any reward for their service, because he believed them to have been favorable to Gnaeus Dolabella (*Galba* 12.2). In his last hour, however, Suetonius reports that he was supported only by a German unit to whom he had shown his favor. Galba meets the fate of the tyrant, left bereft of all support but that of a small group of foreign troops (*Galba* 20.2).

Finally, while honor may be the currency of the commanders, money is the currency of the common soldiers. It is through military pay and grants of land that the emperors maintain the loyalty both of their soldiers and of their veterans. Tiberius was notoriously avaricious, but he was also a man who had spent considerable time in the field with the army. In addition to doubling the legacy left to the army by Augustus, he also gave a thousand denarii to each praetorian, as a reward for loyalty during the crisis with Sejanus, and rewarded the legions in Syria because they had never paid reverence to Sejanus. Tiberius may be avaricious, but he understands the need to use money with the army. As we will see in the following chapter, military pay, and the failure of an emperor to provide his troops with a donative following his accession, can play a decisive role in the principate.

Chapter 5
Sic Semper Tyrannis:
The Death of the Emperor in the *Caesares*

Suetonius was neither the first nor the last author to describe the death of Julius Caesar as the murder of a tyrant. Even if the conspirators had not themselves declared that Caesar had met the fate which all tyrants deserved, Cicero, as we will see, was already casting the assassination as a tyrannicide within weeks of the event. The oftentimes violent and frequently suspicious deaths of Caesar's successors also invited the drawing of comparisons between the Roman emperors and the typical tyrants of antiquity. If the emperor did not fall prey to a conspiracy motivated by hatred, fear, or the desire to avenge insulted honor, then poison administered by an ambitious successor or the military might of a political rival might well bring about the end both of the emperor and of his reign. The historical facts did not make difficult the task of constructing death-narratives fit for tyrants.

Suetonius, I will show in this chapter, made full use of the opportunity with which he was presented and constructed a series of death-narratives that reflects the range of ways in which the tyrant typically met his fate in antiquity. I have already shown how Suetonius depicted each of the emperors as a tyrant, casting his reign as that of a tyrant whose rule may be benevolent in some parts and vicious in others. I will now demonstrate that Suetonius adapted the traditional death-narrative of the tyrant that is found in the works of the historians, the philosophers, and the orators when he turned to the task of crafting his accounts of the deaths of the Caesars.

The death-narratives make up over 10 percent of seven of the lives, and at least six percent of the remaining five:

Biography	Lines in death- narrative	Lines in biography	Death-narrative as percentage of work
<i>Julius</i>	187	1438	13%
<i>Augustus</i>	148	2002	7%
<i>Tiberius</i>	80	1337	6%
<i>Caligula</i>	94	1139	8%
<i>Claudius</i>	53	960	6%
<i>Nero</i>	250	1174	21%
<i>Galba</i>	88	421	21%
<i>Otho</i>	105	241	44%
<i>Vitellius</i>	74	347	21%
<i>Vespasian</i>	28	482	6%
<i>Titus</i>	24	218	11%
<i>Domitian</i>	126	541	23%

These statistics conceal the extent to which the concluding chapters of the eidological sections often prepare the way for the death-narrative of the emperor. The attention that Suetonius pays not only to the death, but also to the causes and conditions that surround the death of each emperor, demonstrates his interest not merely in chronicling, but understanding the way in which the life and reign of each of these twelve men came to its end. Suetonius not only devotes considerable space to telling the stories of how each emperor died, but also exhibits his literary talents in constructing these narratives.³⁷¹

Tyrants in antiquity die in a variety of ways. The death of a tyrant is often violent.

³⁷¹ For the literary aristry evident in Suetonius' death-narratives, See, e.g., Mooney (1930) 19; Hägg (2012) 226.

To be sure, there are examples of good and peaceful deaths accompanied by the orderly transmission of power to a successor. Some tyrants passed down their power to a natural, adopted, or chosen successor. Some even survived expulsion from office and found work suited to their tyrannical dispositions.³⁷² Some, but not many. Most tyrants met violent deaths: “sine caede et vulnere pauci / descendunt reges et sicca morte tyranni.”³⁷³

The Roman emperors resembled these ancient tyrants in terms of the high rate at which their reigns ended violently. Suetonius writes that nine Caesars died of unnatural causes, assassinated by conspirators, murdered by family, or driven by despair to suicide. I will review the accounts of the deaths of tyrants that are found in the Greek and Roman literary traditions, surveying a range of ancient literary sources in order to establish the canonical ways in which ancient tyrant died. I will show that Suetonius, over the course of his twelve biographies, incorporated the full range of traditional circumstances, agents, motives, and causes — the hubris, contempt, fear, anger, sexual misconduct, violence, carousing, family conflict, effeminacy, ambitious generals and military leaders, and

³⁷² Cicero observes, to provide one example, that Dionysius became a teacher because he was not able to live without tyrannical power. See *Tusc. Disp.* 3.27: “Dionysius quidem tyrannus Syracusis expulsus Corinthi pueros docebat: usque eo imperio carere non poterat.” Among the Romans, Tarquin was unable to relinquish power peacefully, but shamelessly (“impudentius,” *Tusc. Disp.* 3.27) waged war against the very people who had thrown off his yoke.

³⁷³ Juv. *Sat.* 10.111-12. See, e.g., Cic., *de Off.* 2.23: “haud fere quisquam [i.e., reliquorum tyrannorum] talem interitum effugit.” See also McGlew (1993) 124: “when a tyranny came to an end, it was not, as a rule, the tyrant’s peaceful return to private life that ended it.”

insulted politicians — when he turned to the task of depicting and explaining the deaths of these emperors.

The Death of the Tyrant in Antiquity

For as long as historians, philosophers, tragedians, and biographers have taken an interest in the lives of kings and tyrants, they have shown a comparable interest in how these men died. The template is established with the gods. The first two generations of the gods in the *Theogony* are each governed by a tyrannical ruler who is then subverted and overthrown by the succeeding generation, which he had sought to oppress.

Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, Sophocles' *Oedipus* cycle, and the *Bacchae* of Euripides all offer examples of how the typically tyrannical behavior of a ruler — the display of hubris, the making of harsh threats of physical violence and death, the indulgence of sexual impropriety, and the descent into impiety — led ultimately to his downfall.³⁷⁴

While a high death rate perhaps ought to be expected in the works of the tragedians, the historical tyrants whom Herodotus describes fare little better. The murder of Candaules by his friend Gyges (*Hist.* 1.8-12), the defeat and overthrow of Croesus following his misinterpretation of the Delphic Oracle (*Hist.* 1.84-91), the death of Cyrus at the hands of the Massagetae (*Hist.* 1.201-214), and the fatal madness of Cambyses (*Hist.* 3.61-66) are ethical and political tales of the deaths of potentates that Herodotus tells at considerable length. The reader of Herodotus learns that a monarch must not

³⁷⁴ For Oedipus as a tyrant, see Lattimore (1958) 85, 95-6; for Pentheus, see Lattimore (1958) 130. For the role of tragedy in introducing the Greek notion of tyranny to Rome, see Dunkle (1967) 154. For tragic tyrants and the characterization of Antony in Augustan propaganda after Actium, see Leigh (1996) 171-97.

become overly familiar with his subjects, should not exceed the boundaries of his empire, and should refrain from acts of hubris and religious impiety.³⁷⁵

Herodotus expressed an interest in the deaths not only of eastern potentates, but also of Greek tyrants.³⁷⁶ Both Herodotus and Thucydides relate how Harmodius and Aristogeiton attacked the Peisistratids. Herodotus in the fifth book of his history tells of how Hipparchus, the son of Peisistratus and the brother of the reigning tyrant Hippias, was murdered by the conspirators (5.55-56). The conspiracy arose both in response to the sexual interest Hipparchus had shown in Harmodius and because of the tyrant's later insulting behavior toward Harmodius' sister; it is the tyrant's confusion of sexuality and power that produces the offences that motivate the conspirators to act. Herodotus also describes how the Spartan Cleomenes later deposed Hippias, after the Spartans had

³⁷⁵ The biographical quality of these Herodotean accounts of eastern monarchs was first analyzed by Homeyer (1962) 75-86. As Hägg (2012) 16 observes, however, these accounts are "integrated parts of an historical narrative and justified by its topic, the succession of power in a hereditary system." Herodotus is not writing biography, but including biographical excurses in his work of history. His interest is specifically in how political power is transferred, rather than in the way any particular ruler dies. Indeed, it is precisely because Herodotus is interested in political constitutions and monarchy, and not because he was a biographer, that the lives of foreign monarchs are of greater interest than those of the Greek generals and politicians. Hägg (2012) 16 contends that "Herodotus shows no similar interest in the pre- or post-political life of the Greek leaders." The death of a Greek tyrant is indeed of interest to Herodotus only when it brings about or coincides with the end of his reign; the death of a former tyrant is of little or no interest to the author.

³⁷⁶ For a review of the ways in which tyrants are reported to have died in the Greek world, see McGlew (1993) 124-56. For the brevity of Herodotus' account of the tyrannicide, see Lavelle (1988) 211-15.

captured his children and were holding them hostage (5.62-65). That the insulting behavior of a tyrant can motivate assassins to act, and that the family of the tyrant can present his enemies with a weapon to use against him, will become stock themes in the ancient portrait of the tyrant.

Fear, insulting behavior, and anger all find their place in Thucydides' account of the fall of the Athenian tyrants. Thucydides too chronicles the attack carried out by Harmodius and Aristogeiton, correcting the common opinion among the Athenians that Hipparchus had been the tyrant at the time of the attack rather than the brother of the tyrant. This mistaken belief of the majority reflects the fear that the tyrant was already in the time of Thucydides a figure whom the people would expect to be attacked by a conspiracy motivated by fear and insulting behavior. In setting the record straight, Thucydides states that the conspirators were indeed motivated to act both by their fear (φοβηθείς) that Hipparchus would seize Harmodius' lover Aristogeiton by force and by Hipparchus' insulting behavior (προυπηλάκισεν, 6.56.1) toward Harmodius' sister.³⁷⁷ The fear and offense are what one would expect a tyrant to cause; in this particular instance, however, it was the brother of the tyrant, rather than tyrant himself, who was acting in character.

Thucydides observed that the rule of the Peisistratids had not, in fact, been oppressive to the majority of people. The Peisistratids had adorned the city, conducted successful wars, and frequently sacrificed to the gods, all of which characterized their

³⁷⁷ Thuc. 6.54.3: φοβηθείς τὴν Ἰπάρχου δύναμιν μὴ βία προσαγάγηται αὐτόν; 6.56.1: ἀδελφὴν γὰρ αὐτοῦ κόρην ἐπαγγείλαντες ἤκειν κανοῦν οἴσουσαν ἐν πομπῇ τινί, ἀπῆλθον λέγοντες οὐδὲ ἐπαγγεῖλαι τὴν ἀρχὴν διὰ τὸ μὴ ἀξίαν εἶναι.

reign as beneficent.³⁷⁸ Indeed, Hipparchus had moved against Harmodius in secret, Thucydides notes, precisely in order to avoid besmirching the benevolent public image of their rule. Their fate reveals that not even tyrants who administer the state in the interest of the common good will necessarily be immune from attack. The personal life and the private conduct of a tyrant, and of the members of his family, can have political and potentially fatal consequences for him.

The rise, reign, and fall of the Peisistratids are described over the course of five chapters in the Aristotelian *Athenaion Politeia* (*A.P.* 14-19). The reign of the father is described as mild, benevolent, and forgiving (*A.P.* 16.1). His tax policy was moderate and he avoided wars both at home and abroad (*A.P.* 16.7). He governed according to the law (*A.P.* 16.8). He reigned well and died peacefully of natural causes. The reign of Peisistratus shows, as an initial matter, how a tyrant who survives in office to the natural end of his life will have conducted himself in office. The reign of the Peisistratids also reflects the pattern that authors will attribute to tyrants who pass their power on to their sons. To explain the tyrant's death in office, the first generation's reign will be described as, if not a golden age, then at least a time of moderation; the reign of the son will often be described as harsher and, if the son should be murdered in office, as an utterly cruel

³⁷⁸ Thuc. 6.54.5: οὐδὲ γὰρ τὴν ἄλλην ἀρχὴν ἐπαχθῆς ἦν ἐς τοὺς πολλοὺς, ἀλλ' ἀνεπιφθόνως κατεστήσατο· καὶ ἐπετήδευσαν ἐπὶ πλεῖστον δὴ τύραννοι οὗτοι ἀρετὴν καὶ ξύνεσιν, καὶ Ἀθηναίους εἰκοστὴν μόνον πρᾶσσόμενοι τῶν γιγνομένων τήν τε πόλιν αὐτῶν καλῶς διεκόσμησαν καὶ τοὺς πολέμους διέφερον καὶ ἐς τὰ ἱερὰ ἔθνον.

despotism.³⁷⁹ This pattern, as we will see, will influence the depiction of the Tarquins in the Roman tradition, and more pertinently that of the reign of the Flavians in Suetonius.

Aristotle's description of the second generation of the Peisistratids follows this pattern of degeneration and decline. The sons of Peisistratus were, as an initial matter, very different from each other.³⁸⁰ Hippias was a natural politician and a wise ruler. Hipparchus, in stark contrast with his brother, was fond of amusements, engaged in numerous love affairs, and was devoted to the arts. The author of the *Athenaion Politeia* tells how Hipparchus had Anacreon and Simonides brought to Athens in order to illustrate his love of the arts (*A.P.* 18.2).³⁸¹ The story of the attack that Harmodius and Aristogeiton made on the brothers, familiar from Thucydides and Herodotus, then follows (*A.P.* 18.2-6). Aristotle next reports that it was after the murder of Hipparchus that the reign of Hippias began to grow harsh (*A.P.* 19.2). He is deposed by the Spartan Cleomenes (*A.P.* 19.3-6). While the death of Peisistratus had been reported, the death of

³⁷⁹ See Rhodes (1981) 218: "It became orthodox doctrine that tyrants ruled harshly; but Pisistratus died a natural death and bequeathed the tyranny to his sons, whereas the sons succumbed to a series of attempts to oust them, so ancient writers inevitably supposed that the father's rule was mild but the sons' rule was harsh." The same pattern was followed at Corinth, where the mild rule of Cypselus was followed by the harsh rule of Periander; at Acragas, where Theron ruled mildly, while his son, Thrasydaeus ruled harshly; at Syracuse, where the mild rule of Gelon, was followed by the harsh rule of Hieron, and the still harsher rule of Thrasybulus.

³⁸⁰ As Rhodes (1981) 227-8 observes, Thucydides and Herodotus have little to say on the respective characters of the brothers. Aristotle emphasizes the different characters of the two Peisistratids in order to depict Hipparchus as a bad man who brought his fate upon himself and Hippias as a good ruler who became a despot after the assassination.

³⁸¹ For the Peisistratids' patronage of the arts, see Rhodes (1981) 228-9.

Hippias is left unremarked. The life of a tyrant is of political interest only until he leaves office.³⁸² This account of the Peisistratids in the *Athenaion Politeia* contributes not only, as we saw in the previous chapter, to Aristotle's analysis of tyrannical rule, but also to his assessment of the ways in which tyrannies are brought to an end.³⁸³

In the *Politics*, Aristotle classifies tyrannicides based upon their motivations: Some act because they desire revenge, while others desire gain or advantage (Arist. *Pol.* 5.10, 1311^a28-36). A tyrant will often suffer from hubris. This will lead him to insult one or more of his subjects. This insulting behavior will enrage that subject and motivate him to seek revenge.³⁸⁴ The great honor and wealth that a tyrant possesses provide a motivation for replacing the current tyrant and seizing for oneself both his office and,

³⁸² A comparison of the treatment that Aristotle affords to Solon and the Peisistratids reveals the relative importance of the death of a democratic leader and the death of a tyrant. Aristotle's discussion of Solon ends with his departure from office; an archon, like a consul, ceases to be of political significance when he leaves office. After he leaves his shield outside his door to protest the rise of the Peisistratids, he vanishes from the work.

³⁸³ At the conclusion of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle explains that he will, in the *Politics*, use his collection of constitutions in order to determine what makes a form of government succeed and what makes a form of government fail. Aristotle's focus on the circumstances that surrounded the overthrow of the Peisistratids reflects this purpose.

³⁸⁴ Arist. *Pol.*, 5.10, 1311^a32-36: αἱ μὲν οὖν δι' ὕβριν ἐπὶ τὸ σῶμα. τῆς δ' ὕβρεως οὕσης πολυμεροῦς, ἕκαστον αὐτῶν αἴτιον γίγνεται τῆς ὀργῆς; τῶν δ' ὀργιζομένων σχεδὸν οἱ πλεῖστοι τιμωρίας χάριν ἐπιτίθενται, ἀλλ' οὐχ ὑπεροχῆς. Those attacks that are motivated by insult are made against the person of the ruler; there are many forms of insult, each of these is the cause of anger. The majority of those motivated by anger attack for the sake of revenge, and not for the sake of ambition.

along with it, the power, wealth, honors, and advantages that reside in that office.³⁸⁵ As an initial matter, therefore, hatred of the tyrant and the desire to become a tyrant are the two primary motivations of the tyrannicide.

Aristotle also offers more specific motivations for attacking the tyrant and removing him from power. He begins with fear (Arist. *Pol.* 5.10, 1311^b36-40). Those who fear that a tyrant intends to harm or punish them have a strong reason to overthrow the tyrant. Aristotle offers Artapanes as an example of an individual who decided to murder a tyrant because he feared such punishment. Artapanes had been ordered to carry out certain orders by Xerxes, but feared that Xerxes would forget that he had given him those orders and punish him for carrying them out. He struck preemptively on account of this fear that he would soon to be punished by the king.

Contempt can also bring about the overthrow of a tyrant. The tyrant who is not respected will soon be removed and replaced. Contempt for the tyrant results when the tyrant is seen to be acting like a coward, like a woman, or in any other way that his subjects consider contemptible. Sardanapalus, whose subjects saw him carding wool with the women, is one example of a tyrant overthrown because of contempt (Arist. *Pol.* 5.10, 1312^a1-3). Dionysius' habitual intoxication likewise led his subjects to hold him in contempt and, finally, inspired Dion to attack and remove him (Arist. *Pol.* 5.10, 1312^a4-6). Simple familiarity also breeds contempt. The friends of the tyrant may attack him because their familiarity and intimacy can foster contempt (Arist. *Pol.* 5.10, 1312^a6-11). Finally, generals often attack their sovereigns out of contempt, just as Cyrus attacked

³⁸⁵ Arist. *Pol.*, 5.10, 1311^a28-29: μέγεθος γὰρ ὑπάρχει πλούτου καὶ τιμῆς τοῖς μονάρχοις, ὧν ἐφίενται πάντες.

Astyages because he despised (καταφρονῶν) his soft living (τρυφᾶν) and came to believe that his power was weak.³⁸⁶ The martial spirit will rebel against a soft and luxurious tyrant.

Not only the softness of the tyrant, but also the boldness of his enemies, can bring about his fall from power (Arist. *Pol.* 5.10, 1312^a15-39). A bold nature is most dangerous, Aristotle asserts, when the tyrant places that man in a position of power, because power amplifies boldness and will create a hope of success. There are also those who will murder a tyrant to make themselves famous. Finally, in addition to being sometimes destroyed by foreign enemies, a tyrant can be destroyed from within, as it were, when the family of the tyrant becomes hostile toward its ruling member.

While all of these can motivate an attack against a monarch, hatred (μῖσος) and contempt (καταφρόνησις) are the most common causes of a tyrant's assassination (Arist. *Pol.* 5.10, 1312^b18-19). Those who are motivated by hatred will be quick to attack, Aristotle explains, because they do not follow a rational principle. They are especially apt to give way to anger, moreover, when they have suffered some insult at the hands of the tyrant. The tyrant who insults his subjects will soon find himself facing the fierce and unpredictable assaults from his angered subjects. It is this power of insult to arouse hatred and anger that, for Aristotle, explained the attack of Harmodius and Aristogeiton on the Peisistratids.³⁸⁷

³⁸⁶ Arist. *Pol.* 5.10, 1312^a11-14: οἷον Κῦρος Ἀστυάγει καὶ τοῦ βίου καταφρονῶν καὶ τῆς δυνάμεως διὰ τὸ τὴν μὲν δύναμιν ἐξηργηκέναι αὐτὸν δὲ τρυφᾶν.

³⁸⁷ Arist. *Pol.* 5.10, 1312^b29-31: μάλιστα δὲ συμβαίνει τοῖς θυμοῖς ἀκολουθεῖν διὰ τὴν ὕβριν, δι' ἣν αἰτίαν ἢ τε τῶν Πεισιστρατιδῶν κατελύθη τυραννὶς καὶ πολλὰ τῶν ἄλλων.

Plato and Xenophon also addressed the deaths of tyrants. Their interest, however, was directed more to the emotional state of the tyrant facing the ever-present threat of assassination. For both of these authors, the tyrant is the most unhappy of men because he, more than any other man, must live in a state of constant fear. Plato compares the tyrant with a slaveholder who is transported, with only his wife, his children, and his slaves, to a desert island: “Would he not,” Socrates inquires, “be horribly afraid that his servants would do away with him and his family?” (*Rep.* 9.578). Xenophon likewise emphasizes the constant and overpowering fear of assassination with which the tyrant must at all times live. He has Hiero explain to Simonides that a tyrant is always living effectively in enemy territory; returning from a war may restore the ordinary citizen to the safety of home, but the tyrant remains behind enemy lines even in his own city (*Hiero* 2.6-12). By the time of the composition of the *Hiero*, poison has already taken its prominent place in the arsenal of the tyrannicide. As a result, the tyrant must always be cautious of all that he eats and drinks (Xen. *Hiero* 4.2). There is neither release nor escape from fear. To flee from one danger is to draw nigh to another (Xen. *Hiero* 6.4-5):

τὸ δὲ φοβεῖσθαι μὲν ὄχλον, φοβεῖσθαι δ' ἐρημίαν, φοβεῖσθαι δὲ ἀφυλαξίαν, φοβεῖσθαι δὲ καὶ αὐτοὺς τοὺς φυλάττοντας, καὶ μήτ' ἀόπλους ἔχειν ἐθέλειν περὶ αὐτὸν μήθ' ὀπλισμένους ἡδέως θεᾶσθαι, πῶς οὐκ ἀργαλέον ἐστὶ πρᾶγμα; ἔτι δὲ ξένους μὲν μᾶλλον ἢ πολίταις πιστεύειν, βαρβάροις δὲ μᾶλλον ἢ Ἑλλησιν, ἐπιθυμεῖν δὲ τοὺς μὲν ἐλευθέρους δούλους ἔχειν, τοὺς δὲ δούλους ἀναγκάζεσθαι ποιεῖν ἐλευθέρους, οὐ πάντα σοι ταῦτα δοκεῖ ψυχῆς ὑπὸ φόβων καταπεπληγμένης τεκμήρια εἶναι;

To be frightened of a crowd and also of solitude, to be frightened of being unguarded and also of your very guards, to be reluctant to have unarmed people around you and yet to find the sight of armed men alarming — isn't this a horrible situation? And then to trust strangers rather than your fellow citizens and non-Greeks rather than Greeks, to want to turn free men into slaves and yet to be forced to make slaves free — doesn't all this strike you as evidence of a mind cowed by fears?

In sum, the tyrant lives threatened by every manner of death, at home and abroad, from every quarter of society, from citizens and non-citizens, from family, friends, and enemies alike.

Fear and hatred take center stage in the discussion of tyranny at Rome. As at Athens, it is with the tragedians that we find the first references to tyrants among the Romans.³⁸⁸ The earliest surviving occurrence of the Greek loan-word *tyrannus* is from the *Atreus* of Accius.³⁸⁹ From Cicero, we learn that the Roman public was already in the late Republic ready, willing, and able to draw comparisons between their own leaders and the mythological tyrants of the tragic stage.

He tells of how the line “nostra miseria tu es magnus,” a verse which seemed “uti in tempus ab inimico Pompei scripti,” caused the audience at the Apollinarian games of 59 B.C. to demand encore after encore (*ad Att.* 2.19.3).³⁹⁰ An audience attending a performance of Accius’ *Tereus* was similarly roused in favor of Brutus (*ad Att.* 16.2.3). Cicero also records the most famous line of Accius’ *Atreus*: “oderint dum metuant.” The line, which Cicero deemed a statement befitting a tyrannical personality, and which later became a cliché applied to describe the attitude of the tyrant toward his people, already elicited applause from audiences in Cicero’s own day (*Cic. de Off.* 1.97).³⁹¹ He himself

³⁸⁸ For the tyrant in Roman tragedy, see Dunkle (1967) 154.

³⁸⁹ 181-2 (Warmington): “ne cum tyranno quisquam epulandi gratia accumbat mensam aut eandem vescatur dapem.”

³⁹⁰ Likewise, in response to the line “eandem virtutem istam veniet tempus cum graviter gemes,” “totius theatri clamore dixit itemque cetera” (*ad Att.* 2.19.3).

³⁹¹ Hurley (1993) 122 concludes, based upon Seneca’s *de Ira* 1.20.4, that the line originally referred to Sulla. Seneca, however, claims only that the line was written

offered the line as a warning to Antony in the *First Philippic* (1.34).³⁹² In the first century of the imperial period, Seneca quotes the line in both his *de Clementia* (1.12.4 and 2.2.2) and his *de Ira* (1.20.4). According to Suetonius, Tiberius modified the line to “oderint dum probent,” while Gaius adopted it as his own verbatim and bandied it about *subinde* (*Cal.* 30.1).³⁹³ The fear and hatred that the Greeks made primary among the motives that drive men to seek the life of the tyrant come to hold pride of place at Rome as well. They are applied in the Republic to those who resisted men who aspired to obtain despotic power and in the imperial period to the men who acquired the power of the principate.

After the tragedians, Cicero provides the earliest evidence for the reception at Rome of the Greek treatment of the tyrant and his death. It is with Cicero, moreover, that the tyrant and the assassination of the tyrant entered into Roman political rhetoric and philosophical discourse. As we have already seen, for Cicero, the archetypal Roman tyrant was Tarquinius Superbus. The Roman orator describes his fall from power in terms that reflect his role as both the last king and the first tyrant of Rome (*Cic. de Rep.* 2.45-46):

nam rex ille de quo loquor, primum optimi regis caede maculatus integra mente non erat, et cum metueret ipse poenam sceleris sui summam, metui se volebat; deinde victoriis divitiisque subnixus exultabat insolentia, neque

Sullano saeculo. Braund (2009) 302 notes that even Seneca’s actual assertion would be hard to square with Gellius’ claim (*N.A.* 13.2.2) that Accius had read his play to Pacuvius, who died in 130 B.C.. The similar line, “quem metuont oderunt,” occurs in the *Thyestes* of Ennius.

³⁹² *Cic. Phil.* 1.34: “Quod videmus etiam in fabula illi ipsi, qui ‘Oderint, dum metuant’ dixerit, perniciosum fuisse. Utinam, M. Antoni, avum tuum meminisses!” Cicero quotes the line again at *Sest.* 102.

³⁹³ Hurley (1993) 122 is doubtful that Gaius in fact did so, “since it was a cliché.”

suos mores regere poterat neque suorum libidines. itaque cum maior eius filius Lucretiae Tricipitini filiae Conlatini uxori vim attulisset, mulierque pudens et nobilis ob illam iniuriam sese ipsa morte multavisset, tum vir ingenio et virtute praestans L. Brutus depulit a civibus suis iniustum illud durae servitutis iugum.

For that king about whom I am speaking, did not have a clean conscience when he began his reign, having stained his hands with the murder of a most excellent king, and since he himself feared that he would have to pay the ultimate penalty for his crime, he wanted to make himself feared. Then, relying upon his victories and his wealth, he exulted in his insolence and was not able to control his own behavior or that of his relatives. And so, when his older son forced himself on Lucretia, the daughter of Tricipitinus and the wife of Collatinus, and this chaste and noble woman inflicted the penalty of death upon herself on account of this injury, at that point then a man outstanding in virtue and in character, Lucius Brutus, removed that unjust yoke of hard servitude from his fellow citizens.

That Tarquin began his reign *maculatus caede* reflects the traditional understanding of the tyrant as a ruler who holds office without sanction of law. Tarquin sought power because he himself feared punishment; he then used fear in order to maintain his hold on power. These are the same motives and means that Aristotle included in his discussion of tyranny. The role of *metus* is common to the reign of almost every tyrant. Tarquin's inability to control the sexual behavior of his children is reminiscent of the account of Hippias and his brother Hipparchus. That sexual violence inspires Brutus to rise against the Tarquins, therefore, recalls the fate that Hipparchus met at the hands of Harmodius and Aristogeiton. Like Hippias, Tarquin neither committed the offense nor was himself assassinated. Like Hippias, he was expelled from office. He took refuge with Aristodemus, the tyrant of Cumae, where he died "senio et aegritudine" (*Tusc. Disp.* 3.12.27). Cicero's account of the fall of Tarquin has all of the elements that are characteristic of a tyrant's death-narrative, therefore, save the death of the tyrant himself.

Cicero follows the tradition in attributing the downfall and death of a tyrant specifically to the hatred (*odium*) and the fear (*metus*) that tyrannical behavior aroused in the people. Writing in the aftermath of the assassination of Caesar, he offers the death of the dictator as evidence of the fact that no amount of power can resist the hatred of the masses (“multorum autem odiis nullas opes posse obsistere,” Cic. *de Off.* 2.23). The case of Julius Caesar, whom Cicero refers to expressly as a tyrant (“huius tyranni”), revealed “quantum odium hominum valeat ad pestem.” The lesson that Cicero draws from the Ides of March is one of general applicability: “malus enim est custos diuturnitatis metus contraque benevolentia fidelis vel ad perpetuitatem” (Cic. *de Off.* 2.23). The fear that a tyrant instills provides no sure protection against the hatred that he inspires.

As we will see in the section that follows, Suetonius’ descriptions and analyses of the deaths of the emperors follow the pattern that was established by the Greeks and adopted by the Romans for narrating the death of the tyrant. My intention in this last chapter is to demonstrate that the emperors depicted by Suetonius not only lived as tyrants, but died as tyrants. The details that he includes and the narratives that he creates place the deaths of the emperors in the same tradition as the deaths of Peisistratus, Hiero, Hipparchus, and Dionysius. Fear and anger predominate in the *Caesares* just as they do in these traditional accounts. So too hubris, violence, sexual insults, effeminacy, revelry, carousing, ambitious family members, are cast in the same familiar supporting roles they have always played in the tale of the tyrant and his demise. Some of the emperors rule justly; some of them rule unjustly. Some of them die peacefully; most die violently. Suetonius depicts all of them, however, as rulers who lived, reigned, and, as I will now show, died as tyrants.

**Causes and Effects:
The Death-Narratives in the *Caesares***

The remaining sections of this chapter will review the death-narratives in the *Caesares*. My aim, in part, is to uncover the common patterns and practices that Suetonius uses in relating how the emperors meet their deaths. I assess how Suetonius makes the transition from the topical analysis of each emperor's life and reign to the chronological narration of his death. My larger purpose, however, is to consider the way in which Suetonius casts each emperor in the role of a tyrant in the last act of his story. I consider both how each emperor either avoids or precipitates his own death by acting as either a good or a bad tyrant both in his administration of the state and in his private life.

I first consider those emperors who died prematurely as a result of a conspiracy. I begin with the biography of Julius, both the first Caesar and the first of the Caesars to be removed from the principate by a conspiracy, and then examine the biographies of Gaius and Domitian, the other two emperors to fall to the knives of assassins. I examine the motivations that Suetonius attributes to each of these groups of tyrannicides, and assess how they comport with the motives that authors traditionally offer to explain the actions of those who rise against a tyrant. In each case, I also examine the narrative techniques and literary artistry that Suetonius employs to construct these narratives. The death of Nero, the emperor who receives what is agreed to be the finest of the Suetonian death-narratives and the only emperor to die by his own hand, is treated separately. I then consider the final scenes in the lives of Tiberius and Claudius, two emperors who seem to have been murdered by their adopted successors. Before turning to the good deaths of the good emperors, I briefly examine the final days of the short reigns of Galba, Otho, and

Vitellius. I conclude with the emperors Augustus, Vespasian, and Titus, in order to establish the path that an emperor should follow in order to survive and succeed.

**Conspiracies and Assassinations:
Julius, Gaius, and Domitian.**

Suetonius recounts the assassinations of three emperors. How he constructs his account of each of these deaths is of particular significance for our study of the influence of the traditional portrait of the tyrant on Suetonius' depiction of the lives and deaths of the Caesars. I intend to show that the Roman biographer narrated each of these attacks in ways that reflect the traditional discourse of tyrannicide and incorporates many of the elements commonly found in the historiographical accounts of the deaths of tyrants.

The conspirators who killed the emperors Julius, Gaius, and Domitian did not seek the principate for themselves. They murdered these emperors solely in order to end their lives and their reigns. They sometimes acted for the sake of revenge (τιμωρίας χάριν), to use Aristotle's categories, but never for the sake of ambition (ὕπεροχῆς χάριν). As Suetonius tells the story, Julius was assassinated because he had sought to make himself a king and because he had repeatedly insulted the senate. Gaius, in turn, is shown to have reveled and raged in the way that tyrants customarily do, but, in the end, it is his insulting behavior that once again gives the assassins their reason to act. He also inspired fear among those men who should have protected him and, by so doing, created the conditions under which the plot against him could succeed. Domitian's story, finally, is the tale of an emperor whose fear of assassination caused him to act in a way that indirectly brought that fear to pass.

Julius

Before beginning the narrative of the death of Julius Caesar, Suetonius first concludes the eidological analysis of his life with four rubrics that catalogue those actions that motivated the conspirators to remove Caesar from power. The clemency of Caesar in victory is the subject of chapter 75. This is the last piece of favorable evidence that Suetonius provides. The rubrics turn negative in chapter 76. The case against the emperor grows stronger with each rubric. His words and deeds are the first pieces of evidence that were offered in order to establish that he had abused his rule and deserved his fate. Suetonius declares that the evidence weighed in the balance justified the actions of the conspirators: Caesar had abused his *dominatio* and been rightly cut down: “Praegravant tamen cetera facta dictaque eius, ut et abusus dominatione et iure caesus existimetur” (*Jul.* 76.1).³⁹⁴ There follows a catalogue of the excessive honors (“honores modo nimios”) that Caesar had received. Some are simply excessive for a man, such as the dictatorship for life, the title of *pater patriae*; others, however, are properly reserved for the gods alone, including a golden throne, temples, altars, and calling one of the months by his own name.³⁹⁵ Caesar’s assumption of honors and titles appropriate to a god places

³⁹⁴ Suetonius’ use of *dominatio* strongly suggests that Caesar’s rule was tyrannical. For the use of *dominatio* and *dominus* to signify tyranny and the tyrant, see Béranger (1975) 56-7.

³⁹⁵ Butler and Cary (1927) 137-8 explain that the *sedem auream* is a sign of royalty; the *ferculum*, however, is a bier on which the images of the gods were carried. The *templa*, *aras*, *pulvinar*, and *flaminem* also signify divine status. Rawson (1975) 149 adequately addresses those who have argued that the appointment of a *flamen* was only in Caesar’s honor, rather than for his worship.

him in the tradition of the impious tyrant that begins with the Persian kings and the tyrants of Greek tragedy.

Suetonius offers three statements of Caesar to establish that he had sought to set himself up as a tyrant. Indeed, these three statements represent the path followed by a tyrant to power. Caesar first subordinates the state, then asserts tyrannical power, and finally ascends to the level of the gods. First, he refers to the state as a non-entity that exists only in name: “nihil esse rem publicam, appellationem modo sine corpore ac specie” (*Jul.* 77). He then declares that Sulla had been a fool to give up the dictatorship of his own free will; the thinly veiled import of this being that Caesar will make no such error himself. Caesar’s insolence then culminates with a claim of divine power.

Confronted with unfavorable entrails, he declares that the signs will turn favorable when he wishes them to turn favorable (*Jul.* 77). Caesar had assumed divine honors in chapter 76. He now asserts the powers of a god as well. These three utterances tell the tale of a man first rising over the state and then, finally, attaining the level of the gods.

Suetonius declares that the hatred against Caesar is now building to a lethal level: “verum praecipuam et exitiabilem sibi invidiam hinc maxime movit” (*Jul.* 78.1). To this point, Caesar has been growing as a tyrant at the expense of the dignity of the Republic. He now begins to insult the Senate. Suetonius reports that he refused to rise from his seat when he received the senators in front of the temple of Venus Genetrix. As an initial matter, the naming of the temple of Venus Genetrix recalls the divine origins and pretensions of the Julii. Suetonius then explains that Caesar himself had revealed the insulting power of such a gesture, having considered it an insult when a tribune failed to

rise as he rode past during his triumph.³⁹⁶ Caesar on that occasion had challenged the offending tribune to take back the Republic from him, once more revealing that he considered the state to be his own possession. Performed by Caesar, the action is an insult from a tyrant directed toward the Senate; performed by a tribune, it is a challenge to a tyrant by a republican.

To these already intolerable acts of insolence, Caesar adds a deed still more arrogant and disrespectful toward the Senate: “Adiecit ad tam insignem despecti senatus contumeliam multo arrogantius factum” (*Jul.* 79.1).³⁹⁷ Suetonius reports that, during the *Feriae Latinae*, someone had crowned a statue of Caesar with a laurel wreath decorated with a white fascia.³⁹⁸ The tribunes order the crown removed and the man led off to

³⁹⁶ *Jul.* 78.2: “Idque factum eius tanto intolerabilius est visum, quod ipse triumphanti et subsellia tribunicia praetervehenti sibi unum e collegio Pontium Aquilam non assurrexisse adeo indignatus sit, ut proclamaverit: ‘Repete ergo a me Aquila rem publicam tribunus!’”

³⁹⁷ For how the structure of these chapters establishes the rising arrogance of Caesar, see Steidle (1963) 57.

³⁹⁸ Westcott and Rankin (1918) 172 state that the white color of the fillet was probably a sign of royalty. Plutarch (*Caes.* 61.3), Appian (*B.C.* 2.108), and Dio (44.9-10) all report that it was the man who had proclaimed “rex” who was arrested, not the one who decorated the statue. Both Appian and Dio mention that the tribunes removed the *fascia* from the statue; Caesar ignored their action out of indifference, according to Appian, but swallowing his anger, according to Dio. That Suetonius focuses on the fascia, and omits any reference to someone declaring Caesar king, allows him to create a sustained progression toward the rumor that Caesar was planning to assume that title. In section 1, there is a sign of royalty; in section 2, there is a rejection of the notion that Caesar is a king; in section 3, there is the rumor that he was, in fact, now planning to assume the title.

prison. Caesar removed the tribunes from power. Suetonius explains that Caesar was grieved, either that the suggestion of his kingship had been poorly received or because he had been deprived of the honor of removing the crown himself. The portrait is of a man either craving *dominatio* or already claiming the sole power to accept or refuse such power himself. Suetonius then reports a rumor that Caesar had been planning to take up the title of king because of a prophecy that the Parthians could be defeated only by a king. As Suetonius turns to begin his narrative of the conspiracy and the ultimate murder of Caesar, the author explains that this hastened his assassination: “Quae causa coniuratis maturandi fuit destinata negotia, ne assentiri necesse esset” (*Jul.* 80.1).

These chapters reveal how Suetonius will use the concluding rubrics of each biography’s eidological section to set the stage for the narrative account of the emperor’s death and ease the transition to that final narrative section. Suetonius uses these rubrics to classify the acts that contributed to the hatred of Caesar. He begins with honors and offices, continues with his public remarks, and then turns to his specific acts of insolence toward the senate. There is a pattern of increasing insolence and arrogance that is revealed in Caesar’s behavior. Caesar is not merely a tyrant, Suetonius establishes, but an increasingly tyrannical tyrant. This pattern is also evident within individual chapters. Suetonius tends to move from the general to the specific, from the lesser to the greater offense. For example, as we saw in the case of his catalogue of statements attributed to Caesar, Suetonius progresses from Caesar’s denigration of the state to his elevation of the self, and then from his elevation above men to his equation with the gods. This logically

For the debate among historians regarding the controversy as to Caesar’s “final intentions,” see Rawson (1975) 148.

ordered dissection adds a sense of narrative progress to the static portrait otherwise created by the use of rubrics and thereby renders the return to chronological narrative a natural transition.

Suetonius uses these final rubrics of the eidological section not only to prepare for the transition to the narrative of his death, but also to reveal why Caesar was assassinated. When the death-narrative begins, the reader has already been made aware that Caesar will die because he had insulted the senate and because he had planned to make himself king.³⁹⁹ Suetonius staked out a clear position regarding the political reasons for the assassination. According to Suetonius, it is the Senate that Caesar insulted and the Senate that will respond to his insults. Caesar's acceptance of divine honors, assertions that the state was his possession, and insulting behavior are all typical tyrannical behavior. He suggests that where Sulla failed to cling to dictatorial power, he will succeed. Caesar may hope for the title of king, but he has already begun to play the part of a tyrant.

For Suetonius, moreover, the opposition to Caesar is found in the senate and among the tribunes. The role of popular opposition will be played down or, at least, overlooked throughout the biography. For others, the hatred of Caesar is felt by members

³⁹⁹ Some might respond that Suetonius has done nothing more than the ancient narrative historians did, albeit in a work organized thematically rather than chronologically. To attribute to Suetonius the same purposes and aims that motivated a Tacitus or a Dio is already to elevate him from the mere collector of trifling gossip and antiquarian trivia that many take him to be. I would, of course, agree that Suetonius shares with these "serious historians" the aim of analyzing imperial politics, not simply collecting the odd, the antiquarian, the prurient, and the anecdotal details of each emperor's life. It is my further contention, however, that Suetonius also has his own distinct point of view.

of all classes.⁴⁰⁰ For Suetonius, the masses lend their support to the conspiracy only late, after they have become displeased with the present state of affairs (“ne populo quidem iam praesenti statu laeto, sed clam palamque detrectante dominationem atque assertores flagitante,” *Jul.* 80.1). He attributes the rising popular discontent, at least in part, to Caesar’s having admitted foreigners to the senate (*Jul.* 80.2). This willingness to rely on foreigners is, once again, another attribute of the tyrant.⁴⁰¹

Once Suetonius has recorded all of the things that Caesar did to motivate the conspirators to act, he turns to the omens of the coming assassination. The placement of the omens here in the narrative shows that the role that Caesar plays in motivating his assassins has been fully described and his future is no longer in his hands, a fact reflected in the story’s turning to the carrying out of that assassination by the conspirators. The assassination of the emperor has become an inevitability, something fated in the heavens.

⁴⁰⁰ The other ancient sources agree that Caesar was killed because of the hatred that his desire for kingship had aroused against him. See, e.g., Plut., *Caesar* 60.1: τὸ δὲ ἐμφανὲς μάλιστα μῖσος καὶ θανατηφόρον ἐπ’ αὐτὸν ὁ τῆς βασιλείας ἔρως ἐξεργάσατο. This hatred is felt not only by the senatorial class, but by the masses as well. See, e.g., Plut., *Caesar* 60.1: τοῖς μὲν πολλοῖς αἰτία πρώτη, τοῖς δὲ ὑπόλοις πάλαι πρόφασις εὐπρεπεστάτη γενομένη.

⁴⁰¹ See, e.g., Plato *Rep.* 8.568 (tyrant incurs hatred by making foreigners citizens); Xen. *Hiero* 6.5 (tyrant takes foreigners as friends). Foreigners and foreign mercenaries played a significant role in the reign of the Greek tyrants. These foreigners were able to do so in part because of the scale of the states over which those tyrants ruled. A bodyguard of foreign mercenaries could preserve the tyrant’s power in a Greek city state in a way that a foreign bodyguard could not influence political affairs at Rome. The role that foreign guards, and foreigners generally, play during the reigns of the Caesars will continue to reflect this traditional portrait of the tyrant throughout the *Caesares*.

These omens are presented in an order that moves the narrative forward to the day of the assassination, when omens give way to a note put into Caesar's hands warning him of the plot (*Jul.* 81.4).

The story of the assassination differs in no significant respects from the accounts found elsewhere in the ancient sources. Suetonius begins his narrative with a detail reminiscent of the insulting behavior that had motivated the assassins: Caesar enters and takes his seat before the senate. The conspirators surround him, acting as if they are paying their respects ("assidentem conspirati specie officii circumsteterunt," *Jul.* 82.1). Caesar had insulted the Senate by refusing to rise to receive them in front of the Temple of Venus; he had himself been insulted by a tribune who refused to rise when he passed in triumph. He now remains seated as the senators surround him *specie officii*. They then strike. Suetonius ends the assassination with the observation that the conspirators had planned to drag his body to the Tiber, confiscate his property, and revoke his decrees.⁴⁰² Caesar had treated the *res publica* as his own possession; the conspirators planned to make his goods public. Caesar sought to make his word law; the conspirators annul his decrees. It is only fear of Antony and of Lepidus that stopped them from taking these steps (*Jul.* 82.4). The failure of the conspirators to put an end to tyranny is here explained by reference to that emotion, fear, that is the traditional means by which tyrants preserve their reigns.

The Suetonian account of the assassination of Julius Caesar is a tale of how the hubris of an emperor can lead to insulting behavior that, in turn, can lead to his downfall.

⁴⁰² *Jul.* 82.4: "Fuerat animus coniuratis corpus occisi in Tiberim trahere, bona publicare, acta rescindere, sed metu Marci Antoni consulis et magistri equitum Lepidi destiterunt."

It is not only that Caesar sought to make himself king, but also, and indeed this is the point the Suetonius chooses to emphasize, that he insulted the Senate, that motivated the conspirators to act against him. Caesar is the first emperor, but not the first tyrant, to be killed in revenge for an insult. He will not be the last.

Gaius

Suetonius' account of the death of Gaius examines both the motivations of the men who attacked the emperor and the reasons their attack succeeded. The analysis of the conspirators' motivations in the *Caligula* is almost as extensive as that in the *Julius*. Suetonius establishes by the conclusion of this analysis that it was the tyrannical behavior of the emperor that explains both why he was attacked and why that attack was not thwarted. As in the *Julius*, the emperor is again shown to have mistreated members of the senatorial order. In this case, however, he mistreats and insults one man in particular. It is this insulting behavior that inspires that individual to kill the emperor. Gaius is also shown to have encouraged those who should have protected him from the assassins to turn a blind eye to the impending danger. While the *Julius* was a study primarily of why the tyrannicide attacks, the *Caligula* is a study not only of what motivates men to kill a tyrant, but also of why it is that some succeed where others do not.

Gaius is the second emperor in the *Caesares* after Julius Caesar to be assassinated by a conspiracy. As in the *Julius*, Suetonius devotes the last chapters of the eidological section to cataloguing the reasons why the emperor was attacked.⁴⁰³ From chapter 49, in

⁴⁰³ Suetonius links these chapters to the death-narrative that follows by referring explicitly at three points to the emperor's impending death. First, he observes that Gaius died within four months of returning to Rome from Gaul (*Cal.* 49.2). Gascou (1984) 686, n. 30 argues that this in fact marks the beginning of the account of the emperor's death. I

which Suetonius reviews Gaius's hostility toward the senate, to chapter 55, in which he describes the excessive favoritism that the emperor exhibited toward those whom he loved, Suetonius sets out the causes of, and the contributing factors surrounding, the emperor's demise. The analysis begins with Gaius's insulting behavior toward the senate. Suetonius then turns to the emperor's physical characteristics. This discussion may at first seem out of place. It soon emerges that Suetonius' main concern, however, is with the sickness of the emperor. Gaius's madness and insomnia contribute to his erratic and increasingly violent behavior. This behavior in turn renders him both hated and vulnerable to attack. Suetonius concludes the discussion by announcing his belief that the emperor's two principal vices — his intense fear and his overconfidence — can both be attributed to his mental infirmity (“non inmerito mentis valitudini attribuerim diversissima in eodem vitia, summam confidentiam et contra nimium metum,” *Cal.* 51.1). His focus is then put, not on Gaius's *confidentia*, but rather on his *metus*, and specifically on his pathological fear in the face of even merely imagined foes and dangers.

conclude that this, and the other two prospective references, serve instead to suggest the relevance of these rubrics to the death-narrative to come. Second, Suetonius notes that the fear that Gaius once exhibited at the news of an uprising in Germany would later lead the conspirators to announce that the emperor had not been murdered, but had instead killed himself at the news of a military defeat (*Cal.* 51.3). Finally, Suetonius records that Gaius had ordered that an all-night festival take place on what would be the very day of his death so that he might take advantage of the *licentia temporis* to make his stage debut (*Cal.* 54.2). These three references, beginning as they do four months before the death of the emperor and progressing to the day of his assassination, introduce chronology into the eidological sections. One of them, with its reference to the use that the conspirators will make of Gaius's fear of foreign enemies, strongly suggests that these eidological chapters are relevant to understanding the coming fall of the emperor.

Gaius flaunts convention in his dress, but does so in the way that follows the pattern set forth by the ancient tyrants who came before him. His garments, his shoes, and his accessories are unfit for a Roman, a citizen, a man, or a mortal (“vestitu calciatuque et cetero habitu neque patrio neque civili, ac ne virili quidem ac denique humano semper usus est,” 52.1). His adopting of foreign clothing (“neque patrio”) reveals that Gaius has acquired the tyrant’s fondness for things foreign. That his clothing is “neque civili” reflects the political dissociation of the tyrant from the political norms of the citizen. The tendency to dress like a woman (“ne virili quidem”) is part and parcel of the traditional portrait of the tyrant as a man whom luxury had rendered enervated, degenerate, and effeminate. By dressing like a god, finally, Gaius exhibits the tyrant’s impious rivalry with the gods. This seemingly incidental discussion, which may at first appear out of place as the biography draws near to the narrative of the emperor’s assassination, in fact serves to add depth to the portrait of Gaius as a tyrant.

The next rubric is nominally devoted to the intellectual pursuits of the emperor. It concludes, however, with the observation that justice in the courts has been replaced by the capricious verdict of the emperor’s pen. Gaius exhibits the tyrant’s disrespect for the rule of law, and the substitution of the tyrant’s will for the law of the land. Suetonius then offers another catalogue of transgressive behavior of the sort attributed to the tyrant: Gaius sings, dances, races chariots, and fights as a gladiator. Suetonius concludes by describing the extreme lengths to which Gaius would go to exhibit partiality toward his favorites (“quorum vero studio teneretur, omnibus ad insaniam favit,” *Cal.* 55). This section culminates with the lavish treatment afforded by the emperor to his favorite horse, Incitatus. Rumor reported that Gaius planned to name him a consul. The emperor is

exhibiting the preference for private over public interests that is the hallmark of the tyrant.

In response to Gaius's reveling and raging ("ita bacchantem atque grassantem," *Cal.* 56.1), several conspiracies formed.⁴⁰⁴ All failed. Suetonius attributes this lack of success either to a want of opportunity or to their having been detected while still in the planning stages. This establishes that a successful conspiracy will need to find an opportunity to launch its attack and will have to manage to avoid being detected before it is able to make use of this opportunity. Once he has so established the obstacles facing a conspiracy, Suetonius introduces the two men who were ultimately able to carry out their plot (*Cal.* 56.1). He then turns to the tasks, first, of explaining why these two men wanted to kill the emperor and, second, of examining why and how they succeeded.

Suetonius explains that Gaius gave these men their reasons for wanting to assassinate him; it was the emperor who provided these men with their reasons for forming their conspiracy. Gaius, to be specific, had frequently subjected the tribune of the Praetorians, Cassius Chaerea, to insulting and degrading behavior. He had accused Cassius of effeminacy. Gaius mocked him with the watchwords he provided. The

⁴⁰⁴ For a discussion of the rhetorical effect of this opening phrase, see Lounsbury (1987) 84. Steidle (1963) 84 had understood these participles as referring specifically to Gaius' *atrocitas* and madness. Gorringer (1993) 195 explains that the two participles recall the "main facets of a continuing behaviour pattern which forms the background to the conspiracy." The emphatic initial position of "ita" also marks the transition from the eidological section to chronological death-narrative (195-6). In this, Gorringer has followed Gasco (1984) 789, who observed that Suetonius first established the close correlation between the eidological chapters and the narrative of Gaius's assassination.

emperor would offer his hand for him to kiss, but with the fingers formed to make an obscene gesture (*Cal.* 56):

primas sibi partes Cassius Chaerea tribunus cohortis praetoriae depoposcit, quem Gaius seniore iam et mollem et effeminatum denotare omni probro consuerat et modo signum petenti "Priapum" aut "Venerem" dare, modo ex aliqua causa agenti gratias osculandam manum offerre formatam commotamque in obscaenum modum.

Cassius Chaerea, tribune of the praetorian guards, claimed for himself the right to strike the first blow in the attack. This Chaerea was now an elderly man, and had been often rebuked by Gaius for effeminacy. When he came for the watchword, the emperor would give "Priapus," or "Venus;" and if on any occasion he offered the emperor his thanks, Gaius would offer him his hand to kiss, making with his fingers an obscene gesture.

Gaius' insulting and degrading behavior gave the conspirators their motive: they are seeking revenge for insults they had suffered. This is a stock motive of the tyrannicide, first analyzed by Aristotle in his *Politics* and later made the subject of a treatise by Phaenias of Eresus.⁴⁰⁵ The insults are of a sexual nature, which reflects the tendency of the tyrant to confuse sexuality and power. The account of the assassination of Gaius resembles the murders of Tarquin and the Peisistratids.

Suetonius also explains why these two men were able to succeed why Cassius Chaerea was able to succeed where others had failed. The explanation is again to be found in the tyrannical behavior of the emperor. Gaius created the conditions under which these conspirators would be able to carry out their plot when he gave those men who should have protected him good reason to look the other way instead. Suetonius affirms that the conspiracy succeeded "non sine conscientia potentissimorum libertorum praefectorumque praetori" (56.1). The emperor alienated these men, who owed their

⁴⁰⁵ For Phaenias of Eresus and his works *Περὶ τῶν ἐν Σικελίᾳ τυράννων* and his *Τυράννων Ἀναίρεσις ἐκ Τιμωρίας*, see Stuart (1928) 133; Momigliano (1993) 77-8.

power and positions to him and who should therefore have been among his most loyal supporters, by causing them to believe that he suspected them. He at first did so publicly, and then continued to accuse them privately to each other, hoping to set them against each other (“nec cessavit ex eo criminari alterum alteri atque inter se omnis committere,” 56.1).⁴⁰⁶ By following the Aristotelian way of repression and trying to set his men against each other, Gaius succeeds only in uniting them; by falsely accusing his supporters of plotting against him, he causes them to fear that they will soon be punished. They respond, as Aristotle had observed men do in these circumstances, by lending their aid to the conspirators; they turn a blind and perhaps favorable eye when the plot begins.

Once again, only when the plot has been set in motion, and the execution of the deed is all that remains to be done, does Suetonius turn to cataloguing the portents of the murder that is soon to come (“futuræ caedis multa prodigia exstiterunt,” *Cal.* 57.1). This catalogue advances, but also slows the pace of the narrative. A dream on the day before the assassination predicts his approaching death (“pridie quam periret,” *Cal.* 57.3). Four prodigies follow on the day of the murder itself (“prodigiorum loco habita sunt etiam, quae forte illo ipso die paulo prius acciderant,” *Cal.* 57.3). Suetonius thereby creates a sense of chronological progression.⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰⁶ Hurley (1993) 199 observes that “Gaius himself is made responsible for their complicity because he played the three of them off against one [another] until they would have nothing more to do with him and left him to the conspirators.”

⁴⁰⁷ Gorringer (1993) 208 observes that the arrangement of the oracles “is designed to have an intensifying effect by emphasising their increasing proximity to Gaius and his continually clearer awareness of them.”

These prodigies both foreshadow and explain the assassination, even as they retard the narrative progress toward that event. A statue of Jupiter at Olympia laughs violently just as a man named Cassius arrives and declares that he had been bidden to offer a bull to Jupiter. This suggests that Gaius's pretensions to divinity were something that Jupiter found laughable, and yet were also something that the god, acting through Cassius, would not let pass unpunished.⁴⁰⁸ There are also two lighting strikes, one on the chamber of the door warden of the palace; this was interpreted as a sign that a distinguished person was in danger from one of his own guards. A soothsayer declares that Gaius will soon die; the lots of Fortuna at Antium warn the emperor to beware of Cassius. Gaius misinterprets this last omen as applying to Cassius Longinus, whom he puts to death, rather than to Cassius Chaerea, the actual conspirator. On the day before he was killed, Gaius dreams that he was hurled down to earth by Jupiter. On the day of his death, finally, Gaius is sprinkled with the blood of a sacrifice; three portents related to theater performances then follow.

These omens serve not only to retard the narrative, however, but also to reiterate those elements from the eidological section that are pertinent to understanding the assassination. The anger of Jupiter arises from the emperor's hubris; Gaius has insulted the gods as he had insulted Cassius Chaerea. That the danger will come from his close associates is revealed by the omen of the lightning strike on the door warden's chamber. Gaius's continuing, and misplaced, trust in his intimates is confirmed by his execution of Cassius Longinus and his continued trust in Cassius Chaerea; the emperor's misinterpretation of an omen of his own destruction, moreover, places him squarely

⁴⁰⁸ For an analysis of these portents, see Gugel (1977) 50-2; Gorringer (1993) 206-12.

within the tradition of tyrants, historical and mythological, extending back to Croesus and Oedipus. Finally, the three portents related to theater performances recall the non-traditional behavior of Gaius that Suetonius had earlier described (*Cal.* 54), and foreshadow the venue at which the emperor will meet his fate. In constructing his narrative of the death of Gaius, Suetonius uses omens to regulate the pace of his narrative, to show that the gods are working in accord with the human conspirators, and to review the reasons for the impending assassination.⁴⁰⁹

Suetonius at last turns to the assassination. Gaius is murdered at the Palatine games when he leaves the imperial box to dine. He had at first hesitated because his stomach was upset from the previous night's excesses, but had then decided to go to dinner on the advice of his friends.⁴¹⁰ This upset stomach puts the reader in mind of the dissolute life the emperor has led (37.1).⁴¹¹ The emphasis which Suetonius places on the fact that it is the middle of the day recalls that the plan of the conspirators had been to kill Gaius at midday. Finally, the fact that the emperor is said to exit at the urging of his friends — *suadentibus amicis* — reinforces the fact that the assassination would not have succeeded without the *conscientia* of the powerful intimates of the emperor. He stops to watch a troop of young boys from Asia who were rehearsing in preparation for their

⁴⁰⁹ Steidle (1963) 86 observes that the murder of the emperor follows naturally from the omens. Just as the conspiracy arose out of the actions of the emperor, so too the assassination itself arises naturally out of the omens.

⁴¹⁰ *Gaius* 58.1: "VIII. Kal. Febr. hora fere septima cunctatus an ad prandium surgeret marcente adhuc stomacho pridiani cibi onere, tandem suadentibus amicis egressus est."

⁴¹¹ Josephus implies that Gaius did not want to leave the games because it was the last day and he did not wish to miss any of the performances.

appearance on the stage, and would have had them return to the theater to perform, had not their leader pled illness. At this point, Gaius is assassinated.

Suetonius offers two versions of the attack, both of which have Cassius Chaerea striking the first blow.⁴¹² In the first version, Cassius is able to catch Gaius off guard precisely because he is speaking with the boys. Cassius slices his neck with a cutting action (*caesim, discidisce*) as he exclaims the ritual words of sacrifice “*hoc age!*”⁴¹³ This version fulfills the omens relating to the sacrifice that was to be made to Jupiter by Cassius. In the second version, Cassius strikes the emperor down after he had given him the watchword. This recalls the reasons that Suetonius had offered for Chaerea’s desire to kill the emperor: the insulting and denigrating watchwords that the emperor was accustomed to give him. That Gaius chooses “Jupiter” for the watchword concludes the account neatly, bringing the human and divine into harmonious operation against the emperor. As the emperor lies wounded on the ground, the others came forward and dispatched him with thirty wounds. Some strike at the private parts of the emperor (*quidam etiam per obscaena ferrum adegerunt*, 58). The attack on the genitals of the tyrant suggest not only a cutting off of his descendants, but recall the overthrow and castration of the proto-tyrant, Uranus.

Suetonius creates a narrative that adheres to the pattern of a tyrant being assassinated by those against whom he had directed his hubris. It is the emperor’s insulting behavior that brings about both the anger of Cassius Chaerea and that desire for

⁴¹² For an analysis of the literary and linguistic presentation of the scene, see Lounsbury (1987) 85-6.

⁴¹³ For the ritualistic quality of this account and, specifically, of the phrase *hoc age!*, see Gorringer (1993) 216.

revenge which leads finally to the death of the emperor.⁴¹⁴ Suetonius includes many other elements that traditionally contribute to the downfall of a tyrant: fear of punishment, hubris, effeminacy, carousing, and contempt all play parts in the downfall of the emperor. Indeed, it is fear that makes the success of the conspiracy against Gaius possible, when those who should have protected the emperor stand aside because the emperor had caused them to fear that they would soon face punishment. In the final analysis, however, Suetonius has in the *Caligula* added yet another name to the long list of tyrants killed in revenge for an act of hubris.

Domitian

The account of Domitian's death is a story of hatred and fear that is modeled, moreover, on the story of the death of the tyrant Alexander of Pherae.⁴¹⁵ The *Julius* tells of an emperor who was assassinated by the senators whom he had insulted. Gaius was murdered in revenge for an act of insult, while those who should have protected him stood aside on account of their fear of future punishment. The *Domitian* emphasizes the role that hatred and fear play in bringing about the fall of a tyrant. The focus, however, is

⁴¹⁴ For Aristotle, the hubris of a tyrant is one of the two principle motivations for a conspirator. These insults, according to Aristotle, often consist in degrading sexual acts or remarks. As we saw above, this was the motivation behind the conspiracy against the Peisistratids. A conspiracy was also launched against the tyrant Periander, Aristotle reports, by one of his favorites, after the tyrant asked him, when they were carousing together, if he was yet with child by him (Arist. *Pol.* 5.10, 1311^a39-1311^b1). This is precisely the sort of insulting behavior that led Cassius Chaerea to move against Gaius.

⁴¹⁵ For the assassination of Alexander of Pherae by his wife and her three brothers, see Cic. *de Off.* 2.25; Val. Max. 9.13 ext. 3; Plut. *Pelopidas* 35. For a review of the sources for the life and reign of Alexander, see Sprawski (2006) 135-47.

on fear. It is fear that causes Domitian to act in a way that makes him both feared and hated and, ultimately, that precipitates his assassination.

Suetonius arranges the eidological section of the life in such a way that the murder of the emperor is the natural and inevitable culmination of his life and reign. The rubrics are arranged in a way that suggests a progressive decline in the reign of the emperor. Suetonius first describes the positive aspects of Domitian's reign,⁴¹⁶ before observing that the emperor did not persevere in *clementia* and *abstinentia*, but descended instead into *saevitia* and *cupiditas*, and more quickly into the former than the latter (*Dom.* 10). Suetonius brings the eidological section to a close with a description of the emperor's *saevitia* (*Dom.* 11), *avaritia* (*Dom.* 12), and lack of *civilitas* ("minime civilis animi," *Dom.* 12.3-13).⁴¹⁷

These vices made the emperor an object of terror and hatred to all (*per haec terribilis cunctis et invisus*, *Dom.* 14.1). The particular vices and actions upon which Suetonius focused explain how the emperor aroused both fear and hatred in his subjects. The fear and hatred that a tyrant arouses often inspires a tyrannicide to act. Fear that the

⁴¹⁶ The emperor's positive act includes providing public games, entertainments, and spectacles (*Dom.* 4), his building program (*Dom.* 5), military campaigns (*Dom.* 6), innovations in the customs of the state (*Dom.* 7), administration of justice (*Dom.* 8), and clemency and generosity (*Dom.* 9).

⁴¹⁷ These rubrics devoted to the *saevitia* and *avaritia* of the emperor serve more to close the eidological section than open the death-narrative. As Jones (1996) 117 observes, the eidological section opens in chapter 3 with the observation that the emperor's rapacity was increased by his need and his savagery by his fear (*inopia rapax, metu saevus*, 3.2). The *Domitian* lacks, I believe, the fully organic transitions that can be found in the *Julius*, *Caligula*, and *Nero*.

tyrant intends to strike him moves the tyrannicide to strike first. When combined with a desire for revenge, hatred will, as Aristotle observed, cause the tyrannicide to strike out both rashly and emotionally. By establishing that Domitian had made himself an object of terror and hatred among his people, Suetonius has set the stage for his assassination.

Suetonius then identifies the conspirators as the emperor's friends, favorites, and even wife ("tandem oppressus est insidiis amicorum libertorumque intimorum simul et uxoris," *Dom.* 14.1). Suetonius does not name the conspirators. Regardless of whether he knew their identities, he creates a biographical narrative that uses this ignorance, feigned or actual, to put the reader into the position of the emperor, who was necessarily unaware of the conspiracy moving against him and of the identities of those conspirators.⁴¹⁸ The vices and emotions upon which Suetonius had focused do not continue to predominate as the emperor's death draws near. The fear and hatred that Domitian inspired may have motivated the assassins, but the focus now turns to the fear that the emperor himself experienced.

The narrative now depicts a tyrant who must live with the knowledge of his approaching death. The portents of his impending death and the fear-inspired actions that Domitian takes in response to these portents make up the majority of the account. Suetonius first reports that Domitian had known the year, day, and hour of his death since he was a young man (*Dom.* 14.1):

annum diemque ultimum uitae iam pridem suspectum habebat, horam
etiam nec non et genus mortis. adolescentulo Chaldaei cuncta

⁴¹⁸ Suetonius is here crafting a narrative that conforms to what Stuart (1928) 78 referred to as "the law of biographical relevance," the telling of events from the perspective of the biographical subject. For Plutarch's adherence to this law, see Pelling (2011) 22.

praedixerant; pater quoque super cenam quondam fungis abstinenter
palam irriserat ut ignarum sortis suae, quod non ferrum potius timeret.

He had for a long time then had a suspicion about the final year and day of his life, indeed even the hour and the manner of his death. When he was a young man, the Chaldaeans had predicted all these things: His father even once over dinner had once openly mocked him for abstaining from mushrooms, as if he did not know of his own fate, that he should not rather fear the sword.

Suetonius here relates the *Domitian* both to other lives in the *Caesares* and to the stock portrait of the tyrant. This story of Vespasian laughing at his son's fear of mushrooms puts the reader in mind not only of the murder of Claudius but also of the gallows humor of Vespasian. The fate of Claudius puts both Domitian, and now the reader, in mind of the dangers the emperor faces. The good humor of Vespasian serves to highlight by way of contrast the fear now felt by Domitian. Vespasian was a good emperor who laughed in the face of death. Domitian is "pavidus semper atque anxius" (*Dom.* 14.2). He is a tyrant who is plagued with the fear that afflicts all tyrants.

Suetonius next describes the actions that this fear inspires. The emperor first abstains from behaviors in which he otherwise would have engaged (*Dom.* 14.2-14.3). He then begins to take affirmative precautions, first lining a portico on which he walked with reflecting stones and then adopting the practice of questioning prisoners in private as he himself holds their chains (*Dom.* 14.4). His fear finally turns lethal as he puts two men to death. He executes Epaphroditus, the *a libellis* who had assisted Nero in his suicide, to offer an example to his own aides lest they come to believe that it is ever appropriate to play a part in the death of their patron ("ne bono quidem exemplo audendam esse patroni necem," *Dom.* 14.4). He also kills Flavius Clemens, an indolent and contemptibly lazy individual. Domitian put him to death "repente ex tenuissima suspicione." This

execution, Suetonius concludes, hastened his own death (“quo maxime facto maturavit sibi exitium,” *Dom.* 15.1). As with Caesar, Domitian acts in a way that hastens his own death. Caesar’s intention to assume the title of king hastened the conspiracy against him (“quae causa coniuratis maturandi fuit,” *Jul.* 80.1). When the tyrant acts in character, he brings his own death closer.

As in the *Julius* and the *Caligula*, it is the fact that the behavior of the emperor provides the assassins with their motivation that is essential. Little detail is offered about the conspiracy itself. Suetonius had noted that the *amici*, *liberti intimi*, and *uxor* of the *princeps* all took part in the conspiracy, but beyond this he says little about how they went about forming their plan or even who these conspirators were. This sparing use of detail reflects not only the perspective of the biographer, but also the focus of the biographer on the role the emperor plays in bringing about his own demise.

As soon as the murder of Flavius has been recorded, and its role in hastening Domitian’s *exitium* noted, Suetonius offers a catalogue of omens that advances the work to its conclusion.⁴¹⁹ This catalogue concludes with the prediction of the astrologer

⁴¹⁹ Over the course of eight months, lightning strikes proceed from the temple of Jupiter, to the temple of the Flavians, to the Palace, and finally to the emperor’s own bedroom (15.2); Suetonius arranges these strikes to suggest that Jupiter is homing in on the emperor, as Domitian’s exclamation – *feriat iam quem volet*, 15.2 – acknowledges. A tree associated with the good fortune of Vespasian withers. The Fortuna of Praeneste, which had returned a favorable omen in every year of Domitian’s reign, now predicts a dire outcome, *nec sine sanguinis mentione* (15.2). Minerva declares in a dream that she can no longer protect the emperor, as she has been disarmed by Jove. Syme (1983) 135 n. 81 observes that the phrase *continuis octo mensibus* bridges the chronological gap of eight

Ascletarion that the emperor will soon die. Domitian tests the astrologer by asking him to predict his own death. He replies that he would be rent by dogs. Domitian seeks to prove him wrong and discredit his powers by ordering him put to death and burned. As this was being done, the pyre was overturned and the body of the seer seized and mangled by dogs. Word of this is then brought to Domitian by a mime named Latinus. That Domitian hears of Ascletarion's fate from a *mimus* over dinner *inter ceteras diei fabulas*⁴²⁰ adds a theatrical overtone to the story.⁴²¹ That this last anecdote concerns an attempt to defeat a prediction and alter fate recalls, as we will see, the efforts of earlier emperors, most notably Nero, to alter or escape their fates. The tendency of the tyrant to misinterpret oracles goes back to at least the account of Croesus in Herodotus.

Suetonius continues with a series of signs that occur on the day before and in the hours leading up to the murder of the emperor (*Dom.* 16). These omens re-present the material of the preceding chapters in a compressed and symbolic form. The temporal sequence is carefully set out: *pridie quam periret*, Domitian makes two prophetic pronouncements of his own end; *circa mediam noctem*, he leaps from bed in terror; *mane*, he sentences a haruspex to death for his interpretation of certain omens as indicative of a *mutatio rerum* (16.1). Up to his last moment, the emperor's fear drives him to seek to escape his fate.

months between the execution of Flavius Clemens and the assassination of Domitian. The omens also serve the dramatic purpose of retarding the narrative and building suspense.

⁴²⁰ These details are not recorded by Dio.

⁴²¹ For the identity of the mime, Latinus, see Mooney (1930) 584-5. Latinus was a *delator* and would, presumably, have intended to provide Domitian with news of the sort he wished to hear; Suetonius has created a situation rich in irony.

As his end draws near, Domitian scratches his head and draws blood. He concludes that this was the bloodshed he had feared. At the fifth hour, the hour fated to be his last, Domitian asks the time and is told falsely that it is already the sixth hour. Error and deception surround the final hours of the emperor. Nero, as we will see, believed that the loss and recovery of Britain and Armenia fulfilled the prophecy that he would suffer a loss and recovery, much as Domitian believed that his drawing of blood fulfilled the prophecy of the blood he would shed. Likewise, as in the case of Galba, Domitian goes to his death immediately after being misled into believing that he was now safe. The assassination then takes place, described in two sentences (*Dom.* 16.2):

His velut transacto iam periculo laetum festinantemque ad corporis curam
Parthenius cubiculo praepositus convertit, nuntians esse qui magnum
nescio quid afferret, nec differendum. Itaque summotis omnibus, in
cubiculum se recepit atque ibi occisus est.

Parthenius, having positioned himself before the emperor's bedchamber, announcing to the emperor, who was rejoicing at these things as if the danger had now passed and was hastening to take care of his body, that someone bore great news of some sort and would not be put off, he turned him from his purpose. And so, having sent everyone away, he took himself into his bedchamber and there he was killed.

The suddenness of the murder is reflected by the sudden introduction of Parthenius into the middle of the sentence and his abrupt altering of the emperor's purpose.⁴²² The murder comes upon the reader in the text as suddenly as it came upon the emperor in life.

Only at this point does Suetonius describe the nature of the conspiracy and the details of the assassination (17.1). He reports that Domitilla's steward, Stephanus, who had been accused of misappropriation of funds, aided the plot (*tunc interceptarum*

⁴²² For the identity and fate of Parthenius, the freedman and chamberlain of Domitian, see Mooney (1930) 587.

pecuniarum reus, consilium operamque optulit, 17.1). Pretending to betray the conspiracy, Stephanus instead stabs Domitian in the groin. As in the *Caligula*, the desire to strike at the emperor and his progeny is reflected in the attack's being directed specifically at the emperor's groin.⁴²³ A struggle ensued in which several named individuals inflict seven wounds on Domitian. Suetonius reports, based on the testimony of a *puer* who had been present, that Domitian had asked for a dagger that should have been hidden under his pillow; there was nothing there but the hilt.⁴²⁴ This account, however, on the whole adds little to the reader's understanding of the conspiracy, save that the fear of facing future punishment played a key part in the plot: Stephanus provided *consilium operamque* to the conspiracy because he was *interceptorum pecuniarum reus*.

In the case of Domitian, therefore, the savagery and avarice of the emperor arouse both fear and anger among the people. These two emotions are those that Aristotle had identified as the most common cause of a tyrant's assassination. In the case of Domitian, they set the stage for the removal of the emperor. In response to this popular hatred and fear, Domitian himself begins to fear. Like the tyrant described by Xenophon, Aristotle,

⁴²³ The detail is reported only by Suetonius, although Philostratus has Stephanus strike the emperor's thigh (v. *Apoll.* 8.25).

⁴²⁴ The *puer* is mentioned by Suetonius alone. Otho also keeps a dagger under his pillow on the night before his suicide. *Otho* 11.2. Dio (67.17.1) reports that Parthenius had removed the blade from the sword before sending in Stephanus. The modern commentators do not explain why Parthenius chose to remove the blade rather than simply removing the dagger.

and Plato, he takes steps to protect himself even in his own palace; wherever the tyrant goes, he is in enemy territory.

His fear at last drives him to kill Epaphroditus and Flavius Clemens. These killings motivate those around the emperor to act; the fear of being killed by the emperor leads to the killing of the emperor. Stephanus, himself facing a risk of punishment, struck out at the tyrant who would have administered that punishment. The death-narrative in the *Domitian* is a case study of how the tyrant's own character and behavior lead inevitably to his own demise.

The death-narrative of the *Domitian* tells a tale similar in key respects to the tale of the death of Alexander of Pherae. Alexander's reign, like Domitian's, was characterized above all else by its savage cruelty. Plutarch reports how Alexander would punish men by having them buried alive, or sewn into the skins of wild boars or bears and torn apart by the dogs — the fate that had, by a coincidence that Domitian himself had sought to avoid, befallen the astrologer Ascleparion — and had on two occasions slaughtered all of the inhabitants of cities that were his allies (Plut. *Pelopidas* 29). He was murdered by his wife, Thebe, whom he both loved and feared. Fear, indeed, is the emotion that predominates in the traditional account not only of Domitian's death, but of Alexander's as well.⁴²⁵

⁴²⁵ Cicero includes Alexander, along with Dionysius, among those who must be afraid of those in whom they seek to inspire fear: “etenim qui se metui volent, a quibus metuentur, eosdem metuant ipsi necesse est.” Cic. *de Off.* 2.24-25. He describes Alexander being led to his bedroom by an armed guard, sword brandished before him; he enters the bedchamber only after the room has been thoroughly searched. As the above-quoted sentence indicates, Cicero emphasizes *metus* in this account.

The wife of Alexander was described as both the cause and conclusion of his fear: “cuius timoris eadem et causa et finis fuit” (Val. Max. 9.13 ext.3).⁴²⁶ Suetonius identifies the wife of Domitian as a member of the conspiracy against him, but she plays no part in the assassination according to Suetonius. Thebe led the conspirators into the emperor’s bedroom, after having had the dog guarding the bedchamber and the sword that hung above the bed removed; led by Stephanus, the steward of Domitilla, the conspirators attack Domitian in his bedroom, after someone had removed the blade from the emperor’s dagger. Domitian is wrestled to the ground and stabbed by multiple assailants; Alexander was held down by the three brothers of his wife and run through with a sword. Suetonius has included the details that he has in his account of the death of Domitian in order to associate the emperor and his death in his bedroom with the death of Alexander, another tyrant who was plagued with unrelenting fear, in his bedroom.

Suetonius makes no mention of the arrangements or even the desires of Domitian relating to the succession.⁴²⁷ This reflects, in part, the emperor’s having been assassinated. Suetonius, an official in the court of Hadrian, would also have had his

⁴²⁶ According to Plutarch, Thebe attacked Alexander out of hatred and fear, both of which arose in response to his cruelty. Plut. *Pelopidas* 35. According to Cicero, she attacked him “propter pelicatus suspicionem.” Cic. *de Off.* 2.25.

⁴²⁷ The *Domitian* records the reactions of people, army, and senate to the end of the life and reign of the ruler. The people respond *indifferenter* (*Dom.* 23.1). The soldiery bear the news heavily (“gravissime tulit,” *Dom.* 23.1) and seek to have the fallen emperor proclaimed a god and, when they fail in this effort, begin to demand the execution of his murderers. The senate, in contrast, rejoiced (“laetatus est,” *Dom.* 23.1), subjecting the fallen emperor to insulting and biting outbursts (“contumeliossimo atque acerbissimo adclamationum genere laceraret,” *Dom.* 23.1).

reason for wanting to avoid implicating Nerva in the murder of the last of the Flavians. Suetonius concludes the biography of Domitian and the work as a whole by observing that the emperor's dream that the state of the empire would soon be happy was fulfilled: "sicut sane brevi evenit abstinentia et moderatione insquentium principum," *Dom.* 23.2. Suetonius may have felt the need to exercise restraint as the Flavian dynasty came to an end; the author had had no such incentives, however, when it came to the end of the Julio-Claudians with the suicide of the emperor Nero.

The Suicide of the Julio-Claudians: The Case of the Emperor Nero

Suetonius' description of the death of the emperor Nero has long been considered the finest writing in the *Caesares*.⁴²⁸ Indeed, the passage has been judged "the closest Suetonius gets to Tacitus and other Roman historians in the rhetorical act of *narratio*."⁴²⁹ Although Nero's death does not conclude the biography, as the imperial death-narratives generally do in the *Caesares*, it does follow naturally from the immediately preceding rubrics depicting the emperor's acts of ever-increasing violence.⁴³⁰ Suetonius precedes

⁴²⁸ See, e.g., Mooney (1930) 19: "The most graphic and impressive accounts which he has given are those of the assassination of Julius Caesar and the flight and death of Nero; the latter is praised by Montesquieu as a 'chef-d'oeuvre.'"

⁴²⁹ Hägg (2012) 226, who continues that it is also, "somewhat worryingly, the farthest from his usual biographical technique." That Champlin (2003) 1-6 begins his recent biography of the sixth emperor with an account of his death that by and large follows that found in the *Caesares* reveals the continuing dramatic power of the Suetonian narrative.

⁴³⁰ The review of the emperor's physical attributes and character traits is placed after the account of the emperor's obsequies in chapter 50. Rubrics continue through chapter 56, after which follow the emperor's formal death notice and the description of the public reactions to news of suicide. The death-narrative both interrupts the eidological section of

the emperor's last days and death with a review of the expanding circle of imperial violence that characterized the emperor's rule. He begins with Nero's violence toward his own family (*Nero* 35), and then progresses through those outside of the imperial family: "nec minore saevitia foris et in exteros grassatus est" (*Nero* 36.1). Just as the revelry and raging of Gaius led to the formation of conspiracies against him ("ita bacchantem atque grassantem non defuit plerisque animus adoriri," *Cal.* 36.1), so too Nero's raging ("grassatus est") leads to the formation of conspiracies against him. As in the *Caligula*, these initial conspiracies are here likewise discovered and thwarted (*Nero* 36.1). Nero suppresses his opposition with tyrannical savagery (*Nero* 36.2):

Coniurati e vinculis triplicium catenarum dixere causam, cum quidam ultro crimen faterentur, nonnulli etiam imputarent, tamquam aliter illi non possent nisi morte succurrere dedecorato flagitiis omnibus. Damnatorum liberi urbe pulsati enectique veneno aut fame; constat quosdam cum paedagogis et capsariis uno prandio pariter necatos, alios diurnum victum prohibitos quaerere.

The conspirators pled their case while bound in triple sets of chains, some freely admitted their crime, some even making a favor of it, saying that there was no way except by death that they could help a man disgraced by every kind of wickedness. The children of those who were condemned were banished or put to death by poison or starvation; a number are known to have been slain all together at a single meal along with their preceptors and attendants, while others were prevented from earning their daily bread.

Some of these details — forcing the accused to make their case already in chains — are found in other accounts of Nero's reign. Suetonius' inclusion of the triple chains does comport with his intention to depict Nero as a tyrant; the placing of his opponents in

the biography, therefore, and is itself interrupted by the description of the emperor. I believe that Suetonius constructs his narrative in this way in order to emphasize how Nero's unnatural death — a suicide that ended his life prematurely — nevertheless follows logically from his consistently violent behavior in the principate.

chains has been characteristic behavior of the tyrant since Zeus had Prometheus chained to the rock.⁴³¹ The exile and murder of even the children of the conspirators, the slaughter of all those attending a dinner, including the *paedagogi* and *capsarii*, as well as the prevention of men from earning a living are specific to Suetonius.⁴³² Suetonius has created an account that deliberately exaggerates both the intensity and the reach of the emperor's *saevitia*.

This accords with what follows, as Nero now begins to murder without any moderation or discrimination (“nullus posthac adhibitus dilectus aut modus interimendi quoscumque libuisset quacumque de causa,” *Nero* 37.1). This circle of violence then expands to encompass both the city and its people: “sed nec populo aut moenibus patriae pepercit” (*Nero* 38.1). Nero attacks not only his family and his political enemies, therefore, but the people and even the very walls of the *patria* as well. Instead of adorning the city in the manner of a beneficent steward as Aristotle counsels the tyrant following the way of moderation,⁴³³ Nero burns the city down “quasi offensus deformitate veterum aedificiorum et angustiis flexurisue vicorum” (*Nero* 38.1). His desire to transform the city into a private garden is typical of the degenerate tastes of easterners and tyrants; one is put in mind both of the Lydians constructing gardens from

⁴³¹ See, e.g., Aesch., *P.V.* 5-6. See also Griffith (1983) 82, who notes that “[i]mages of yoking, taming, etc. are common in this play ... as Zeus tries to break P’s unruly spirit.”

⁴³² Bradley (1978) 222 concludes that “the information may have been derived from an account of the Pisonian conspiracy used only by Suetonius or else from an account of the other plot.” Bradley finds the account confusing, but concludes that this confusion may be “deliberately contrived.”

⁴³³ Arist. *Pol.* 5.11, 1314^b37-8: κατασκευάζειν γὰρ δεῖ καὶ κοσμεῖν τὴν πόλιν ὥς ἐπίτροπον ὄντα καὶ μὴ τύραννον.

which the Sun was excluded,⁴³⁴ and of the tyrant Polycrates, ζηλώσας τὰ Λυδῶν μαλακά, constructing a street in Samos in imitation of one in Sardis.⁴³⁵ That Suetonius portrays

⁴³⁴ See Clearchus (Wehrli) fr. 43a = Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae* 515e: Κλέαρχος δ' ἐν τῇ τετάρτῃ περὶ Βίων 'Λυδοί,' φησί, 'διὰ τρυφήν παραδείσους κατασκευασάμενοι καὶ κηπαίους αὐτοὺς ποιήσαντες ἐσκιατροφοῦντο, τρυφερώτερον. ἡγησάμενοι τὸ μηδ' ὅλως αὐτοῖς ἐπιπίπτειν τὰς τοῦ ἡλίου ἀνγὰς. ("Clearchus in the fourth book of his *περὶ Βίων* says that 'The Lydians on account of luxury prepared garden parks and having made them park-like they shaded themselves, believing that it was more luxurious to avoid the rays of the sun entirely.'"). The Peripatetic Clearchus offers the Lydians as an example of a people who are led by luxury (διὰ τρυφήν) to commit such acts of manipulation of nature, and then to acts of growing hubris. They finally advance in hubris (πόρρω προάγοντες ὕβρεως) to the point of committing degrading acts of sexual violence against their enemies. They are, ultimately, themselves reduced to effeminacy, which in turn leads to their defeat. See Clearchus (Wehrli) fr. 43a = Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae* 515f-516a: καὶ τέλος τὰς ψυχὰς ἀποθηλυνθέντες ἠλλάξαντο τὸν τῶν γυναικῶν βίον, διόπερ καὶ γυναῖκα τύραννον ὁ βίος εὑρετο αὐτοῖς μίαν τῶν ὑβρισθειςῶν Ὀμφάλην, ἥτις πρώτη κατήρξε τῆς εἰς Λυδοὺς πρεπούσης τιμωρίας, τὸ γὰρ ὑπὸ γυναικὸς ἄρχεσθαι ὑβριζομένους σημειὸν ἐστὶ βίας ("And in the end, having grown effeminate in their hearts they adopted the lifestyle of women, wherefore life selected a woman tyrant for them, one of the women they had raped, Omphale. She first began to implement punishments fit for the Lydians. For being ruled by a woman and abused is a sign of violence."). The pattern followed by the Lydians as a people seem, in the Peripatetics, to have been applied generally to tyrants. Cooper (2000) 324-6 concludes that Clearchus accepts a theory of historical causation according to which unusual prosperity sets in motion a kind of chain reaction of decadence: from πλοῦτος to τρυφή to ὕβρις to ἀπώλεια. He then applies this theory of causation specifically to autocratic rulers. Both Pelling (2000) and Gorman and Gorman (2007) have cautioned against drawing such far-reaching conclusions from excerpts preserved in Athenaeus.

Nero as a tyrant in the specifically Greek tradition is suggested by his reporting that Nero modified a quotation from Greek tragedy, Ἐμοῦ θανόντος γαῖα μειχθήτω πυρί, to ἔμοῦ ζῶντος.⁴³⁶ Nero is a tyrant willing to sacrifice the public good for his private luxury.

The *exitus* of the emperor occupies chapters 40 to 50 of the *Nero*. The outward expansion in Nero's circle of *saevitia* is now paralleled by a corresponding circle of enemies set on ending his reign. The story begins in the provinces, with the rebellion of Vindex, and ends in the house of a friend of the emperor at Rome. Suetonius describes the defections and Nero's reactions to them. He narrates Nero's flight from Rome, his last hours, and his death in chapters 47.3 to 49.4. the burial of the emperor follows in chapter 50. The events are, for the most part, narrated from the emperor's perspective.⁴³⁷

⁴³⁵ Clearchus (Wehrli) fr. 44 = Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae* 540f: τούτων δὲ ἡ μὲν Σαμίων λαύρα στενωπὴ τις ἦν γυναικῶν δημιουργῶν πλήθουσα καὶ τῶν πρὸς ἀπόλαυσιν καὶ ἀκρασίαν πάντων βρωμάτων ὄντως ἐνέπλησε τὴν Ἑλλάδα.

⁴³⁶ In the *de Finibus*, Cicero refers to the line as an utterance both *inhumana et scelerata* (3.19.64), the sort that one would attribute to a man who betrayed his country for his own utility or benefit. The care for posterity that such a man betrays runs contrary to man's social nature: "Quodque nemo in summa solitudine vitam agere velit ne cum infinita quidem voluptatum abundantia, facile intellegitur nos ad coniunctionem congregationemque hominum et ad naturalem communitatem esse natos." That man is born for community is, of course, the first principle of Aristotle's *Politics*.

⁴³⁷ Bradley (1978) 240 contends that Suetonius "is interested only in recounting events from the viewpoint of the subject of the biography and any development or situation which has no immediate and direct effect on Nero is excluded no matter what its importance in the wider historical perspective." Warmington (1977) 106 makes essentially the same observation.

The initial narrative focus is as much on the world that has been forced to endure him and that is now going to cast him off as it is on the emperor himself: “*talem principem paulo minus quattuordecim annos perpessus terrarum orbis tandem destituit*,” (*Nero* 41.1). It is the “*orbis terrarum*” that will remove the emperor. The emphasis on the phrase “*talem principem*” suggests that it is the rule of Nero described in the eidological section that is the cause of this desire to seek his removal; his *destitutio* results from his performance, from his being *talis princeps*.⁴³⁸ The “*talem*” here at the opening of the narrative of Nero’s last hours parallels the “*ita*” with which the account of the demise of Gaius begins; both emperors are going to meet their fates because of the type of rulers that they were. Nero had shown himself to be this sort of ruler to his family, to the nobles, and, finally, to the *populus* and *patria*. The world now responds and removes him from power. Cassius Chaerea murdered Gaius because of the insult he had suffered at the emperor’s hands. The world turns against Nero because of the violence it suffered at his hands.

The death-narrative proper is preceded by a catalogue of the signs and predictions of Nero’s abandonment by the world (40.2-3). As in the *Caligula*, these signs create a transition from the eidological section to the chronological narrative of the emperor’s death, moving the reader from the timeless world of the static portrait of the reign to the narrative moment at which the *motus Galliarum* begins. As in the *Caligula*, however, these signs are also strongly evocative of the traditional portrait of the tyrant. Nero is promised a tyranny in the east: “*Sponderant tamen quidam destituto Orientis*

⁴³⁸ Bradley (1978) 242 observes that sections 40-50 “follow swiftly the demonstration of Nero’s enormities (ss.26.1ff) so that at this point of the biography feeling is already directed against Nero; *talem principem* (s.40.1) emphasises this from the outset.”

dominationem, nonnulli nominatim regnum Hierosolymorum” (40.2). Nero is here explicitly linked, therefore, with eastern despotism.

That Suetonius is constructing a portrait of Nero as a tyrannical ruler is further suggested by the emperor’s interpretation of an oracle from Delphi (*Nero* 40.3):

Ut vero consulto Delphis Apolline septuagensimum ac tertium annum cavendum sibi audivit, quasi eo demum obiturus, ac nihil coniectans de aetate Galbae, tanta fiducia non modo senectam sed etiam perpetuam singularemque concepit felicitatem, ut amissis naufragio pretiosissimis rebus non dubitaverit inter suos dicere pisces eas sibi relatueros.

And then after having consulted the Delphic oracle he heard that he must beware the seventy third year, as if he were going to die at that time, and taking no thought for the age of Galba, with such confidence not only in his old age but also in his perpetual and singular felicity, when he had lost some very precious items in a shipwreck he did not hesitate to say to his friends that the fish would return these things to him.

This is an unmistakable allusion to the story told of the ring of Polycrates, the tyrant of Samos who, after hurling his ring into the sea, was served a fish at dinner in which he found that ring (Hdt. 3.40-42). Suetonius has placed Nero in the tradition of the tyrants of the east and eastern Mediterranean, associating him, as he had already done in the case of Gaius and his building program (*Cal.* 21), specifically with Polycrates of Samos.

Nero expresses indifference to the political situation in Gaul, but takes deep offense at criticism of his musical talents.⁴³⁹ After returning to Rome, he again lapses into frivolity, passing his time with his advisors discussing a hydraulic organ, rather than the

⁴³⁹ He receives two reports of Vindex’s uprising in Gaul in one day. *Nero* 40.4. In response to the first report, he goes off to watch the athletic contests. In response to the second, he utters threats of vengeance, but remains at dinner nonetheless. Nero responds to Vindex only after he has received a series of edicts from the rebellious provincial attacking his lyre-playing and addressing him as Ahenobarbus. *Nero* 41.1.

military situation.⁴⁴⁰ Nero is depicted as a ruler concerned more with gymnastic contests, the appreciation of his talent as a citharoedus, and his new hydraulic organ than with the revolution under way. He urges the senate to avenge him, but only for the insults Vindex made against his artistic talents. He does so in a letter; he could not be present in person, *excusato languore faucium* (*Nero* 41.1). The emperor will risk his kingdom, but the artist cannot risk his voice. This is consistent with the portrait of Nero as more artist than emperor that Suetonius has created in the eidological section.

Nero remains more a performer than a ruler when he receives the news that Galba has revolted.⁴⁴¹ His reaction to Vindex had been subdued and restrained. He returns to form, however, in the performance he delivers in response to the news of Galba's defection (*Nero* 42.1):

Postquam deinde etiam Galbam et Hispanias descivisse cognovit, conlapsus animoque male facto diu sine voce et prope intermortuus iacuit, utque resipit, veste discissa, capite converberato, actum de se pronuntiavit consolantique nutriculae et aliis quoque iam principibus similia accidissememoranti, se vero praeter ceteros inaudita et incognita pati respondit, qui summum imperium vivus amitteret.

After he then learned that Galba and Spain had also revolted, he collapsed and lay out cold for a long time, without a word and seemingly dead. As he came to, he rent his garb, beat his brow, and announced that it was done for him; he replied to his nurse, when she sought to console him and was reminding him that similar things had befallen other princes before, that he unlike the others was enduring unheard of and unknown things, because he was losing supreme power while still alive.

⁴⁴⁰ Bradley (1978) 250 explains that Nero's lack of response was probably the result of his reasonable expectation that the governors of neighboring provinces would put down the revolt of the governor of this unarmed province. Steidle (1963) 87-90 notes the role that Suetonius as artifex plays in the narrative account of his death.

⁴⁴¹ For a discussion of the historical events leading up to and surrounding Galba's defection, see Warmington (1977) 109-10; Bradley (1978) 254-6.

Suetonius here marks out a turning point in the *destitutio* of Nero. The phrase “postquam deinde etiam Galbam” alerts the reader that Galba’s revolt is a significant event, as does the histrionic reaction of the emperor, a reaction that is in stark contrast to the exaggerated nonchalance he had exhibited at the news of Vindex’s revolt.⁴⁴² Suetonius also continues to build on his eidological portrait of Nero as the artistic tyrant; here, Nero assumes the dramatic role of the tyrant who has lost his *summum imperium* while still *vivus*. The rent garments, the dramatic gesture of beating his forehead, the figure of the nurse comforting him in his affliction place Nero in the tradition of Priam and Xerxes, Oedipus, and even Dido. The ironic note — that Nero weeps because he alone has lost his power without also losing his life — adds an element of comedy to the performance.

Nero plays a different role in response to Galba’s revolt, but a role nevertheless. Changed circumstances did not produce a changed, nor an improved, ruler: “nec eo setius quicquam ex consuetudine luxus atque desidia omisit et inminuit” (*Nero* 42.2). Nero’s foray into playing the tragic tyrant does not remove him from being the vicious tyrant. He remains dedicated to *luxuria* and *desidia*. He continues to feast. He composes lascivious verses aimed at the rebels. Just as he had allowed a new water organ to distract him from the military situation, so now he allows the theater to distract him from the business of being emperor: “ac spectaculis theatri clam inlatus cuidam scaenico placenti nuntium misit abuti eum occupationibus suis” (42.2). Nero is unable to keep himself far from the theater and the stage even in the face of real threats to his reign and his life.

Nero’s *saevitia* and detachment from reality remain and are both reflected in the plans that he is believed (“creditur,” *Nero* 43.1) to have formed at the beginning of this

⁴⁴² For a discussion of the contrast in Nero’s reactions, see Gorringer (1993) 285.

disturbance; these are described as *multa et immania*. That they were *multa* accords with Nero's fickleness; that they were *immania* confirms the *immanitas naturae* (*Nero* 7.1) of which Seneca is reported to have dreamed early in the biography. Suetonius indeed notes that these plans were "non abhorrentia a natura sua" (*Nero* 43.1). These included deposing and assassinating his army commanders and provincial governors on the grounds that they had conspired against him. He also considers murdering all exiles and men of Gallic birth at Rome in order to deprive the rebels of their potential allies and natural supporters. He considers poisoning the entire senate, a means not only of removing his opponents in the city, but of eliminating the good men at Rome as well. Nero is depicted, therefore, as planning to follow the advice that Periander had first offered to his fellow tyrants and to remove all men in his realm who might challenge his authority and his rule.⁴⁴³ As we have seen, he also plans to burn Rome a second time, only now releasing wild beasts in order to hinder the people from protecting themselves (*Nero* 43.1). The portrait of the mad tyrant bent on wiping out large swaths of his people is not Suetonius' creation, but a commonplace of Greek literature about tyrants and eastern potentates.⁴⁴⁴

⁴⁴³ For Periander's advice to the tyrant seeking to hold on to his power, see Hdt. 5.92; Arist. *Pol.* 3.13, 1284^a26-30 and 5.10, 1311^a20-22. Suetonius is also suggesting that Nero is exhibiting the tyrant's detestation of good men.

⁴⁴⁴ The best known example of this sort of tyrannical action is found in scripture, in Herod's slaughter of the innocents, an act carried out against all the members of a class in order to remove a threat posed by one member of that class.

Suetonius does not attest to the truth of these allegations.⁴⁴⁵ He does affirm, however, that Nero was deterred “non tam paenitentia quam perficiendi desperatione” (*Nero* 43.2). Although the existence of these plans had been only rumored (“creditur destinasse”), the reasons for his failing to carry them out are accompanied by no such qualification. These rumors illustrate the *immanitas* of the emperor; they may be untrue but they are the sort of things that a man of Nero’s character would do.⁴⁴⁶ The very fact that they could be believed confirms the depraved character of the man. That Nero would seek to retaliate against the provinces and city, the common people and senators, reflects his hatred of, and opposition to, the entire world.

Suetonius then describes the plan of action on which Nero actually settled: he would depose the consuls, assume the office himself, and then set off for Gaul (*Nero* 43.2-44.2). Suetonius explains that he chose to assume a sole consulship — a step that might have been warranted by the military crisis he faced — because of a superstitious belief (“quasi fatale esset,” *Nero* 43.2) that only a consul could subdue the province of Gaul. Suetonius has demonstrated, as an initial matter, that Nero remains a creature who is governed by superstition. Suetonius has, moreover, created a strong narrative parallel

⁴⁴⁵ For the likely historical roots from which these rumors grew and evolved, see Gorringer (1993) 290.

⁴⁴⁶ As Bradley (1978) 258 observes, these are “not to be treated as serious historical evidence. The rumours represent what Nero was thought to be capable of doing, not what he actually did. The outrageousness of the proposals readily shows this.” Gorringer (1993) 289 makes much the same point.

between the *Julius* and the *Nero*.⁴⁴⁷ Caesar was, of course, the man who in fact had subdued Gaul. He was assassinated, more significantly for the death-narrative in the *Nero*, when the rumor spread that he was planning to assume the kingship because of a prophecy that only a king could defeat the Parthians. Nero now plans to assume a sole consulship because of a similar prophecy that only a consul could defeat the Gauls. The regime of the Julio-Claudians begins and ends, therefore, with a plan to assume sole power; it is characterized by the usurpation of authority and the flouting of Republican practice.

Any expectation the reader might have had that Nero intended to assume a military command when he assumed this sole consulship is immediately thwarted. The emperor returns to his role as actor, but with no intention of acting the part of an *imperator* (*Nero* 43.2):

Ac susceptis fascibus cum post epulas triclinio digrederetur, innixus umeris familiarium affirmavit, simul ac primum provinciam attigisset, inermem se in conspectum exercituum proditurum nec quicquam aliud quam fleturum, revocatisque ad paenitentiam defectoribus insequenti die laetum inter laetos cantaturum epinicia, quae iam nunc sibi componi oporteret.

After he had taken up the fasces, when he was leaving the dining room after a banquet, as he leaned on his comrades for support, he affirmed that as soon as he should have set foot in the province, he would offer himself unarmed in the sight of the armies and would do nothing other than weep.

⁴⁴⁷ See Pelling (2009) 264, who explains that Nero has here drawn the wrong lesson from Caesar's example: "Nero at the end tries to learn from Caesar's lesson, becoming consul on the grounds that "the fates decreed that the Gauls could only be subdued by a consul" (*Nero* 43.2), whereas in Caesar's case the word "in the books of fate" was that "the Parthians could only be conquered by a king" (*Iul.* 79.3); but Nero sets about it the wrong way, throwing the current consuls out of office. It was the wrong lesson to learn, and it was anyway too late."

On the following day, when the rebels had been brought back repentant, joyful among the joyous he would sing epinicians, which he should really already be composing.

The juxtaposition of the fasces and his feasting effectively summarizes the regime of the emperor. Nero is the ruler who governs from the banquet hall. His last plan is perhaps his most Neronian; he will save himself by taking to the stage as an actor and will win back the troops by appearing before them in tears. Nero may not have thought his plan through realistically, but he has thought it through: his thoughts have already run forward to the celebration that will follow the return of the troops to loyalty when, *laetus inter laetos*, he will sing epinicians. It is on these songs of victory, not the campaign, that Nero believes he should be focused.⁴⁴⁸

Matters become more serious when Nero turns to the task of paying for his fantastic military adventures. Nero begins to levy taxes to pay for the instruments and musicians he plans to take on his campaign. His exactions are carried out “*ingenti fastidio et acerbitate*,” with the emperor accepting only newly minted coin, refined silver, and pure gold. He levies these taxes on every segment of society: “*partem etiam census omnes ordines conferre iussit et insuper inquilinos privatarum aedium atque insularum*

⁴⁴⁸ Nero had conducted just such an artistic campaign during his tour of Greece, putting military means and motifs in the service of his art. He now seeks to put art in the service of military aims. His attention to detail, however, remains undiminished. Suetonius observes that Nero’s *prima cura* was to select the wagons for carrying his theatrical equipment (“*scaenicis organis*,” *Nero* 44.1, which recalls Nero’s preference for discussing the newest hydraulic organs rather than Vindex’s revolt with his advisors) and having the hair of his concubines trimmed. His second care is for summoning the tribes to enlist; when no private citizens respond, Nero orders masters to provide a fixed number of slaves.

pensionem annuam repraesentare fisco” (*Nero* 44.2). It is in response to these exactions, Suetonius observes, that the people begin to revolt; they urge Nero to seek back the payments he has made to informers. For all of the savagery and violence of his reign, it is only when he imposes excessive taxes that the people turn against him. Nero’s *avaritia* begins to create *invidia* when the people learn that he profited from the high cost of grain. It is then announced (*nuntiaretur*) that in a time of shortage a grain ship had arrived from Alexandria carrying sand for the wrestlers (*Nero* 45.1). Nero’s maladministration of the state has created “odium omnium in se” (*Nero* 45.2).

This *odium omnium* seals the fate of the emperor. Before beginning the narrative of Nero’s last hours, Suetonius first offers several examples of how this hatred gave birth to public contempt for the emperor (*Nero* 45.2). This short collection of insults establishes that the public has not only been observing Nero’s behavior but also judging him for it. Nero, first the object of popular hatred, quickly becomes the object of popular contempt. A Greek inscription is hung on a statue of the emperor equating the artistic contests that Nero had earlier engaged in with the political challenges he now faces at the end of his reign. A sack is tied to a statue of the emperor, with a subscription stating the he deserved the fate worthy of a matricide. Nero will pay for his murder of Agrippina. Nero is said to have roused even the Galli/galli to rise up by means of his singing; art and politics are again in conflict. Finally, men pretend to fight with their slaves at night and call out for an avenger, a *vindex*, for help; by calling upon a *vindex* for help with their slaves they call upon Vindex for help with their master the emperor.

These details place the account of Nero’s demise squarely in line with the philosophical analysis of the tyrant and his struggle to maintain his hold on power.

Hatred and contempt are the traditional causes of a tyrant's fall from power. Both Aristotle and Cicero had maintained that the general hatred of the people is something against which the tyrant is utterly unable to defend himself: *multorum autem odiis nullas opes posse obsistere* (Cic. *de Off.* 2.23). By his violent attacks against every sector of society, his lavish private building program, and finally his harsh and confiscatory taxes, Nero has made himself an object of universal hatred. Out of this hatred, the contempt of the people is born and soon flourishes. Hatred first gives the people their reason to resist the emperor; contempt then provides them with the confidence to do so.

Fear, as we have seen, is the standard response of the tyrant to his impending downfall and demise. Suetonius uses a catalogue of dreams, auspices, and omens to show that Nero's fear is indeed growing. The first dreams date from the time just after he had murdered his mother. He dreams that someone is wrenching the helm of a ship from his hands, that Octavia is dragging him into thick darkness, that he is being surrounded by a swarm of winged ants, that the statues of the nations in Pompey's theatre surround him and stop him in his tracks, and, finally, that his favorite Spanish horse has been turned into a monkey, save for its head which continues to neigh tunefully. The first two dreams confirm that Nero will lose his *imperium* and his life. These dreams recall the expanding circle of violence, as their subjects expand outward from his family (Octavia), to the people (ants), and finally to the provinces (the statues of nations). That his horse — the animal, like Galba, comes from Spain — continues to sing after its metamorphosis comports with Nero's belief that he would earn his living by singing if he were ever deposed.

The dreams grew clearer as the end approached. The doors of the Mausoleum flew open and a voice was heard summoning Nero by name. The Lares fell to the ground in the midst of preparations for a sacrifice. Sporus gave Nero a ring, as he prepared to sacrifice, on which the rape of Proserpina had been engraved; if Nero wanted to learn his fate by sacrificing, he needed only look to this gift. When vows for the safety of the emperor and state were to be made, the keys of the temple could not be found. The Senate makes a double entendre suggesting that Nero will pay the price for Vindex's revolt. Finally, the emperor's last performance was of the Oedipus in Exile, a play that ended with the line: Θανεῖν μ' ἄνωγε σύγγαμος, μήτηρ, πατήρ.

Suetonius has now set forth fully the political causes and the circumstances of Nero's fall from power. Through his savagery, his avarice, and his devotion to acting he aroused the fear, the contempt, and the hatred of the Roman people and of the entire world. The rest of the account tells the tale of his final days and hours. While the passage contains some of Suetonius' finest writing, it adds nothing new to the political analysis of the reign and of the fall of Nero. He remains the creature of *luxuria*, tipping over his table and breaking his two favorite drinking cups, upon hearing that the other armies had revolted (*Nero* 47.1). He continues to act as an eastern tyrant, sending his freedmen to Ostia to prepare a fleet (*Nero* 47.1); that he saw himself as another Cleopatra, ready to flee Actium for Egypt, is confirmed by his plan to seek the prefecture of Egypt (*Nero* 47.2). Nero declares himself in death to be the artist we have witnessed throughout his life (*Nero* 49.1). His loss of touch with reality is revealed by his plan to appear as a suppliant before Galba and the Roman people, as well as by his dying words — “Sero.

Haec est fides.” (*Nero* 49.4) — uttered as he mistakes a soldier come to seize him for a supporter seeking to staunch his wound.

In bringing the Julio-Claudian dynasty to an end, Nero commits all of the sins that tyrants commit. His tax policy, his *luxuria*, his effeminacy, his transgressions against and inversions of the natural order, his burning of Rome, his transformation of the city into his private residence, the contempt he aroused among the people, and the fear that his savagery instilled all contribute to Nero’s removal from power. It is Nero’s political and personal conduct, the way he lived and governed as a tyrant, that caused his demise and the end of the dynasty that Julius established.

The Deaths of Tiberius and Claudius.

While Tiberius, Titus, and Domitian had either no need or desire to quicken the death of their predecessor, Nero and Gaius took action to bring about their own succession. Both are said to have poisoned the man they replaced. The *Tiberius* and *Claudius* provide Suetonius with an opportunity to discuss the dangers that family pose to an emperor. Those members of a family who stand in the line of succession presented a clear and long-acknowledged threat to the life of the tyrant. Aristotle had observed that these relatives may seek to corrupt the tyrant by leading him to live a degenerate lifestyle. They may simply oppose and murder him outright. Suetonius uses the deaths of these two emperors to examine how tyrannicides could be found even in the family of the tyrant at Rome. Both of these biographies reveal that the emperor who chooses a monster to be his successor will be the first to pay the price for his choice.

Tiberius

The *Tiberius* is the tale of an emperor who is both unable to let go of his hold on power at the end of his life and who fails to pick his successor wisely. Suetonius provides the reader with a full catalogue of the threats that a tyrant in decline may confront. The *Tiberius* is the story of an emperor who lives plagued with fear; he fears that the Senate has come to hold him in contempt and is terrified that the masses intend to do him violence. These fears plague the man, but neither the Senate nor the people end his life. Suetonius provides four ways in which the emperor was said to have met his demise. All of the ways in which he might have met his fate implicate, to one degree or another, the question of his succession and, in several cases, attribute his demise to the actions of his successor. The *Tiberius* is a lesson in how the fears of an emperor, and the actions they cause him to take, can bring about the fate he seeks to avoid.

In the four lives we have so far reviewed, the final rubrics of the eidological section lead naturally into the narrative of the emperor's death. The *Tiberius* is different. The final rubric in this biography pairs Tiberius' fluency in Greek with his unwillingness to use anything but Latin in his official capacity (*Tib.* 71). The relationship between this rubric and the account of Tiberius' death is not readily apparent. We will see that Suetonius creates a parallel between the *Tiberius* and the *Claudius*, suggesting to the reader that these lives should be read in tandem. Within the *Tiberius* itself, however, the description of the emperor's talent for a language he will not speak highlights, at the end of the emperor's life, the contradictory nature of the emperor that has been a theme of the work. Although Suetonius has chosen not to use the final eidological chapters to

“explain” the emperor’s impending death, there is nevertheless a coherence to this portrait of the conflicted emperor as well as a continuity between this biography and the other lives in the collection.

The account of Tiberius’ death begins with the emperor making two attempts to return to Rome from Capri. He abandons both attempts, turning back the second time after his pet snake was devoured by ants. This was interpreted as a sign that the emperor should beware the violence of the masses (“vim multitudinis caveret,” *Tib.* 72.2).

Tiberius retreats “ostento territus” (*Tib.* 72.1). The omen proves false. As is so often the case with omens and tyrants in works of tragedy and history, the misinterpretation of the omen and its mechanism does not prevent the ultimate realization of its consequence.⁴⁴⁹

For the moment, however, Tiberius has been cast as a tyrant, a man who is afraid of entering even the city over which he rules.⁴⁵⁰

The emperor falls ill during the journey back to Capri. His condition takes a turn for the worse when he overexerts himself hurling a javelin at a boar in an arena (*Tib.* 72.2). Augustus, as we will see, watched the games as a passive spectator; Tiberius takes part and is injured as a result. Even though he is hurt, the emperor omits none of his entertainments as he continues toward home: “nihil ex ordine cotidiano praetermitteret,

⁴⁴⁹ Oedipus is perhaps the most famous example of this in tragedy. Herodotus does not lack for them; Croesus alone provided the historian with two examples of a tyrant unable either to read the signs or to avoid the fate they threatened.

⁴⁵⁰ Xenophon identifies the fear with which a tyrant must live even in his own country, noting that wherever tyrants go, they remain in enemy territory (*Hiero* 2.8). Tiberius is an emperor whose life and reign exemplify the inability of the man who desires the supreme power to be safe either in exile or at home.

ne conuiuia quidem aut ceteras uoluptates partim intemperantia partim dissimulatione” (*Tib.* 72.3). The emperor plays the part of the tyrant to the end.⁴⁵¹ He remains devoted to his *convivia* and *voluptates*, exhibiting the appetite that Plato identified as the defining trait of the tyrannical personality. He likewise continues to dissimulate. Such “pretence was a standard feature of the descriptions of tyrants,” and, indeed, for Aristotle was the defining action of the tyrant who is seeking to hold power through the way of moderation.⁴⁵²

The death of Tiberius is preceded by news that the Senate had dismissed charges against several men because the only evidence against the accused was that the emperor

⁴⁵¹ Suetonius here also reviews the central themes of Tiberius’ life. The emperor’s flirtations with returning to Rome recall his long exile on Rhodes. Given the parallel between entering Rome and entering office that is maintained throughout the *Caesares*, Tiberius’ inability to enter Rome and his eventual flight from the city also suggest his decreasing hold on his office. His efforts to keep up the appearance of being in good health and in command evokes the dissimulation that runs throughout his biography. That he is turned away from Rome, and toward his demise, by the portent of the snake recalls both the younger Tiberius’ trust in his astrologer’s guidance as he sought the principate and his excessive devotion to astrology. That Tiberius is terrified when the senate refuses to pursue a charge he instigated recalls the frequent trials for *maiestas* that he held during his reign. Suetonius has constructed an account of the emperor’s last days, in short, that both recapitulates the key characteristics of his reign and explains how the typical features of his reign and his life ultimately led to his death.

⁴⁵² Woodman and Martin (1996) 89, who continue that “the ascription of *dissimulatio* to Tib[erius] by T[acitus] and others would support their general presentation of the emperor, while the reinterpretation by Vell[eius] and the denial by Tib[erius] himself would help to deflect any suggestion of tyrannical behavior.” For the role of appearance in Aristotle’s way of moderation, see n. 34 and accompanying text in chapter 3.

had written that they had been named by an informer (*Tib.* 73.1). Upon learning of this, Tiberius raged that Senate was now holding him in contempt (*pro contempto se habitum fremens*, *Tib.* 73.1). He then sought to return to the safety of Capri. Tiberius realizes the importance not only of keeping his political opponents in check, but also that being held in contempt is, for a tyrant, a death sentence.

Tiberius dies shortly afterward (*Tib.* 73.1). Neither of the two fears that had afflicted Tiberius are realized. Both his fear of a popular uprising and his fear of the Senate's contempt came to naught. Tiberius is an emperor plagued by the fears of a tyrant, but whose fears are always mistaken. Suetonius offers four competing accounts of the emperor's death, none of which had been imagined by the emperor (*Tib.* 73.2):

Sunt qui putent uenenum ei a Gaio datum lentum atque tabificum; alii, in remissione fortuitae febris cibum desideranti negatum; nonnulli, puluinum iniectum, cum extractum sibi deficienti anulum mox resipiscens requisisset. Seneca eum scribit intellecta defectione exemptum anulum quasi alicui traditurum parumper tenuisse, dein rursus aptasse digito et compressa sinistra manu iacuisse diu immobilem; subito uocatis ministris ac nemine respondente consurrexisse nec procul a lectulo deficientibus uiribus concidisse.

Some think that a slow-consuming poison was given him by Gaius. Others say that during an interval in the fever with which he was seized, when he asked for food, none was given to him. Some that he was smothered with a pillow that was placed over him, when, after recovering from a swoon, he called for his ring, which had been taken from him in the fit. Seneca writes, "That finding himself dying, he took his signet ring off his finger, and held it a while, as if he would deliver it to somebody; but put it again upon his finger, and lay for some time, with his left hand clenched, and without stirring; when suddenly summoning his attendants, and no one answering the call, he rose; but his strength failing him, he fell down at a short distance from his bed."

Of these four accounts, three involve foul play. The "innocent" story reported to have been told by Seneca, moreover, seems to be a patently bowdlerized version of the third story, crafted to deflect suspicion from Tiberius' successor Gaius.

Suetonius accomplishes several aims by presenting this variety of alternatives. First, by showing that the death of even an old emperor, and one who had been in poor health for some time, gave rise to extensive speculation about how he had actually died reveals the high degree of danger that is inherent in being emperor. Even a sick and aged tyrant is more likely to have been murdered, Suetonius suggests, than he is to have died of natural causes. Second, by offering these four rumors, Suetonius creates a catalogue of the ways in which a weak emperor's reign can be brought to its conclusion. An emperor who will not give way will be either poisoned by his successor, starved, or smothered with a pillow. Finally, that Tiberius, in spite of his constant and very specific fears, imagined none of the ways in which he was rumored to have died, shows that a tyrant cannot protect himself from the full range of dangers that threaten him. Fear may precede and even precipitate the death of an emperor, but it provides no sure protection.

The story of the death of Tiberius is also the story of the rise of his successor. It is highly significant that Gaius is the only potential assassin identified by name. This emphasizes that the heir apparent presents the most readily identifiable threat to the tyrant. There is also the focus on the emperor's ring. According to the third account, Tiberius was smothered when he asked for the return of his ring. This had been taken from him during his illness. The emperor had lost his power, even if only symbolically, because of his weak condition; when he tried to reclaim that power, he also lost his life. Power lost cannot be regained. Seneca modified the story. Tiberius in this last version becomes an emperor who is looking to designate his successor, rather than slow the succession, and hopes to use his ring to designate that man. Near the last moment, he decides not to relinquish his power. He dies, alone, soon after. The contrast with

Augustus, who dies after designating Tiberius his successor, signals to the reader how an emperor should, and how an emperor should not, let go of power and depart this life. At his death, Tiberius is unwilling to let go of his power; as a result, that power is taken from him by force. He is unable or unwilling to name a successor; as a result, Gaius names himself.

Claudius

Claudius shares with Tiberius the distinction of having been succeeded in the principate by a man who is rumored, if not reported, to have hastened his death. The *Tiberius* told of an emperor who feared many things, but never the right things. He had expected death to come from the senate or from the masses, but it came from his presumptive heir, Gaius. The *Claudius* more directly analyzes the relationship between the emperor and his heir apparent. It demonstrates that those who are closest to the emperor can, because of fear or ambition or both, bring about his demise.

The eidological section of the *Claudius* concludes, as does that of the *Tiberius*, with a rubric devoted to the emperor's knowledge of Greek language and literature. This discussion has no discernible role in easing the transition from the rubrics of the *Claudius* to the biography's narrative of the emperor's death.⁴⁵³ Suetonius may have included it here in order to establish the plausibility of later attributing to Claudius the statement “ὁ

⁴⁵³ Hurley (2001) 230 observes that Claudius was “more adept with Greek than most educated Romans. Augustus was never fluent (*Aug.* 89.1); Tiberius was (*Tib.* 70.1-71); also Germanicus (*Calig.* 3.1-2), Nero (*Ner.* 7.2), Titus (*Tit.* 3.2).” Although the discussion of the emperor's knowledge of Greek falls toward the end of the eidological section in the *Augustus*, it immediately precedes the narrative of his death only in the case of Tiberius and Claudius.

τρώσας ἰάσεται” (*Claud.* 43.1). More likely an explanation, in my opinion, is that Suetonius has done so to create a structural parallel between the *Claudius* and the *Tiberius* to match the similar ways in which these emperors die. That the dissection of each reign culminates with a review of the emperor’s knowledge of Greek invites the reader, by virtue of the very oddity of emphasizing such a correspondence, to draw larger parallels between the two lives and, ultimately, to compare the narrative accounts of each emperor’s death that follows.

The death-narrative is not preceded by, nor does it begin with, a discussion of the signs and omens that signaled the emperor’s impending demise. It begins instead with the signs that Claudius gave of his second thoughts regarding his marriage to Agrippina and his adoption of Nero: “Sub exitu uitae signa quaedam nec obscura paenitentis de matrimonio Agrippinae deque Neronis adoptione dederat” (*Claud.* 43.1). “Sub exitu vitae” strongly demarcates the ending of the eidological section and announces the beginning of the death-narrative. There is no transition from rubrics to narrative. Claudius’ death arrives abruptly in the text, therefore, as it did in fact.

That the *signa* that Claudius gave of repenting of his marriage and adoption were *nec obscura* explains their power to motivate Agrippina and her son. One sign pertains to Agrippina. Claudius explains to his freedmen, after condemning a woman for adultery, that while his wives had been unchaste, they had not been unpunished (*Claud.* 43.1). Such a thinly-veiled threat would have instilled in Agrippina a fear of imminent punishment of the sort traditionally identified as a motive for murdering a tyrant. The other sign relates to Nero. Claudius embraces Britannicus and suggests that Britannicus will one day come to hold the principate himself; then at last, Claudius concludes, the

Roman people will have a true Caesar (“ut tandem populus R. uerum Caesarem habeat,” *Claud.* 43.1). Ambition, and the fear that his ambition will be thwarted, motivates Nero. Claudius then makes out his last will and testament, presumably seeking to actualize the worst fears of his wife and adopted son. Agrippina intervenes. Fear, therefore, coupled with ambition and intra-familial quarrels, brings about the downfall of Claudius.

Agrippina poisons the emperor. In the case of Claudius, unlike that of Tiberius, there is no dispute that the emperor was poisoned. The only questions that are open for debate are how and by whom he was poisoned. Suetonius reports that the poison was administered either by the eunuch Halotus, while Claudius was dining with the priests on the Capitoline, or by Agrippina, in mushrooms, a dish for which the emperor had a particular fondness (44.2). Some reported that this single dosing led to his death on the following morning, while others reported that he had to be given a second dose during the night. This second dose was administered either in water that was offered to him after he had vomited up the first dose or in an emetic (44.3). The death of the emperor is brought about, therefore, by his intimates. They exploit the character traits which Claudius had exhibited throughout the course of his life — his appetite for food and drink, his inability to resist a feast, his tendency to eat until he must be forced to vomit — in order to bring about his death. The contributing role that his appetites play in his death reflects the risks that appetites and intemperance are traditionally said to pose for tyrants.⁴⁵⁴

Claudius’ death is then concealed until arrangements can be made for Nero’s succession to the principate (*Claud.* 45). The discussions and the signs of the succession that, as we will see, are both present and, indeed, prominent in the *Augustus*, the

⁴⁵⁴ See, e.g., Xen. *Hiero* 4.2 (tyrant fears food because he fears poison).

Vespasian, and the *Titus* are lacking in the *Claudius*. The emperor had of course tried to make such arrangements, Suetonius reports, but Agrippina had put a stop to his efforts. Theatrical and comedic elements of the sort found in the *Augustus* and the *Vespasian* are, however, unmistakably present in the events surrounding Nero's succession (*Claud.* 45):

itaque et quasi pro aegro adhuc uota suscepta sunt et inducti per simulationem comoedi, qui uelut desiderantem oblectarent.

And so [because arrangements had to be made for the succession] vows were made as if the emperor were still ill and comedic actors were led in to keep up the ruse, who came as if he had asked for them to entertain him.

The suggestion that the principate is a farce that Suetonius makes in both the *Augustus* and the *Vespasian*, is an observation of a fact in the *Claudius*. At his death, Augustus compared his life to a farce in which he played the part of emperor. In the *Claudius*, Suetonius takes it a step further, as professional actors are now given a part to play in the farce.

The death notice of the emperor follows. Suetonius reports, in a way that seems to reflect a rhetorical practice described by Quintilian, that the emperor was buried with all due honors and *in numerum deorum relatus* (*Claud.* 45). Suetonius adds the detail that this honor was revoked by Nero and then later restored by Vespasian, establishing the relationship between Claudius and Vespasian that we will explore more fully below when we turn to consider the death-narrative of the latter. This detail also signals to the reader that Vespasian will restore the principate after the end of the Julio-Claudian line that Nero will end.

The omens are reported only after the narrative of the emperor's death is complete. These are presented in quick succession. There is a comet. Lightning strikes the tomb of Drusus. Many magistrates die in the same year. Only now does Suetonius

make clear to the reader that Claudius had been aware of his impending death. The opportunity that this awareness affords in the other lives to focus on the character of the emperor is sacrificed in the *Claudius* in order to bring on the death of the emperor quickly. Suetonius passes over an opportunity to say something about Claudius himself in order to say something about the abrupt nature of the succession, and the dangers inherent in that process, under the principate.

Galba, Otho, and Vitellius

The death-narratives in the *Galba*, *Otho*, and *Vitellius* are of roughly the same length in absolute terms as those in the *Tiberius* and *Nero*; in relative terms, they take up a larger portion of these lives than do the comparable narratives in any of the other Caesares, with the exception only of the *Nero* and the *Domitian*. These differences cannot be explained as the result of either the author's diminished enthusiasm or his loss of access to the imperial archives, for while these biographies do grow shorter as one moves through the collection, the narratives of the emperors' deaths do not do so consistently, either in relative or absolute terms.⁴⁵⁵ The accounts of the deaths of Galba, Otho, and Vitellius show, in other words, that Suetonius is not growing bored, but making choices.

The length of an emperor's reign does not necessarily correlate, as the statistics relating to these three lives bear out, with the significance of that emperor's death. The way that an emperor loses power, and how his fall from power contributes to the accession of his successor, is what is both significant in and of itself and of interest to our author, Suetonius. As we will see in the case of these three emperors, it is political

⁴⁵⁵ For the view that Suetonius' lives decline in length and in terms of the information about each emperor that they provide, see Wallace-Hadrill (1983) 62; BurrIDGE (2004) 154.

significance that motivates Suetonius as an author and determines the length of the death-narratives in his lives. The short reigns and violent deaths of these emperors are significant, as we will now see, because they reveal that the principate is now in the gift of the army.

Galba

The *Galba* is the story of an emperor who lost power on account of his failure to do what needed to be done in order to remain in power. He failed, above all, to take the steps necessary to maintain the support of the army. As it is told by Suetonius, the story of Galba is not the story of a ruler's relationship with the people or with the senate; both indeed are notably absent from the narrative of the events leading up to his assassination. Julius had insulted the senate. Gaius had insulted Cassius Chaerea. Nero had incurred the *odium omnium in se*. For Galba, the senate, people, and provinces all fade into the background; the power of the emperor is in the hands of the soldiers. Indeed, at the moment of his murder in the forum, the people do not merely fail to support their emperor, they fail even to show any interest in his murder. The *saevitia* and *avaritia* of the tyrant play their part, but the army has taken on a new role in the drama. With the *Galba*, as I will show, Suetonius has written a biography that reflects the new Roman political reality.

Suetonius begins to explain Galba's fall almost before he has finished with his rise. The two rubrics that precede the beginning of the chronological narrative of his death describe the avarice and the cruelty of the emperor. Suetonius arranges the anecdotal examples of these vices in such a way that they advance Galba from Spain to Rome and from his accession to his deposition and murder. By the time that he has

arrived at Rome, therefore, Galba is already a *persona non grata*, a fact revealed by a theater audience transforming a line in an Atellan farce into a critique of the emperor's avarice (*Galba* 13). The complex relationship between the theater and the principate, readily apparent in the narratives of Claudius and Nero, and, as we will see, those of Augustus and Vespasian, is here also clearly in evidence.

Galba became an object of hatred not only because of his vices, but because his vices tended to manifest themselves in an unpredictable and arbitrary manner.⁴⁵⁶ Almost all of his actions, however, contribute to his unpopularity. He condemns men to death without trial and on the slightest suspicion (*Galba* 14.3). He imposes a heavier workload on jurors. He limits the offices open to senators and knights, and offers those offices only to those likely to refuse them (*Galba* 15.1). He revokes grants made by Nero. He is parsimonious in giving, willing to sell offices and favors, and unwilling to punish Nero's henchmen. All of these actions contribute to the portrait of a tyrannical ruler. He disparages the rule of law. He is careful in elevating and honoring men.

In the end, however, it is not that the emperor came to be hated by all, but that he came to be hated by the army, that proves his undoing: "Per haec prope universis ordinibus offensis vel praecipua invidia apud milites" (*Galba* 16.1). His *avaritia* and *saevitia* prove fatal when directed at the soldiers and the army as a whole. His officers had promised a donative to their men when they swore allegiance to the new emperor.

⁴⁵⁶ Suetonius explains that Galba displayed this capriciously varied mix of vices – "modo acerbior parciorque, modo remissior ac negligentior quam conveniret principi electo atque illud aetatis" (*Galba* 14.2) – on account of his being under the influence of three men, each of whom possessed a distinct vice, and each of whom would exercise control over the emperor in turn.

Galba refuses to honor the promise, boasting that he was accustomed to levy troops, rather than buy them (“iactavit legere se militem, non emere consuesse,” *Galba* 16.1). Not surprisingly, this contemptuous remark angered his troops wherever they were stationed (“eo quidem nomine omnis, qui ubique erant, exacerbavit,” *Galba* 16.1). Galba insults and alienates those whose support he particularly needs to survive.

Galba caused fear and anger (“metu et indignitate,” *Galba* 16) among even the Praetorian Guard. He removed some of them as if they were under suspicion for supporting Nymphidius (“ut suspectos et Nymphidi socios,” *Galba* 16.1). Gaius had alienated his advisors by leading them to believe they were suspected and hated (“suspectos tamen se et inuisos sentiebant,” *Cal.* 56.1); this created an opening through which the conspirators were able to move against the emperor. Galba has given his Praetorians a similar reason to stand aside.

Suetonius reports that the armies in Germany, sensing that they had been defrauded of their donative, were the first to show signs of discontent (“sed maxime fremebat superioris Germaniae exercitus fraudari se praemiis,” *Galba* 16.2). They sent an embassy to Rome. This embassy comes not to the emperor or the senate, but to the Praetorians (*Galba* 16.2):

ergo primi obsequium rumpere ausi Kal. Ian. adigi sacramento nisi in nomen senatus recusarunt statimque legationem ad praetorianos cum mandatis destinaverunt: displicere imperatorem in Hispania factum; eligerent ipsi quem cuncti exercitus comprobarent.

They therefore first dared to break their oaths on the Kalends of January and refused to be compelled to swear allegiance unless in the name of the Senate, and immediately sent a delegation to the Praetorians with the following message: They were displeased with the emperor who had been made in Hispania; they should choose one of whom all the armies would approve.

The soldiers may refuse to swear allegiance except in the name of the Senate, but they send their delegation not to the Senate, but to the Praetorians. They ask the Praetorians, moreover, to name an emperor of whom all of the armies will approve. Following the death of Nero, the decisive role of the army in selecting the emperor is established and settled.

Suetonius reveals that the rapidity of the change, from the world of Augustus, in which the emperor is free to name his successor, to the world in which the army's voice is authoritative, has left Galba behind. The emperor receives the news of the army's revolt, but misses the point of their complaint. He considers the issue to be one, not of his giving way to a successor to be named by the Praetorians, but of his simply announcing his chosen successor; the army, he believes, is concerned that he has no children and, hence, no heir apparent. He believes that the soldiers expect him to name his successor. He therefore comes before his soldiers and announces his adoption of Piso: "filiumque appellans perduxit in castra ac pro contione adoptavit" (*Galba* 17). He makes no mention of the promised and expected donative ("ne tunc quidem donativi ulla mentione facta," *Galba* 17), an omission which gives Otho his opportunity. Although his reign will last another six days, all of the pieces that will lead to the deposition and death of Galba are already now in place.

As he often does when the emperor has taken all of the steps he must in order to motivate his enemies, Suetonius turns to the omens and portents. These are set forth in chronological and geographical order from Galba's accession in Spain ("iam inde a principio") to his death at Rome. The omens Suetonius includes are unusually clear. For example, Fortuna appears to Galba in a dream, after he has dedicated a necklace to

Capitoline Venus, and complains that he has robbed her of the gift meant for her and threatens him, in turn, with taking away what she has given him (*Galba* 18.2). This is a far cry from the *Tiberius*. There is no question of why and how Galba will die. The army will take from Galba the principate it has given to him, because Galba failed to give the soldiers the gifts that he promised them.

The uprising begins as Otho assumes control of the Praetorians' camp (*Galba* 19.1). Galba had alienated the guards by causing them to fear his retribution and Otho takes advantage of their alienation. Galba at first chooses to hold his ground in the palace, but is soon lured out by false reports that the conspiracy has been put down. He believes that others have again acted to keep him in power, in much the same way that others had acted to put him in power originally. He goes out in such a spirit of confidence (*tanta fiducia*, *Galba* 19.2) that when one of his soldiers boasts that he had slain Otho, Galba responds "On whose authority?" (*quo auctore?*). He remains the martinet that he has been throughout his life, to the very end making no effort to ingratiate himself with the soldiers. He then proceeds into the forum, where a crowd of civilians is first dispersed by a group of cavalrymen; these horsemen then butcher Galba *desertum a suis* (*Galba* 19.2).

Suetonius acknowledges that it might be hard to believe that none of those present came to the aid of the emperor and that all of those who had been summoned to his aid had spurned the request. The *saevitia* of the emperor, however, had inspired no love whatsoever among either his people or his soldiers. In his hour of need, the tyrant is utterly abandoned. Those who do not join in the attack will watch from the sidelines with, at best, idle curiosity. This is the fate of the stern tyrant, as Cicero observed; it was the fate of Demetrius, whose men abandoned him and marched over to Pyrrhus *en masse*,

and of the Spartans, who had ruled unjustly (“iniuste imperantes”), and whose allies deserted and watched the calamity unfold at Leuctra as idle spectators (“omnes fere socii deseruerunt spectatoresque se otiosos praebuerunt Leuctricae calamitatis,” Cic. *de Off.* 2.26).

Cicero explained that love alone can protect a tyrant from hatred. Almost as if to illustrate the point, Suetonius reports that there was one unit of German troops that did not abandon Galba. These Germans had rushed to the emperor’s aid because he had helped them when their unit was suffering from illness. This single act of kindness on the part of the emperor inspired the lasting devotion of this unit. The reader is invited by this example to ponder whether the others would have responded to his call for help had Galba shown kindness, rather than severity, toward them. He had not done so, however, and therefore lacked their support in his hour of need. Suetonius has used the death of Galba to show unmistakably both the importance of the army and the need to cultivate their favor and their love, rather than their fear, if an emperor hopes to remain in power.

The *Galba* does not examine the motives of those who overthrew the emperor. There was no need to, as Otho’s motives were readily apparent. Otho did not desire wealth or seek to avenge for an insult; he simply desired the principate. The *Galba* examines instead how an emperor alienates the army and the people and, by so doing, can deprive himself of the support he needs to remain in power. As in the *Caligula*, the emperor causes fear among those whose support he needed to survive. Gaius alienated his closest advisors; Galba alienated the Praetorians. When the legions’ hatred of the emperor and the ambition of one man combined to produce a revolt, Galba stood, literally, alone and unprotected.

Suetonius presents the emperor Galba in the rhetorical guise of a tyrant, but he analyzes the power dynamics in the empire with a keen attention to Roman political reality. The Senate is now playing a purely symbolic role; the power is in the hands of the army and the praetorians. The *Galba* is a biography that tells the story of a man. The personal interacts with the political in the *Galba*, however; the character of the man has consequences for the reign of the emperor. His *saevitia* and *avaritia* make him not only a classical tyrant, but a former emperor as well. Otho has almost no role in the murder of Galba. If anyone is responsible for Galba's demise, it is Galba and his unwillingness, or inability, to recognize the political reality of his day.

Otho

The *Otho* depicts an emperor who loses power on account of being both too rash and too mild. The biography is unique among the *Caesares* in that it lacks an eidological section. There is a short description of the emperor at the very end of the biography, but no eidological analysis of the man either follows his accession or precedes the narrative of his death. The emperor's character is revealed, if it is revealed at all, solely in the chronological narration of his actions.

These actions reveal an emperor who is in turns both rash and dilatory. He reveals this dimension of his personality at the very outset of his reign. After the adoption of Piso, Otho's inclination is to move immediately (*statim*) against Galba: "tulerat animus post adoptionem statim castra occupare cenantemque in Palatio Galbam adgredi," (*Otho* 6.1). He stays his hand, however, out of respect for the troops ("respectus cohortis," *Otho* 6.1) who were guarding Galba; the same unit had been on duty, Suetonius reports, when Gaius was murdered and also when Nero was deserted (*Otho* 6.1). An omen then causes

him to delay a further five days. The story of Otho's initial desire to move immediately against Galba is not recorded in the other surviving sources; its inclusion (if not invention) by Suetonius serves to explain the eventual fall of Otho at the outset of his reign. The rapid initial rush of activity, followed by inaction, down even to the detail of that inaction being motivated by a respect for his soldiers, will characterize both the beginning and end of his rule.

Following a brief discussion of Otho's association with Nero⁴⁵⁷ and a review of the omens related to his impending demise,⁴⁵⁸ Suetonius narrates the downfall of the emperor. The emperor exhibits the rashness, caution, and concern for the common soldiery that he revealed during his accession to the principate. His initial reaction to the news of Vitellius' defection is to pursue a course of appeasement and reconciliation. The affection of the soldiers toward their emperor is then dramatically illustrated. Believing

⁴⁵⁷ Suetonius observes that Otho was hailed as Nero upon his accession; he did not object to the appellation. Suetonius reports that Otho is rumored to have used the surname of Nero in his correspondence with the provincial governors. To this rumor, Suetonius adds the fact that Otho had allowed the busts and statues of Nero to be set up again, reinstated many of Nero's officials, and funded the completion of the *Domus Aurea*. At this early stage in what will be, admittedly, a very short rule, Otho has not only already revealed that he is both rash and overly cautious but also chosen to associate himself with the last of the Julio-Claudians.

⁴⁵⁸ The omens begin to arrive on the very night (*ea nocte*, *Otho* 7.2) of his accession. Otho is knocked out of bed by a dream, foretelling that he will be knocked out of office. He seeks to propitiate the shade of Galba, by whom he had dreamed he was removed from office. On the day after his accession, Otho was taking the auspices, a storm arose and Otho fell, again indicating that he will soon fall from office under tumultuous circumstances.

that Otho was in danger, his men come very close to murdering the Senate. They grow calm only when they see their emperor safe and sound.⁴⁵⁹

After this initial delay, Otho's rashness reasserts itself. The emperor sets off "in pigre atque etiam propere" on his expedition against Vitellius (*Otho* 8.3). Suetonius describes five omens. The first three foretell not only that the expedition will fail, but that the emperor's haste, revealed in his willingness to set out *adversissimis auspiciis*, will prove his undoing (*Otho* 8.3). The last two suggest that the gods were trying to restrain the emperor directly. The Tiber floods at the moment Otho seeks to leave the city; collapsed buildings block the road north (*Otho* 8.3).⁴⁶⁰ The omens are both significant and significantly placed; these omens establish that it is Otho's character, and his haste above all else, that will bring about his fall.

The emperor's *temeritas* soon causes him to abandon sound strategy. Otho should have delayed and allowed hunger to take its toll on the enemy, but instead, acting *simili temeritate* (*Otho* 9.2), he decides to bring on a pitched battle. The forces loyal to Otho win three small battles, in the Alps, near Placentia, and at Castor's (*Otho* 9.2). They are defeated in the last and most important battle at Betriacum. The enemy won through trickery and deceit, attacking a force that had advanced to negotiate terms (*Otho* 9.2).

⁴⁵⁹ Again, Suetonius' uses this *tumultus* of the soldiers to create a positive portrait of the emperor, rather than as an example of *sedition* and rebellion, as Tacitus (*Hist.*, 1.80) and Plutarch (*Otho* 3.2) portray it. For Otho, this revolt of the soldiers is a sign of their love for him which is, in turn, evidence of his genuine concern for his men and aversion to shedding their blood. Their readiness to defend their emperor, in short, is a piece of evidence supporting Suetonius' case for the emperor's fall.

⁴⁶⁰ Tacitus includes a more detailed list of omens and portents (*Hist.* 1.86); that Suetonius focuses on the blocking of Otho's path is significant.

Immediately (*statim*), Otho decides to take his own life: “ac statim moriendi impetum cepit” (*Otho* 9.3). He decided to end his reign in the same way that he had begun it: *statim* (*Otho* 6.1).

This account of the military campaign that resulted in the suicide of Otho is at odds with those found in both Tacitus (*Hist.* 2.31) and Plutarch (*Otho* 8.1). Both of these authors place Otho’s decision to seek a decisive battle after the three *mediocria proelia*. They describe this decision as the result of a council of war, rather than as the choice of Otho alone. Suetonius has, therefore, seemingly put aside historical veracity in order to craft a portrait of the emperor that emphasizes his character and his character’s contribution to the failure of his reign.

Suetonius is certain that Otho killed himself in order to avoid bloodshed and not because he had despaired of victory. Otho acted “magis pudore, ne tanto rerum hominumque periculo dominationem sibi asserere perseveraret, quam desperatione ulla aut diffidentia copiarum” (*Otho* 9.3). Suetonius here offers the testimony of his own father, who took part in the war, in order to establish the character of the emperor. Indeed, this testimony receives its own rubric in the biography. The evidence is presented in chronological order, beginning with Otho as a private citizen, moving to the conflict with Galba, and then concluding with his death after Betriacum.

The testimony of Suetonius’ father establishes that Otho was a good man, but one who was ill-suited to the principate. He first testifies that Otho, even as a private citizen, so detested *civilia arma* that he would shudder whenever the deaths of Brutus and Cassius were mentioned. That it is the death of these two tyrannicides, rather than the death of Caesar, that caused this reaction in the young Otho suggests that the future

emperor associates more with the enemies of tyrannical rule than with the men who exercise it. That he shudders at the mention of bloodshed, given the bloodshed that has characterized the reigns of the first seven Caesars, also suggests that Otho is not temperamentally suited to the *principate*. Finally, his sympathy for the fate of Brutus and Cassius foreshadows the fate that he will suffer: Otho, a suicide, will die both as and at hand of a tyrannicide.⁴⁶¹ Suetonius also learned from his father that Otho would not have challenged Galba “nisi confideret sine bello rem transigi posse” (*Otho* 10.1). Finally, it was the example of one of his soldiers, who fell on his sword when he was accused of desertion, that had inspired Otho to end the conflict (*Otho* 10.1). The realization that his continuing to rule will lead to bloodshed motivates Otho to put an end to his life.

In his suicide, Otho exhibits none of the rashness he had exhibited in his earlier campaign. His concern for avoiding bloodshed is paramount; his demeanor is calm. He encourages his brother, nephew, and friends “ut sibi quisque pro facultate consuleret” (*Otho* 10.2). He writes letters to his sister and to Messalina, whom he had intended to marry, asking that due honor be paid to his body. He burns his other letters “ne cui periculo aut noxae apud victorem forent” (*Otho* 10.2). His last act is to forbid that violence be done to any soldiers seeking to desert (“vetuitque vim cuiquam fieri,” *Otho* 10.2). He left his bedroom door open, should anyone wish to come and speak with him (*Otho* 11.1). He sleeps soundly and, at dawn, stabs himself (*Otho* 11.2).

⁴⁶¹ That Otho will die by his own hand, while at risk of being removed from office by military force, is likewise foreshadowed in the early association of the emperor with Nero.

Vitellius

The eidological section of the *Vitellius* focuses on the tyrannical vices of *luxuria* and *saevitia* to which Vitellius was *praecipue deditus*. The description of these vices paints a picture of an emperor who was more steeped in vice than any other emperor in the *Caesares*. The eidological analysis of his reign concludes with a catalogue of those whom Vitellius had killed; this culminates in the accusation that the emperor had, like Nero, been responsible for the death even of his own mother.

Once the eidological section has been brought to its conclusion, the narrative of the emperor's demise opens with a brief statement announcing that the armies had defected and sworn allegiance to Vespasian (*Vit.* 15.1):

Octavo imperii mense desciverunt ab eo exercitus Moesiarum atque Pannoniae, item ex transmarinis Iudaicus et Syriaticus, ac pars in absentis pars in praesentis Vespasiani verba iurarunt.

In the eighth month of his reign as emperor, there defected from him the army of Moesia and Pannonia, and likewise the Judean and Syrian legions from the transmarine provinces, and part in absentia and part in person to Vespasian they swore allegiance.

The structure of the sentence reflects the structure of the political situation. The defection (*desciverunt ab eo*) from Vitellius opens the sentence and the adhesion to Vespasian (*Vespasiani verba iurarunt*) concludes it. The legions in their respective areas of operation, some present and some distant from Vespasian, separate the two men. The legions are referred to in the middle of the sentence, literally breaking apart the two men while they form the bridge of transition from the one to the other. Vespasian is named; Vitellius, already yesterday's man, is referred to only with the pronoun (*ab eo*).

There is no catalogue of omens foretelling the emperor's death. This omission reflects, perhaps, that the fall of Vitellius was not the inevitable result of his character and

his actions. In the case of each emperor who meets an unnatural end, the omens of and portents of his coming demise are catalogued at that point in the biography where the root cause of his demise have been fully revealed. In the case of Vitellius, neither the emperor's vices nor his behavior lead to the revolt of Vespasian or to the eventual defeat of Vitellius at the hands of Antonius Primus.

The *Vitellius* is the biography of an emperor, therefore, whom Suetonius concluded died, not as a result of his vices, even though he exhibited those vices to an outstanding degree, but simply because the armies revolted and chose Vespasian to replace him. The decisive role of the army in selecting the emperor, apparent already in the *Claudius* and emerging as dominant in the *Galba*, is here again illustrated and confirmed. That those with the ability to seize the supreme power will try to do so is not something that one necessarily needs a philosopher to understand.⁴⁶² It is sufficient to note, therefore, that Suetonius has created a portrait that reflects the reality of the role military power and the support of the army now play in determining the fate of the emperor and the choice of his successor. Vitellius does not fall because he ruled as a tyrant. He falls simply because the army preferred Vespasian.

Good Deaths of Good Emperors: Augustus, Vespasian, and Titus.

According to Suetonius, three of the twelve emperors in the *Caesares* died of natural causes. No foreign power, no politically ambitious enemy, no insulted noblemen,

⁴⁶² Aristotle does observe that those who think that they will be able to seize power successfully will try to seize power; he considered this a form of contempt toward the tyrant and concludes that confidence and contempt are the reasons that generals attack their sovereigns (Arist. *Pol.* 5.10, 1312^a9-12: ὡς δυνάμενοι γὰρ καὶ καταφρονοῦντες τοῦ κινδύνου διὰ τὴν δύναμιν ἐπιχειροῦσι ῥαδίως, ὥσπερ οἱ στρατηγοῦντες τοῖς μονάρχοις).

no member of the imperial family, and no military uprising resulted in their being deposed. Their deaths carried consequences for the government. With the passing of the emperor, power passed to his successor. Suetonius' treatment of their deaths reveals his understanding of the ways in which power is maintained and ways in which it is transmitted in the empire.

Augustus

Suetonius depicts the reign of Augustus as a model for how an emperor should conduct himself in office. The death of the emperor likewise establishes the paradigm for the death of a good emperor. The *Julius* established that an emperor can precipitate his assassination by acting like a tyrant. The *Augustus* reveals how an emperor can avoid meeting the typical fate of the tyrant. Much of the analysis of how Augustus, who exhibited the *saevitia* of a tyrant at the outset of his rule, soon came to appear to exercise power in the moderate way Aristotle advised in the *Politics* is conducted in the eidological section of the biography and was discussed in the preceding chapter. Suetonius nevertheless uses the account of the emperor's death to complete his portrait of the moderate autocrat and good tyrant, Augustus.

The final rubrics of the eidological section set the stage for the death of the emperor. The discussion of Augustus' religious beliefs and practices and of the omens that foretold the major events of his life act as the thematic and tonal bridge from the eidological dissection of the reign to the narrative account of its last days and mark the moment at which the emperor's death has become inevitable. In the *Augustus*, the inevitability of the emperor's death is not the result of men having decided to kill their

ruler, but of the gods having ordained the natural terminus to his life. The omens reveal, in short, that the impending death of Augustus is the will of the gods.

The *Augustus* provides not only a study of how an emperor avoids assassination, but also a model of how one should face death. Suetonius portrays Augustus performing the public's business until the moment he ratifies his plan to pass on his power to Tiberius. He remains in good humor until the end. He exhibits courage in the face of death. Even as death draws near, he continues to appreciate the importance, not so much of being, as of seeming to be a good ruler. Suetonius reports that Augustus even acknowledges that he has played a part in the mime of the principate, not only affirming that he has kept up appearances in the way Plato and Aristotle held to be essential for the survival of a tyrant, but also making explicit reference to the theater, the cultural *locus* in which the Roman understanding of tyranny first began to be influenced and shaped by the cultural and intellectual attitudes of the Greeks to tyranny. The role of the theatrical and the performative in the lives of the emperors, which Suetonius makes more or less explicit in a majority of the lives, is here acknowledged by the emperor himself.

The discussion of Augustus's piety and religion sets the tone for the account of his death that will follow. Suetonius first notes that the emperor had faith in select signs and omens ("auspicia et omina quaedam pro certissimis observabat," *Aug.* 92.1). He then reports that while Augustus had respect for ancient cults, he was contemptuous of all others ("peregrinarum caerimoniarum sicut veteres ac praeceptas reverentissime coluit, ita ceteras contemptui habuit," *Aug.* 93.1). Impiety is a stock feature of the portrait of the unjust tyrant. The tyrant exhibits contempt for the traditional cult and will often set

himself up as a rival to the gods.⁴⁶³ This is not the portrait of Augustus. By placing the discussion of the piety of Augustus in this emphatic position, Suetonius has created a strong contrast between the second Caesar and the unjust tyrant. By concluding with the religion of the emperor, moreover, Suetonius has prepared for the transition to the coming catalogue of omens and also associated the emperor with the gods among whom he will soon take his place.

Following this discussion of the emperor's religion, Suetonius catalogues the omens that accompanied each stage in the life of the emperor. He begins with those that preceded the birth of Augustus and those that predicted his future greatness and enduring happiness (*Aug.* 94.1):

Et quoniam ad haec ventum est, non ab re fuerit subtexere quae ei prius quam nasceretur et ipso natali die ac deinceps evenerint, quibus futura magnitudo eius et perpetua felicitas sperari animadvertique posset.

And since we have come to these things, it will not be off topic to work in those things that happened before he was born, on the day of his birth, and afterwards, by which the future greatness and enduring felicity of the man could be anticipated and perceived.

The rhetorical practice would have been to discuss these omens when describing the events to which they correspond.⁴⁶⁴ Suetonius seems to acknowledge both the accepted rhetorical practice and that he has intentionally departed from it and displaced this discussion to the end of the biography, when he explains that it is not out of place (*non ab*

⁴⁶³ See, e.g., Xen. *Hiero* 4.11; Pl. *Rep.* 574d, 575b. The depiction of Pentheus in the *Bacchae* exemplifies this aspect of the stock portrait in tragedy.

⁴⁶⁴ See, e.g., Quint. 3.7.11, who advises that one include responses and auguries that foretell of the subject's future fame.

re) to weave in this material (*subtexere*) here in the *Augustus*. And indeed it is not out of place. While the discussion of the piety of the emperor had eased the transition to these omens, the omens themselves serve to recapitulate the major events in the life of Augustus. Suetonius will use these omens to create a summary of the emperor's life that will precede the account of his death.

The discussion of these omens is the longest devoted to a single topic in the *Augustus*. Their exposition effectively summarizes the long life of the emperor. Each part of his life that was included in the opening section of the *Augustus* – ancestry, parents, birth, youth, and rise to power – is recalled by an omen or cluster of omens. As with the description of his ancestry, the catalogue of omens begins at Velitrae, where we now learn a lightning strike had long ago been taken as a sign that the town would one day rule Rome.⁴⁶⁵ The second omen occurs at Rome a few months before the birth of Augustus and indicates that nature will soon give birth to a king for the Roman people (*regem populo Romano naturam parturire*, *Aug.* 94.3).

Suetonius next describes the story of how Atia had conceived Augustus by Apollo.⁴⁶⁶ The god had come to her in the form of a serpent. She then dreamed that her

⁴⁶⁵ *Aug.* 1.1: “Gentem Octaviam Velitris praecipuam olim fuisse multa declarant.” *Aug.* 94.2: “Velitris antiquitus tacta de caelo parte muri responsum est.”

⁴⁶⁶ The dreams, signs, and stories surrounding the birth of the Roman emperor resemble those that surround the birth of Cyrus in Herodotus. See Hdt. 1.107. For the Herodotean motif of the dream signifying future world domination, see Fehling (1988) 200-2. Suetonius reports these signs and dreams that a ruler of the world has been born, with their strong overtones of eastern monarchy, only at the end of the life of Augustus. This placement suggests that Suetonius is using these signs as confirmation of what the emperor had achieved rather than a prediction of what he would achieve.

vitals were lifted up to heaven and spread over the earth. Octavius, finally, dreamed that the sun rose from Atia's womb (*Aug.* 94.4). The omens of the day of his birth and immediately following are then recorded (*Aug.* 94.5-6). The divine origins of Augustus not only establish his right to rule as a king, but also establish a parallel with heroic figures of the mythological past who, like Hercules and Dionysus, had joined the company of the gods.⁴⁶⁷ Omens from his childhood and adolescence, each again pointing to the reign that is to come (*Aug.* 94.7-11), follow. The catalogue of omens from his early life concludes with a prediction that an astrologer made to Augustus and Agrippa at Apollonia. A rubric is then devoted to those alluding to his future military success (*Aug.* 96.1). The death and deification of Augustus are then, finally, foretold by unmistakable signs ("mors quoque eius, de qua dehinc dicam, divinitasque post mortem evidentissimis ostentis praecognita est," *Aug.* 97.1).⁴⁶⁸

⁴⁶⁷ For the heroic and traditional parallels with the story of Octavian's conception, and the role of the serpent in these stories, see Louis (2010) 528-9.

⁴⁶⁸ Suetonius includes three omens of the emperor's impending death. First, an eagle flew around the emperor's head and settled on the first letter of the name of Agrippa; Augustus had himself interpreted this as a sign of his impending death. Interpretations have been offered for the letters M (Marcus) and A (Agrippa), as signaling either the death (M) of Augustus, or that he too would receive a temple (Aedes, A) as a memorial after his death. Weber (1936) 11, n. 47 argues for the A/aedes interpretation, while Hanslik (1954) 142 argues for M/mors. He asked his colleague Tiberius ("collegam suum Tiberium," *Aug.* 97.1) to recite the vows, believing that he would not live to fulfill them. Second, lightning blasted off the letter "C" from his name, leaving the word "aesar." The letter "C" signified that Augustus would live for only 100 more days before becoming a god, while *aesar*, as Suetonius explained, is the Etruscan word for god. Finally, when he was preparing to leave the city with Tiberius, who was being dispatched to Illyricum

There are no omens from the time of his reign or relating to his performance in the principate. This may reflect the reality of the record available to Suetonius. It may also reflect the almost static quality of the eidological treatment of the reign. The omens reflect the progress of the man, first, toward the principate and, then, toward his death. The absence of omens about the progress of his reign may suggest that Suetonius did not see the reign as a work in progress.

The account of Augustus' last days now begins. The emperor spends these days making a journey to Beneventum. He is accompanied by Tiberius. He boards ship at Astura and contracts a case of diarrhea. He rests at Capri for several days and then resumes an active social life ("nullo denique genere hilaritatis abstinuit," *Aug.* 98.3), distributing gifts to his friends, watching a group of epebes exercise, providing them with a lavish banquet, and decreeing ("lege proposita," *Aug.* 98.3) that Greeks should wear Roman dress and vice versa.⁴⁶⁹ As described by Suetonius, the last days of

("Tiberium igitur in Illyricum dimissurus," *Aug.* 97.3) and was confronted by men seeking to detain him on business, he cried out that: "non, si omnia morarentur, amplius se posthac Romae futurum" (*Aug.* 97.3). The significance of these words became clear only later after the emperor's death; they reveal that Augustus is departing both from Rome and from the performance of the public business to which he has devoted his life as emperor. The placement of this portent here at the end of the catalogue of omens also creates a seamless transition to what follows.

⁴⁶⁹ Suetonius inserts an extended anecdote that illustrates the continuing high spirits of the emperor. Upon seeing the tomb of one of his favorites being visited by a large crowd bearing torches, Augustus uttered a verse in Greek that he had composed on the spot. He asked a certain Thrasyllus, a member of Tiberius' entourage, if he knew the name of the poet? When Thrasyllus hesitated to answer, Augustus added another verse. Thrasyllus could not name the author, but said that the verses were very good. At which, Augustus

Augustus are festive, characterized by acts of largesse, banquets, festivals, athletic contests, and the adulation of the people.⁴⁷⁰ To the very end, moreover, Augustus is shown to be a master at using the tools available to the tyrant for winning the favor of the masses.⁴⁷¹

Even though his bowels remained weak, Augustus soon crossed over to Naples. He starts for Beneventum *cum Tiberio* (98.5). His illness grows worse and he now takes to his deathbed at Nola, where he summons Tiberius (*revocatumque ex itinere Tiberium*, 98.5). He converses with him in secret. After this conversation, Suetonius reports, Augustus no longer attends to the public business. It is now, when Augustus has had his final conversation with the man who will succeed him, that he is able to die in peace.

The narrative leading up to the death of Augustus has, therefore, cast him as a moderate autocrat rather than the cruel tyrant. The stress placed on his jocularity highlights the absence of fear that is characteristic of the repressive tyrant. The detached

fell over laughing: “cachinnum sustulit atque in iocos effusus est,” *Aug.* 98.4. A crowd bearing torches does not cause Augustus the fear typical of a tyrant, but offers him an opportunity for a joke. That this anecdote of the imperial sense of humor is sparked by the sight of men approaching a tomb, moreover, reflects that this sense of humor survives even as he too approaches the tomb.

⁴⁷⁰ Gascou (1984) 792 concludes that the death of Augustus is the most beautiful death narrated in the *Caesares*, which reflects that Augustus is, for Suetonius, the model *princeps*: “Sa mort n’est entachée d’aucune souffrance, et même d’aucune tristesse. Les journées qui précèdent immédiatement la mort d’Auguste après l’apparition de sa maladie (*Diu. Aug.* 97,4) sont décrites par Suétone comme une véritable fête (*ibid.*, 98).”

⁴⁷¹ For a sampling of the means available to the tyrant for currying popular favor, see, e.g., *Cic. Phil.* 2.116 (discussing Caesar’s efforts): “muneribus, monumentis, congiariis, epulis multitudinem imperitam delenierat.”

role that he plays in many of the events that Suetonius narrates perhaps indicates that the emperor is on the threshold of divinity, but also accords with the traditional depiction of the tyrant as a man who cannot engage in the contests of his subjects, but must remain always separate and aloof. It is against the aloofness of Augustus, for example, that the story of Tiberius being injured when he joined in the games and tried to throw a spear in the arena should be read and understood (*Tib.* 72.2-3).

The constant presence of Tiberius is highly significant. Suetonius depicts the transition of power as a peaceful and harmonious event. Tiberius is mentioned, by name, five times in the two chapters that precede the death of the emperor.⁴⁷² It is when Augustus has spoken in secret with Tiberius that he retires from public business. Suetonius is suggesting that it was at this meeting that the principate effectively passed from Augustus to Tiberius. It has done so by the free and personal choice of the emperor. A conversation, not a pillow, accomplishes the succession. The *Augustus* ends, therefore, with a peaceful transmission of office from one emperor to another.

To create this portrait of a peaceful death, Suetonius has left out any suggestion that the emperor was poisoned by Livia. Both Tacitus (*Ann.* 1.4.2) and Dio (56.29.2) record that Livia was suspected of having killed her husband. Dio goes so far as to report that Livia had murdered the emperor by poisoning figs while they still hung on the tree. Given the narrative parallel that this story would have created with Agrippina's role in Claudius' death, Suetonius' omission of this colorful anecdote must have been the result

⁴⁷² See *Aug.* 97.1: "collegam suam Tiberium nuncupare iussit"; *Aug.* 97.3: "Tiberium igitur in Illyricum dimissurus"; *Aug.* 98.4: "Thrasyllum Tiberi comitem"; *Aug.* 98.5: "cum Tiberio ad destinatum locum contendit"; *Aug.* 98.5: "revocatumque ex itinere Tiberium diu secreto sermone detinuit."

either of Suetonius' being unaware of the story, his believing that it was untrue, or his determination that such an allegation simply could not be squared with his depiction of the reign and the death of Augustus. His death and the transmission of his power would not have provided the unblemished model against which to assess the other emperors had Augustus been poisoned by a wife hoping to promote her son to the principate.

Once this final conversation with his successor has taken place and Augustus has retired from public life, the emperor's last day arrives both quickly and peacefully. In his last moments, Augustus describes his life as a farce in which he has played his part well. He adjusts his hair and facial composure like an actor primping for his fans. He inquires *identidem* whether there is any *tumultus de se* outside. He asks those around him whether he has acted well in the *mimus vitae*.

This metaphor of life as a *mimus* may well reflect, as some have suggested,⁴⁷³ the Stoic vision of human life as a *fabula*. It becomes more difficult to credit this reading of the *Augustus*, however, when one considers the role that theatrical imagery later plays in the lives of Nero and Domitian. These references to the theatre are consistent with the traditional conception of the tyrant as the man who must work always to maintain his public image and keep up appearances. As we saw in the preceding chapter, Aristotle had emphasized the need of the tyrant to appear to be ruling as a king. Plato, in book 9 of the

⁴⁷³ Gorringer (1993) 118-20 advances such a Stoic reading of the death-narrative in the *Augustus*. For Seneca's view of death as a *fabula*, see Sen. *Ep.* 80:7: "hic humanae vitae mimus"; Sen. *Ep.* 77:20: "quomodo fabula sic vita non quam diu sed quam bene acta sit, refert. nihil ad rem pertinet quo loco desinas. quocumque voles desine; tantum bonam clausulam impone." Griffin (1976) 367-88 describes Seneca's attitude to death with great clarity.

Republic, likewise cast the tyrant as the tragic actor, all of whose energies are consumed in maintaining a pleasing facade, in keeping up a show of being something other than he is. In his final moments, Suetonius has Augustus acknowledge the pretense that the principate requires of the first citizen. The mask of the tyrant is allowed to drop for a moment before the emperor exits the stage.

Augustus' final words are directed to his wife: "Livia, nostri coniugii memor vive, ac vale." If the rumor that Livia had killed her husband had been current in his own day, Suetonius has here made it abundantly clear that he gives that rumor no credit. Whatever "part" Augustus may have been playing, moreover, both in his reign and in the moments leading up to his death, there is no reason to suspect that the sentiment is not sincere. Suetonius held the man Augustus in high regard. He passes away, dying the good death (εὐθανασίαν) that he had always desired for himself and for his friends. Suetonius even observes that a moment of apparent delirium, in which Augustus had seen himself being carried off by forty men, proved to be *magis praesagium quam mentis deminutio*; he would be carried to his funeral by forty praetorians. The emperor does not become delirious at the end, but prophetic.

Vespasian

Vespasian is the second emperor in the *Caesares* who dies as a result of natural causes. While Suetonius did not exclude the possibility of an unnatural death in the cases of Tiberius and Claudius, he offers no such alternative in the case either of Augustus or of Vespasian. Suetonius had a high opinion of both men and this is reflected in his avoiding making an suggestion that these emperors died prematurely. That both men die good and natural deaths is not, however, the only point of biographical similarity between

these two emperors.⁴⁷⁴ Both men die after suffering from diarrhea, accept their approaching deaths and their deifications in good humor, and die confident that the principate will pass to their chosen successors.

Suetonius uses the final chapters of the eidological section of the *Vespasian* to establish a jocular tone for the emperor's death-narrative. The religious piety and beliefs of Augustus and the omens and portents of his success and happiness establish a solemn tone for the account of his death. In the *Vespasian*, the *dicacitas* of the emperor, his wit and his humor, concludes the eidological section and sets the tone for the story of his last days.⁴⁷⁵ Suetonius records three quips that Vespasian uttered in response to the signs of his impending death (*Vesp.* 23.4):

Ac ne in metu quidem ac periculo mortis extremo abstinuit iocis. Nam cum inter cetera prodigia Mausoleum derepente patuisset et stella crinita in caelo apparuisset, alterum ad Iuniam Calvinam e gente Augusti pertinere dicebat, alterum ad Parthorum regem qui capillatus esset; prima quoque morbi accessione: "Vae," inquit, "puto deus fio."

He abstained from humor not even in the fear or the extreme danger of death. For when among the other signs the Mausoleum of a sudden opened and a comet appeared in the heavens, he said that the one omen pertained to Junia Calvina from the family of Augustus and the other to the king of the Parthians, who wore his hair long; at the first onset of his illness: "Woe is me," he said, "I think I am becoming a god."

Suetonius stresses the good humor of the emperor even in the face of death. Like Augustus, Vespasian does not exhibit the fear that is the dominant emotion of the tyrant. By showing the emperor in good humor specifically in "periculo mortis extremo" and by

⁴⁷⁴ Gasco (1984) 793 observes that Vespasian, one of the better Caesars in Suetonius' work, receives a death-narrative that is close to the Augustan model.

⁴⁷⁵ For the prominence of this characteristic in the *Vespasian*, see Gasco (1984) 318-20, who notes the large number of *sententiae* (319 n.8) in the life.

concluding with three examples of jokes made by the emperor in the face of his own death, Suetonius creates a smooth transition from the eidological section to the narrative of Vespasian's death.

The humor of Vespasian's final remark lies partially in its mimicry of the "last words" of the emperor Claudius: "Vae me, puto concacavi me!"⁴⁷⁶ Claudius, like Augustus, died as a result of intestinal distress, albeit brought on by the poison that Agrippina administered. Vespasian too dies after a bout of diarrhea; his behavior, however, more closely resembles that of Augustus, than that of Claudius (*Vesp.* 24):

Consulatu suo nono temptatus in Campania motiunculis levibus protinusque urbe repetita, Cutilias ac Reatina rura, ubi aestivare quotannis solebat, petit. Hic cum super urgentem valitudinem creberrimo frigidae aquae usu etiam intestina vitiasset nec eo minus muneribus imperatoriis ex consuetudine fungeretur, ut etiam legationes audiret cubans, alvo repente usque ad defectionem soluta, imperatorem ait stantem mori oportere; dumque consurgit ac nititur, inter manus sublevantium extinctus est VIII. Kal. Iul. annum agens aetatis sexagensimum ac nonum superque mensem ac diem septimum.

During his ninth consulship, he was afflicted in Campania by a light little illness, and after quickly returning to the city, he sought out Cutilia and the country about Reate, where he was accustomed to spend each summer. Here, when in addition to his pressing illness, his bowels worsened on account of his frequent cold baths, he performed his customary duties as emperor that he even heard embassies while reclining. When his bowels were suddenly loosened to the point that he swooned, he said that it is fitting for an emperor to die standing. While he was struggling to rise, he died in the arms of those who were helping him to rise, on the ninth day before the Kalends of July, at the age of 69 years, one month, and seven days.

⁴⁷⁶ Gorringer (1993) 438 observes that this "deliberate mimicry" not only corresponds "with the rather earthy nature of Vespasian's preferences in humour, and also with his penchant for literary quotations, but gains added impact from the fact that his own last illness was compounded by attacks of diarrhoea."

Vespasian remains the dutiful administrator to the very end. He dies in a way, moreover, that befits a man with an earthy sense of humor, who had once joked with Titus about the smell of the money that had been collected from taxes imposed on latrines. Reclining as he receives a foreign embassy, he is hit with a wave of diarrhea; seeking relief, he struggles, again making a macabre quip about how an emperor should die standing. As he struggles/strains (*nititur*), he dies. If Augustus had conceived of his existence as a *mimus vitae* at the end, Vespasian seems to act the comic part as he passes away.

There are, as noted, numerous similarities between the death of Vespasian and that of Augustus.⁴⁷⁷ Suetonius notes that both men die in the summer. Both die while traveling outside of Rome and near their respective birthplaces: Augustus in the very room in which his father had passed away and Vespasian near Reate. Both men attend to the business of their office until the moment of their death. Both suffered from diarrhea. The parallel details that Suetonius emphasizes suggest that he intended for these lives to be read in tandem.

As he chose not to refer to rumors that Livia had played a part in the death of Augustus, so too Suetonius omits any references to the rumors that Titus had murdered Vespasian. Dio records that some, including the emperor Hadrian, had told of a rumor that Titus poisoned his father. This rumor, which Dio ultimately rejects, would have contributed to the depiction of Titus as an *alius Nero* that Suetonius sought to create in the early chapters of his biography; poisoning would also have created another parallel with the death of the emperor Claudius. That Suetonius does not mention the rumor, to

⁴⁷⁷ For the similarity between the death-narrative of Augustus and that in the *Vespasian*, see Graf (1937) 107.

which the emperor he served seems to have subscribed, is hard to explain as a product of ignorance. Given the contribution it would also have made to developing the parallel with the death of Claudius that he has created in the *Vespasian*, it is a reasonable surmise that Suetonius chose not to include this piece of false gossip because it would have besmirched Titus, cast the succession as a violent transfer of power,⁴⁷⁸ and ultimately conflicted with the portrait of Vespasian as a good emperor. The tyrant lived in fear because of the threat that his heirs seize power by precipitating their predecessors' ascension to heaven. If Tiberius and Titus had conspired against their predecessors, it would cast not only them, but also their predecessors, in a bad, and specifically tyrannical, light. By omitting any mention of these rumors, therefore, Suetonius avoids casting either Augustus or Vespasian as a traditional tyrant.

Vespasian dies confident that he will be succeeded by his sons. Indeed, Vespasian had such a high degree of confidence in his horoscope that he was able to declare to the senate with confidence that either he would be succeeded by his sons or would have no successor (*Vesp.* 25.1). He had dreamed that he saw a balance beam placed in the vestibule of the palace. In one pan of the scale, there sat Claudius and Nero; in the other, he and his sons were sitting. "Nec res fefellit," Suetonius concludes the biography, "quando totidem annis parique temporis spatio utrique imperaverunt" (*Vesp.* 25.1). Both Augustus and Vespasian die confident that they have successfully passed their office on

⁴⁷⁸ This would, moreover, have created a divergence between the accounts of the deaths of Augustus and Vespasian and between the accounts of the peaceful passage of power from them to Tiberius, Augustus' *collega* (*Aug.* 97.1), and Titus, Vespasian's "particeps atque etiam tutor imperii" (*Tit.* 6.1).

to the men they chose. Happiness at the end of a reign, Suetonius is suggesting unmistakably, requires confidence in the success of one's plan for the succession.

The account of Vespasian's death therefore provides a second example of how Suetonius reports a natural death. On the one hand, Suetonius has no need to explain how the actions that the man took as emperor contributed to his death. There is no insulted subject or conspiracy that must be explained. The focus need not be on how the emperor's character caused his death, but can be turned to the question of how that character enabled him to face his approaching death. In the case of Vespasian and Augustus, their good humor remains; they are not tormented by the fear that plagues the tyrant. On the other hand, while a natural death has no political causes, it does have political consequences. Suetonius brings out these consequences in a way fitting for a biographer: the successful succession is viewed through the eyes of the emperor who is passing away and who draws comfort from knowing that his chosen successor and son will succeed him in office.

Titus

Titus, the son who succeeded Vespasian, was the third and last emperor whose death Suetonius ascribes to natural causes. The significance of his death is at first difficult to gauge. Suetonius announces the death immediately after telling of the emperor's unwillingness to put any man to death, even those who had plotted against him. By portraying the emperor as unwilling to respond to these dangers, Suetonius not only casts Titus as the anti-tyrant, unwilling to lop off the stalks of wheat that grow too tall, but also creates a narrative expectation that these dangers may soon overwhelm him. At this point in the story, however, Titus dies of natural causes. Suetonius has created an

expectation that is left unfulfilled. He has done so, I believe, in order to portray Titus as an emperor who did not use tyrannical means to remain in office, but who did not have to pay the consequences for his clemency. Suetonius seems to suggest that his unwillingness to shed blood would have resulted in his unnatural death, had not natural death intervened. Otho and Titus are the two emperors who are said to have been unwilling to shed blood. Suetonius constructs the account of the death of Titus, as he did that of Otho, in a way that suggests that, however admirable their pacific sentiment might have been, it was not a sentiment that the *princeps* could hold for long.

Suetonius reports that Titus resolved to keep his hands pure after he assumed the office of Pontifex Maximus (*Tit.* 9.1). He refrains from putting to death even two men who had plotted to overthrow him (*Tit.* 9.1-2). He refuses to restrain Domitian, in spite of his constant plotting and inciting of the army to revolt. Titus not only did not kill his brother, but continued to proclaim him his partner and successor, sometimes beseeching him with tears and prayers to return his affection (“consortem successoremque testari perseveravit, nonnumquam secreto precibus et lacrimis orans ut tandem mutuo erga se animo vellet esse,” *Tit.* 9.3). The use of prayers and tears to win back his brother to loyalty recalls the plan that Nero had earlier devised to win back the armies to loyalty by weeping before them (*Nero* 43.2). Nero’s plan did not produce the desired outcome. Emperors do not hold power with their tears. The reader awaits the moment when Titus’ effort will confirm the power of tears to defend a tyrant.

It is at this point that the emperor dies. Titus’ death seems almost to intrude into the midst of these plots (“inter haec morte praeventus est,” *Tit.* 10.1) and give Titus the natural and happy death that these conspirators would have denied him; the death of Titus

is a greater loss to mankind than to the man himself (“maiore hominum damno quam suo,” *Tit.* 10.1).⁴⁷⁹ The reader has been invited to conclude that, had Titus not died naturally when he did, then he would have died violently soon afterwards. In this way, Suetonius offers his observation regarding how an emperor should respond to threats to his power even when history itself has taught no such lesson.

The *Titus* follows the pattern established by the *Augustus* and *Vespasian* to the end; the emperor dies after presiding over public entertainment (“spectaculis absolutis,” *Tit.* 10.1). Like his predecessors, he too dies while travelling away from Rome. Again, there are portents; two are mentioned, albeit briefly: the escape of a sacrificial victim and thunder in a clear sky. Augustus and Vespasian had been men of good humor before their deaths and remained so when their deaths grew imminent. Titus, an emperor who was in tears before his death, remains true to his character as death approaches, weeping copiously in public (“populo coram ubertim fleverat,” *Tit.* 10.1). Although there is a clear pattern in the *Caesares* for how both good and bad emperors face death, there are also significant differences in how each man dies. Suetonius’ biographies exhibit the influence of the type of the tyrant, but they remain portraits of individual men.

Titus’ sorrow in the face of impending death might seem to cast him in a bad or, at least, a different light from his predecessors. Vespasian and Augustus remained jovial

⁴⁷⁹ Mooney (1930) 501 notes that Suetonius twice uses the verb *praevenire* to convey that an emperor was prevented by death from completing his plans. See *Jul.* 44.4: “taliam agentem atque meditantem mors praevenit”; *Tib.* 62.3: “nisi eum mors praevenisset.” The use of this verb here in the *Titus* perhaps suggests that something else would have occurred in the life of Titus that was related to the conspiracies described in chapter 9 (as is indicated by *inter haec*), had not death intervened. For other uses of the verb in the passive in other authors, see Martinet (1981) 107.

in the face of death. One might well conclude from his sorrow that Titus was overcome by fear. The happiness of Vespasian and Augustus need not have been a sign of their courage in the face of their own deaths, however, as of their attitude toward the succession. Augustus dies happy after a private conversation with his successor, Tiberius (*Aug.* 98.5). Vespasian's good humor reflected his confidence that his sons would soon succeed him with which his horoscope, his dreams, and the oracles had left him (*Vesp.* 25). The last conversations that Titus had were, as they were in the *Augustus*, with his *consortem successoremque* (*Tit.* 9.3). During these conversations, however, Titus begs his brother in tears to return his affection. Suetonius is insinuating that, unlike Augustus and Vespasian, Titus could take no comfort in knowing his successor.

The meaning of the last words of the emperor remain a mystery. As he is being carried in his litter, Suetonius reports, Titus was seized by a fever. Pushing back the curtains, he looks up to heaven and laments that his life was now being taken from him undeservedly ("multumque conquestus eripi sibi vitam immerenti," *Tit.* 10.1). He declares that he felt regret for none of his deeds, save one ("excepto dum taxat uno," *Tit.* 10.1). Titus did not specify this deed. Suetonius reports that there were some who believed that Titus was referring to his having had intimate relations with his sister, Domitia. For Suetonius, that Domitia, a woman who took pride in all of her misdeeds, had denied this liaison was proof of her brother's innocence. Having rejected this one explanation, Suetonius ultimately leaves his last words unexplained.

The inclusion of this rumor concerning Domitia is, at first, hard to explain, particularly when one recalls the rumors that Suetonius chose not to include in his biographies. Suetonius had a purpose, however, for including this false rumor. By

offering a rumor involving Titus' sister, he suggests to the reader that the cause of Titus' regret is indeed to be found in his family. It is not his sister, however, but his brother that is the cause of his regret. The deed that Titus regrets, therefore, is the deed that his death brings to fulfillment: the selection of his brother as his partner and successor. This reading creates a significant contrast between the sadness of Titus and the happiness of Vespasian and Augustus. Vespasian and Augustus were happy in their successors. Suetonius makes the reason for their happiness explicit in each case. The sadness and regret of Titus can also be explained by reference to his successor. That the fault for having made his brother consort and successor in the principate was his own is admitted, but is also left obscure, by this vague expression of regret for his not having lived longer. Suetonius in this way is able to comment on Titus' failure to arrange well for his succession while not allowing that failure to tarnish his positive portrait of the emperor.

Conclusion

This dissertation has sought to demonstrate the ways in which Suetonius used the tools of epideictic rhetoric in order to create biographical portraits of the emperors cast in the roles of stock tyrants. It first examined how Suetonius adhered to the practices of epideictic rhetoric when it came to structuring each biography and then to describing the ancestry and early life of each Caesar. It then analyzed how the Roman biographer created his portraits of each emperor in power and narrated his eventual death.

Scholars have long recognized that the *Caesares* are works in which the author uses both sections of chronological narrative and sections of material organized under rubrics to create portraits of the emperors. I have shown that there is yet another division at work in the *Caesares*: that between the life of the man before and after his accession to the principate. The first chapters of each biography narrate the ancestry, birth, and early life of the emperor in the same way that an orator would have presented that material in the life of any great man. The emperor's ancestry is described in a way that highlights his subsequent behavior. His early life, education, and career likewise all serve to explain or contrast with the life and reign of the adult ruler. The structure and tools of epideictic are deployed in the service of narrating the early life of the man who will become emperor.

After the man becomes emperor, Suetonius shifts not only from chronology to rubrics but also from depicting the emperor in the way that authors traditionally praised and blamed great men to that way in which they have traditionally portrayed the stock figure of the tyrant. He uses the categories and the *topoi* that are used to describe, depict, and analyze the life, reign, and death of a tyrant to present the reign and death of the emperor.

The *Caesares* present static portraits of each emperor cast in the role of a stock tyrant. The emperors exhibit the vices and characteristics traditionally associated with the figure of the tyrant, such as *libido* (manifested as both *stuprum* and *avaritia*), *crudelitas*, *metus*, and *saevitia*. They show contempt for the gods, implement building programs that serve their private interests, are rapacious in matters of taxation, and find themselves friendless as tyrants have always found themselves. They repeat the specific acts of earlier tyrants, for example, kicking pregnant wives to death, finishing the buildings begun by earlier tyrants, and even quoting tragic tyrants of the Roman stage.

The figure of the tyrant is discernible, moreover, in the lives and reigns of good and bad emperors alike. That some emperors are described as tyrants is neither surprising nor difficult to explain. As an initial matter, Suetonius was not the first author to describe a Caesar as a tyrant. Julius was described in such terms both by the men who assassinated him and by those who then sought to justify the actions of these “tyrannicides.” It is not surprising that Tiberius, Gaius, Nero, Vitellius, and Domitian are characterized as tyrants in their biographies, given the generally negative assessment Suetonius makes of their reigns. To the extent that the tyrant is a stock figure of invective, it follows naturally that bad emperors whose reigns are worthy of censure would be portrayed as tyrants.

Even the good emperors, however, are described by Suetonius in terms and using categories that are generally applied to the depiction and the critique of the tyrant in antiquity. The young Octavian shows the savage cruelty of the tyrant, even forcing a son to witness the death of his father. Claudius has the *libido* and the *crudelitas* of the tyrant; Vespasian exhibits his *avaritia*. Titus lives the life of a young tyrant, and of a young Nero in particular, before turning to rule as a benevolent monarch; his inclination once in

power to treat his own property as the property of the people and the property of the people as his own shows a man who is reigning in precisely the way tyrants following a moderate path had been advised to rule since Aristotle. Even the best emperor, therefore, acts in precisely the way that a tyrant, albeit a prudent tyrant, would have acted.

Indeed, it is only in the narratives of the emperors' deaths that some of the *Caesares* break from the standard narrative of the tyrant's life. All but three of Suetonius' Caesars die as tyrants. They are murdered by men whom they had treated insolently. They die poisoned or stabbed by their friends and family. They die in fear. Only the three good emperors die of natural causes; in the case of each of these three emperors, Suetonius rejects or makes no mention of alternative accounts in which these emperors died deaths more typical of a tyrant.

The judgment that Suetonius passes on the individual emperors and their reigns varies. Some reign well; some reign as monsters and some are monsters. All of the emperors are cast, however, as tyrants of one sort or another. The stock tyrant in the *Caesares* is not solely the figure of invective. Suetonius does not use the figure of the tyrant to assign blame and censure to individual emperors. He has instead drawn widely and extensively on the stock figure of the tyrant in order to create a balanced collection of imperial biographies. It is possible that Suetonius was influenced in his choices by some earlier collection of tyrant biographies, perhaps Phaenias' collection of lives of Sicilian tyrants, perhaps some other work of which we have no knowledge. It is equally plausible that the stock tyrant simply seemed the closest analogue to a Roman emperor. We cannot know what Suetonius' motivation and his inspiration ultimately were. We can only assess the work that he has left us. From this collection of imperial biographies, it can

confidently be said that Suetonius has cast the Roman emperors as tyrants and the principate as a tyranny.

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